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**UNENDING WAR? THE COLOMBIAN CONFLICT, 1946
TO THE PRESENT DAY**

By

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degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Politics and
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Declaration and Inclusion of Material

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree.

Abstract

The Colombian conflict is one of the world's longest running civil wars. The country is home to the highest number of internally displaced people in the world, estimated to be up to 5.5 million in 2012. Spanning almost seven decades, the undeclared war has cost the lives of millions. However, despite these alarming figures, Colombia remains one of the least studied of the major Latin American countries.

The conceptualisation of the Colombian conflict has been overwhelmingly shaped by two theories of civil conflict, "New Wars" and "Greed vs. Grievance". Whilst these studies have provided an insight into some of the dynamics of Colombian conflict, such as the drugs trade, the historical continuities of violence and internal drivers of insecurity have been largely ignored. This study re-interprets the long-standing Colombian conflict with an emphasis on a history 'from below'. It addresses this lacuna in the current literature and offers an alternative historical analysis of the conflict by exploring government policies and local dynamics.

This research contributes the existing literature by providing local nuances to the two parallel theories of civil war that have dominated the discourse of violence in Colombia. The "new" characteristics of modern civil war are not new to Colombia. For almost seven decades, Colombia has seen high levels of violence against a civilian population, paramilitary and criminal activity. The idea that "greed" fuels violent conflict fails to explain why thousands have joined various guerrilla movements and endure harsh living conditions in which they risk their lives for a political cause. Importantly, this theory neglects the internal socio-economic problems in countries with persistent levels of violence.

Using an area studies approach and drawing upon recently declassified material from the US and UK governments, press clippings and fieldwork in Colombia, this study highlights the historical continuities of violence in Colombia, which are characterised by economic and security grievances. It examines the conflict from the 'forgotten civil war', known as *la Violencia*, and goes on to illustrate how persistent failures by the Colombian government to solve the rural and agrarian problem and the political exclusion of those claiming to represent the rural population have constituted the fundamental motor of violence over several decades.

List of Abbreviations

ANAPO	<i>Alianza Nacional Popular</i> (National Popular Alliance)
ANUC	<i>Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos</i> (National Association of Small Farmers)
AUC	<i>Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia</i> (United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia)
CERAC	<i>Centro de Recursos para el Análisis de Conflictos</i> (Conflict Analysis Research Centre)
CSTC	<i>Confederación Sindicalist de Trabajadores de Colombia</i> (Sindicalist Confederation of Colombian Workers)
CTC	<i>Confederación de Trabajadores de Colombia</i> (Confederation of Colombian Workers)
CONVIVIR	<i>Servicios Especiales de Vigilancia y Seguridad Privada</i> (Special Vigilante and Private Security Services)
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Programme
DAS	<i>Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad</i> (Administrative Department of Security)
DNI	<i>Dirección Nacional de Inteligencia</i> (National Directorate of Intelligence)
DSP	Democratic Security Policy
EGP	<i>Ejército Guerrillero del Pueblo</i> (Guerrilla Army of the People)
ELN	<i>El Ejército de Liberación Nacional</i> (The National Liberation Army)
FAR	<i>Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes</i> (Rebel Armed Forces)
FARC	<i>Las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo</i> (The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)
FOI	Freedom of Information Request
FUAR	<i>Frente Unido de Acción Revolucionaria</i> (United Front of Revolutionary Action)

GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INCORA	<i>Instituto Colombiano de Reforma Agraria</i> (Colombian Institute for Agrarian Reform)
JMRL	<i>Juventud del Movimiento Revolucionario Liberal</i> (Youth of the Revolutionary Liberal)
JUCO	<i>Juventudes Comunistas</i> (Communist Youth)
MAS	<i>Muerte a Secuestradores</i> (Death to Kidnappers)
MOEC	<i>Movimiento Obrero Estudiantil Campesino</i> (Worker Student Peasant Movement)
M-19	<i>Movimiento 19 de Abril</i> (The 19th of April Movement)
MRL	<i>Movimiento Revolucionario Liberal</i> (Revolutionary Liberal Movement)
MIR	<i>Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria</i> (Leftist Revolutionary Movement)
OAS	Organisation of American States
PCC	<i>Partido Comunista Colombiana</i> (The Colombian Communist Party)
PCML	<i>Partido Comunista Marxista-Leninista</i> (Marxist Leninist Communist Party)
Plan LASO	Latin American Security Operation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UP	<i>Unión Patriótica</i> (Patriotic Union)
UNEB	Unión Nacional de Empleados Bancarios de Colombia (Union of the National Bank Workers)
UTC	<i>Unión de Trabajadores Colombianos</i> (Union of Colombian Workers)

SAC

Sociedad de Agricultores de Colombia (Colombian
Society of Agriculturalists)

Introduction

Colombia: The Latin American Anomaly or the Future of Democracy in the Region?

Latin America today is known as a region of relative peace. This has not always been the case. Between 1930 and 1990 this was a continent characterised by *coups d'état*. Bolivia alone suffered four coups in one year and for much of this period, almost the entirety of the continent was ruled by authoritarian regimes that readily resorted to armed force.¹ From Central America to the Southern Cone, military dictatorships declared war on their civilian populations in the name of freedom and Christian values, leading to the systematic killing, torture and incarceration of hundreds of thousands of civilians. The practice of state sponsored terrorism across the region created 'societies of fear'.² Most Latin American states developed intimidating state security apparatuses to counter wide-ranging internal threats from leftist dissents and insurgents. By 1975, the continent witnessed a connected campaign of political repression and terror. This involved intelligence operations and the assassination of opponents focused on regime security. Known as "Operation Condor", some estimates suggest that 60,000 deaths resulted across six countries.³

Yet remarkably, by the end of the 1980s, many of Latin America's military dictatorships had crumbled. The region experienced an unprecedented wave of change that has been linked to a wider global phenomenon known as the

¹ Juan E. Corradi, Patricia Weiss Fagen and Manuel Antonio Garretón, (eds.) *Fear at the Edge, State Terror and Resistance in Latin America* (Oxford: University of California Press, 1992).

² Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt, (eds.) *Societies of Fear: The Legacy of Civil War, Violence and Terror in Latin America* (London: Zed Books, 1999).

³ Zakia Shiraz, 'Drugs and Dirty Wars: Intelligence Cooperation in the Global South,' *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 10 (2013) pp. 1749-1766.

'third wave of democratisation'.⁴ According to Larry Diamond, the "third wave" began as early as 1974 in Portugal, and was followed by various democratic transitions in Latin America and the Asia Pacific countries in the 1980s, and in Eastern Europe post-1989. However, many of these newer democracies were not fully "consolidated" and their electoral institutions remain fragile. Recent events, most prominently the Arab Spring, have been hailed as the beginning of fourth wave.⁵

The conceptualisation of the "third wave" suggested that democracy is inextricably linked to economic growth, social progress and security. The economies of Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Panama and Peru are undoubtedly growing exponentially and Latin America is seen to be reaping the benefits of economic stability. Across the region some 580 million people were 'lifted out of poverty' with income distribution becoming 'a bit less unequal' between 2002 and 2008.⁶ One leading Latin Americanist commentator notes how the region which was previously 'a byword for financial instability mostly sailed through the recent recession' that followed the financial turbulence of 2008.⁷ According to the chief economist of the Inter-American Development Bank (IBD), Santiago Levy, 'after Latin America's lengthy education in getting macroeconomic policy right', the region's economic performance during the recent recession 'may have been the final exam and the graduation party'.⁸ This exaggerated air of optimism is shared by Latin American leaders and now extends to the realm of security.

Latin American leaders celebrate their region's security success story. In a UN security council meeting led by current Argentine President, Cristina Fernández, she and other leaders suggested that 'regions in turmoil could

⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); Frances Hagopian and Scott P. Mainwaring, (eds.) *The Third Wave of Democratization in Latin America: Advances and Setbacks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁵ Larry Diamond, 'Is the Third Wave Over?,' *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (1996) pp. 20-37.

⁶ Michael Reid, 'So Near and Yet so Far,' *The Economist*, September 9, 2010.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*

learn from the way in which Latin America and the Caribbean have settled long-standing internal conflicts'.⁹ In recent times, the successful military action against the world's longest insurgency in Colombia has been hailed a 'neglected success story'.¹⁰ In foreign policy and military circles Colombia's counterinsurgency programme is referred to as a 'model counterinsurgency' with lessons for eager political scientists and think tanks to copy and paste to far-flung failing states such as Afghanistan.¹¹ With little fanfare, the Colombian authorities are today training the army and police forces of their South and Central American counterparts that are battling their own internal security dilemmas. International recognition of this 'success' is now set to roll out the Colombian model of delivering security outside of Latin America and to other troubled regions in the global South.

Does this mean that the Colombian war has ended?¹² This is certainly the perception outside of Colombia. Recent security advances against the country's armed insurgent groups such as *Las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo* (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC-EP or FARC for short) and *El Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (the National Liberation Army, ELN), as well as the demobilisation of the paramilitary organisation, *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia, AUC) are cited as evidence that the Colombian civil conflict is finally drawing to an end. According to official figures released by the *Dirección Nacional de Inteligencia* (National Directorate of Intelligence, DNI) and the Colombian government, the armed offensive against the FARC and ELN has dramatically reduced the number of irregular combatants. The country's largest insurgent group, the

⁹ 'UN, Latin American Leaders Stress Regional Cooperation for Global Peace,' *Miami Herald*, June 8, 2013.

¹⁰ Thomas E. Ricks, 'Colombia's Neglected Story,' *Foreign Policy*, July 29, 2010.

¹¹ Robert Haddick, 'Colombia Can Teach Afghanistan (and the United States) How to Win,' *Air & Space Power Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (2010); Also see: Thomas A. Marks, 'A Model Counterinsurgency: Uribe's Colombia (2002 – 2006) vs. FARC,' *Military Review*, Vol. 87, No. 2 (2007) pp. 41-56; Thomas A. Marks, *Colombian Army Adaptation to FARC Insurgency* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2002).

¹² For a recent debate on this topic see: Kyle Johnson and Michael Jonsson, 'Colombia: Ending the Forever War?,' *Survival*, Vol. 55, No.1 (2013) pp. 67-86.

FARC, has seen its numbers cascade from an estimated 20,766 members in 2002 to 7168 by 2013.¹³ The ELN at its apex commanded an army of close to 5,000.¹⁴ Today its numbers are estimated at 1,380.¹⁵ The Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programme with the paramilitary group, AUC, had seen over 40,000 combatants demobilised with 18,000 weapons surrendered by 2007.¹⁶

The figures quoted by international organisations and Latin American governments flatter to deceive. The establishment of democratic governments, impressive figures of economic growth and security advancements obscure the murky reality of Latin American security. The largest economies of the region, Brazil, Mexico and Colombia are afflicted with hideous rates of criminality, homicides and human insecurity. Indeed, Latin America is the only region of the world with a rising homicide rate.¹⁷ Official employment figures have historically obscured the fact that the informal economy is the main source of employment for the vast majority of the region's population. According to International Labour Organisation (ILO), 47 per cent of Latin America's non-agricultural employment is in the informal sector.¹⁸ The income distribution in Latin America is the most unequal in the world and the root cause of unrest and political conflict. The recent wave of protests in Brazil,¹⁹ Mexico,²⁰ Argentina²¹ and Colombia²² received little press

¹³ Juan Guillermo Mercado, 'Desmovilización, Principal Arma Contra las Guerrillas,' *El Tiempo*, September 22, 2013.

¹⁴ 'ELN,' *Insight Crime*, <http://www.insightcrime.org/groups-colombia/eln>.

¹⁵ Juan Guillermo Mercado, 'Desmovilización, Principal Arma Contra las Guerrillas.'

¹⁶ Douglas Porch and María José Rasmussen, 'Demobilization of Paramilitaries in Colombia: Transformation or Transition?,' *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 31, No. 6 (2008) p. 520.

¹⁷ 'Latin America Accounts for more than 30% of the World's Homicides,' *The World Bank*, March 5, 2014; Steven Dudley, 'Criminal Evolution and Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean,' *Insight Crime*, June 26, 2014.

¹⁸ 'ILO Head in Latin America: More, but also Better Jobs are Needed,' *ILO*, January 30, 2013.

¹⁹ Tim Padgett, 'What Brazil's Protests say about Latin America's Fumbling Elites,' *Time Magazine*, June 19, 2013; Akemi Nitahara, 'Manifestações de Junho Tiraram o Foco dos Grandes Eventos que o Brasil Recebeu em 2013, Avaliam Pesquisadores,' *Agência Brasil*, September 18, 2013.

²⁰ 'Protestas en la Víspera del Informe Presidencial en México,' *BBC Mundo*, September 1, 2013.

coverage outside the Spanish-speaking world but reveal much about the social troubles bubbling just beneath the surface of the largest and most vibrant economies in the region.²³

The pressing needs of Latin America have been largely ignored over the past decade. The attention of Western states, and in particular scholarly work, has switched to terrorism in the Middle East and poverty and conflict across Africa. Latin Americanists have frequently lamented the lack of attention paid to the region.²⁴ The problems facing countries in Latin America appear eternally unfashionable and so have not evoked the West's moral crusade, which has been the case for Africa's poor, and the security issues facing the region are rarely seen outside of the prism of the drugs trade.²⁵ Nowhere is this persistent myopia more troubling than in Colombia.

Traditionally, Colombia has been seen as the Latin American anomaly.²⁶ The political and economic trajectory of the country is markedly different from other Latin American states. Colombia boasts the oldest democratic tradition in the continent. The Armed Forces, unlike Colombia's Latin American counterparts, have steered away from direct political intervention. In terms of the economy, the country has an impressive record with an almost an unbroken economic growth over decades. The nation's foreign debt has not

²¹ 'Multidinaria Protesta en Argentina Contra el Gobierno de Cristina Fernández,' *El País*, April 19, 2013.

²² 'Las Verdaderas Razones de las Protestas en Colombia,' *El País*, September 3, 2013.

²³ For a wider discussion on social protest in economically successful countries see Moisés Naím, 'In Brazil, Turkey, and Chile, Protests Follow Economic Success,' *Bloomberg Businessweek*, June 27, 2013.

²⁴ Michael Reid, *Forgotten Continent: The Battle for Latin America's Soul* (London: Yale University Press, 2009); David Bushnell, 'South America,' *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (1985) pp. 772, 783-785.

²⁵ Coletta A. Youngers and Eileen Rosin, (eds.) *Drugs and Democracy in Latin America: The Impact of U.S. Policy* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2005); Scott B. MacDonald, *Dancing on a Volcano: The Latin American Drug Trade* (London: Praeger, 1988); Mary P. Lassiter, (ed.) *Economics, Politics and Social Issues in Latin America* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2007).

²⁶ Robert H. Dix, *The Politics of Colombia* (New York: Praeger, 1987) p. 11; David Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself* (Oxford: University of California Press, 1993) p. vii; Jorge P. Osterling, *Democracy in Colombia: Clientelist Politics and Guerrilla Warfare* (Oxford: Transaction Publishers, 1989) p. ix.

generated severe economic crises as it has done repeatedly in other Latin American states. Yet puzzlingly, and despite these political and economic successes, Colombia has been beset by violence throughout its history. Since 1946, the country has consolidated its position as one of the world's most violent nations. According to data collected by the Norwegian Refugee Council, 'Colombia remains the country with the highest number of internally displaced persons in the world, with a total between 4.9 and 5.5 million'.²⁷ These figures are put into context when compared with the country's total population, which reveal that 10.3 to 11.6 per cent of the country's population are internally displaced. This astonishing figure is set to grow. In 2012, the most recent wave of the internal armed conflict forced 230,000 to flee their homes.²⁸ Despite recent celebrations of 'Colombia's neglected success story' and its 'model counterinsurgency', the conflict is far from over and the human cost remains intolerably high.

Colombia's conflict is increasingly emblematic of violent conflict in the global South. The country's relatively successful democratic and economic trajectory has not been reflected in the nation's social development. The case of violence in Colombia offers stark lessons to democratising and developing states in Latin America and beyond. The history of violent conflict in this country, which has run parallel with democracy and economic success, challenges the conventional developmental models of achieving peace in the global South.

Colombia's paradoxical democracy – a successful failed state – could well be the future for other Latin American nations. Symptoms of the possible trajectory can already be observed in the region. Alongside democracy and economic growth, huge social and political troubles run just beneath the surface. Social unrest has ranged from protests and strikes across wide-ranging sectors of Latin American society relating to the economy, public

²⁷ Norwegian Refugee Council, 'Global Overview 2012: People Internally Displaced by Conflict and Violence,' Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, April 2013.

²⁸ *ibid.*

reactions to human rights abuses, political scandals, widespread criminality and a booming contraband trade of oil, drugs, gold and other commodities.²⁹

Colombia is no longer the Latin American anomaly. Violent democracies are now the Latin American norm. Brazil and Mexico, the two largest economies of the region and democratically functioning countries, are experiencing spiralling levels of violence and social unrest.³⁰ A 2013 report from Brazil's Forum of Public Security and the Open Society Foundations concluded that the country's security forces are beset by a 'culture of violence' with almost 2000 people killed by the police in 2012.³¹ In Mexico, most estimates of the death toll of violence since late 2006 are numbered around 60,000.³² It comes as no surprise that Latin America is the only region in the world where the overall homicide rates increased between 2000 and 2010.³³

Despite the fact that Colombia is home to one of the world's longest running conflicts, the relative lack of scholarly attention this country is striking. For decades Colombia did not fit the Latin American economic and political models. However, today parallels can be drawn across this increasingly economically successful but violent region. Not only has Colombia suffered the misfortune of being 'the least studied of the major Latin American countries' within the realm of area studies, the very subject of Colombia's

²⁹ Robert L. Ayres, (ed.) *Crime and Violence as Development Issues* (New York: World Bank Publications, 1998); Nizah Richani, *Systems of Violence: The Political Economy of War and Peace in Colombia* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002); Rob Glastra, *Cut and Run: Illegal Logging and Timber Trade in the Tropics* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 1998); Roberto Briceño-León and Verónica Zubillaga, 'Violence and Globalization in Latin America,' *Current Sociology*, Vol. 50, No.1 (2002) pp. 19-37; Pablo Fanjnzylber, Norma Loayza and Daniel Lederman, *Determinants of Crime Rates in Latin America and the World: An Empirical Assessment* (New York: World Bank Publications, 1998).

³⁰ João Feres Junior and Fábio Kerche, 'Social Unrest and Political Reform in Brazil,' *North American Congress on Latin America*, July 4, 2013; Kyle Barron, 'Protests in Brazil Reflect Ongoing Disparities,' *North American Congress on Latin America*, June 25, 2013; Hank Johnston and Paul Almeida, (eds.) *Latin American Social Movements: Globalization, Democratization and Transnational Networks* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

³¹ Miriam Wells, 'Why do Brazilian police kill?,' *Insight Crime*, November 21, 2013.

³² 'Q&A: Mexico's drug-related violence,' BBC News, November 25, 2013.

³³ UNDP, 'Seguridad Ciudadana con Rostro Humano: Diagnostico y Propuestas para América Latina,' Informe Regional de Desarrollo Humano 2013-2014, November 2013.

insecurity has arguably been misappropriated by others fields of social science.³⁴

In recent times, the conceptualisation of the Colombian conflict has been shaped by a generalised debate about post-modern conflicts in an era of globalisation and identity. The dominating theories in this area of scholarship are “new wars”³⁵ and “greed vs. grievance”.³⁶ In both academic and policy circles, the forces of globalisation and in particular “greed” are hailed as the most important causal factors for civil conflict in the global South. Undoubtedly, these classifications have been useful in shedding light on the dynamics of intra-state conflict in a globalised world. In particular, they have helped to theorise an important element of violent conflict: criminality. However, criminality is hardly an unexpected symptom of war. Political, social and economic upheaval gives way to black markets in almost all situations of violent conflict. In focusing on a universal phenomenon, these theories have corroded our specific understanding of violent conflict as they unduly focus on criminality in an attempt to establish broad causal factors that link a wide range of civil conflicts across the world as a homogenous phenomenon. In reality, there is no single type of violent conflict. The origins, motivations and objectives of violence in countries vary considerably and are often dependent on particular local factors as a driving force of internal insecurity.

The debate over “new wars” has played a major role in framing our understanding of violence in Colombia. Mary Kaldor, the instigator of “new wars” theory, has asserted that the core drivers of these “new” types of conflict are closely related to globalisation, which simultaneously fragments the nation-state and renders identity-processes increasingly insecure. Despite ten years of writing and discussion, the debate over the nature of “new wars”

³⁴ Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia*, p. vii.

³⁵ Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999).

³⁶ Paul Collier, ‘Doing Well Out of War: An Economic Perspective’ in Mats Berdal and David M. Malone, (eds.) *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000); Paul Collier, ‘Causas Económicas de las Guerras Civiles y sus Implicaciones para el Diseño de Políticas,’ *El Malpensante*, Vol. 30, May-June (2001) p. 28-53.

remains active.³⁷ Kaldor's theory of "new wars" is representative of broader shifts within academia and policy-making circles in a post-Cold War world. There is an emerging consensus that the complexity of intra-state conflict in the countries of the global South could no longer be explained through traditional interstate power relations. In their rush to claim new paradigms that critique the impact of globalisation, academics have arguably been drawn into a process that parallels globalisation itself.

By contrast, this thesis asserts that Colombia is not a "new war". It is instead an old and long war with a complex lineage, which has been undoubtedly impacted by the forces of globalisation. However, the characteristics hailed as "new" by conflict theorists are not new to area studies specialists who are familiar with the history of Colombia. Indeed, the country has experienced paramilitary activity and high civilian death tolls intermingled with widespread criminality throughout its history. Colombia's war, one of the longest and oldest globally, has emerged in the context of a paradoxical democracy where dysfunctional democratic institutions have served as a de facto oligarchy, masking deep social, political and economic insecurities for decades.

The most provocative theory of civil conflicts to have emerged in recent times is that of "greed vs. grievance". This approach has been led by Paul Collier of the World Bank. He argues that the distinction between "greed" and "grievance" is important in understanding the motivation for civil war.³⁸ Drawing on an impressive range of statistical data on civil wars since 1945, the rather generalised conclusion of Collier's work is that 'grievance-based explanations of civil war' were 'seriously wrong'.³⁹ In short, he asserts that

³⁷ Mary Kaldor, 'In Defence of New Wars,' *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2013) pp. 1-16.

³⁸ For literature on the greed school of thought see: Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, 'Greed and Grievance in Civil War,' *Policy Research Working Paper*, Paper No. 2355 (Washington D.C: World Bank, 2001); Paul Collier, 'Rebellion as Quasi-Criminal Activity,' *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 44, No. 6 (2002) pp. 838-852; James Fearon and David Laitin, 'Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,' *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1 (2003) pp. 91-106; Mats Berdal and David Malone, (eds.) *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000).

³⁹ Collier, 'Doing Well out of War,' p. 91.

economic motivations for conflict are more important than political or ideological explanations. Indeed, the conclusions of his study had a major impact upon policy prescriptions that address civil wars as well as academic debates. The long-standing view that civil strife related to political grievances, such as rising expectations and relative deprivation,⁴⁰ the disruption of traditional social structures through modernisation,⁴¹ inequality,⁴² ethnic cleavages and nationalism,⁴³ was fundamentally called into question by Collier.

Is the Colombian conflict a “greedy” war? There are indeed strong links between criminal economic activities, paramilitary groups and rebel organisations. Criminality and war have gone hand in hand for centuries. But, to suggest that greed fuels conflict is a gross simplification of any conflict. The theory fails to provide a credible explanation as to why thousands of people would risk their lives and live in harsh living conditions, often much worse than they would have otherwise experienced in rural Colombia, in order to generate an armed uprising. Most importantly, this theory gives no significant attention to the lack of legal economies in war torn countries. This thesis argues that widespread criminality and “greed” in Colombia is a mere symptom of political exclusion and economic and security grievances. It illustrates persistent failures by the Colombian government to address issues such as rural poverty, unemployment, political exclusion and the protection the basic human rights of its citizens. These are instead the key drivers for internal insecurities, criminality and violent conflict.

The main prism through which Colombia has been viewed has been America’s “War on Drugs”. Almost all the literature in this field relates to

⁴⁰ Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, University of Princeton Press: 1970).

⁴¹ Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (London, Yale University Press, 1968).

⁴² Barrington Moore Jr., *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (White Plains, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1978); Edward N. Muller, ‘Income Inequality, Regime Repressiveness, and Political Violence,’ *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (1985) pp. 47-61.

⁴³ Walker Connor, *Ethno-Nationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

counter-narcotics. The increasing prevalence of drug use in America and the cultivation and production of narcotics in Colombia has been at the forefront of the political agenda between the two states and accordingly the focus of much of the scholarly work in this area. This body of scholarship on the Colombian conflict in the English-speaking world is considerable and much of it is well researched. It has provided detailed insights in US-Colombian relations and the implications of this bilateral relationship for the internal conflict, however the overt emphasis on the drugs trade is deeply problematic.⁴⁴ Colombian security has been repeatedly framed in terms of Cold War counter-subversion programmes, the War on Drugs and most recently the Global War on Terror. This has led the subject of Colombia to be embedded in a debate that is ultimately about the security of the United States.

Accordingly, Colombian security is never for Colombia. Instead, it is for and about the safety of the United States. As a result, the substantial body of literature on Colombian security suffers from two main problems. Firstly, the Colombian conflict has been dehistoricised in this scholarship. As the US is seen as the main perpetrator in the conflict, either in terms of its intervention through military aid and training or as the world's foremost consumer of illegal narcotics, Colombia's conflict is seen to have begun during the 1960s. For US foreign policy practitioners and detractors of US foreign policy alike, the 1962

⁴⁴ Richard Downes, *Landpower and Ambiguous Warfare: The Challenges of Colombia in the 21st Century* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 1999); Angel Rabasa and Peter Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth: The Synergy of Drugs and Insurgency and its Implications for Regional Stability* (Washington DC: Rand Inc., 2001); David Passage, *The United States and Colombia: Untying the Gordian Knot* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2000); Raphael Perl, 'US-Andean Drug Policy' in Bruce Bagely and William Walker, (eds.) *Drug Trafficking in the Americas* (Miami: University of Miami Press, 1995); Bruce Bagely and Juan Tokatlian, 'Dope and Dogma: Explaining the Failure of US-Latin American Drug Policies' in Jonathon Hartlyn, Lars Schoultz and Augusto Varas, (eds.) *The United States and Latin America in the 1990s: Beyond the Cold War* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Russell Crandall, *Driven by Drugs: U.S. Policy toward Colombia* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2002); Doug Stokes, *America's Other War: Terrorizing Colombia* (London: Zed Books, 2005).

counterinsurgency programme known as “Plan LASO” marks the beginning of the contemporary Colombian conflict.⁴⁵

This is particularly problematic in a number of respects. Firstly, it does not take into account one of the bloodiest periods of violent conflict that preceded Plan LASO. Known simply as *la Violencia* (the Violence), from 1946 to 1958 an estimated 200,000 people were killed in a conflict that engulfed almost the entirety of the country. The social, political and economic changes that were brought in by this period of violence are rarely discussed in foreign policy literature. This thesis repositions the beginning of the Colombian civil conflict and brings *La Violencia* out of the shadows of a neglected history in order to connect it with the lineage of later developments. It argues that only by looking at violence in its wider context can we understand the reality of current violence and social unrest in Colombia.

Secondly, the literature ignores the role of the Colombian state. The Colombian government and the country’s democratic institutions are highly regarded in Washington. The Colombian two-party system is hardly alien to the US and other Western states. It is certainly not seen as a possible contributor to Colombian insecurity. In US foreign policy accounts, the Colombian government is portrayed only as a willing recipient of foreign military aid. There is little attention paid to the inner-workings of the Colombian political system and most importantly the dysfunctional relationship between the elected Colombian government and the Colombian people. This thesis addresses this disconnect by exploring the conflict through an examination of the role of the Colombian state in the implementation of various policies that have failed to alleviate the situation of the rural poor over decades and highlights how persistent failures have led to a spiralling of violence.

⁴⁵ On the origins of this see: Dennis M. Rempe, 'The Origin of Internal Security in Colombia: Part I — A CIA Special Team Surveys *la Violencia*, 1959–60,' *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol.10, No. 3 (1999) pp. 24-61.

The goal of this research is therefore twofold. Firstly, it seeks to escape the Americanisation of the conflict. Secondly, it challenges the dominating theories of civil conflict advanced by political economists determined to apply numbers. Importantly, none of these areas of scholarship and research have focussed on the internal dynamics of the Colombian conflict, despite the fact they have shaped the conceptualisation of violence in both academic and policy terms. Therefore, this thesis seeks to resist these twin incursions by deploying approaches derived from history and area studies in an attempt to rediscover the real face of Colombian insecurity. By shifting the focus of the scholarship to the local and the microcosmic, this hopefully provides a platform for an alternative view of Colombian security, which is rooted in the relationship between the state and its citizens.

Why has an area studies approach been selected? First, area studies is an intrinsically interdisciplinary approach, perhaps even transdisciplinary. It allows research to encompass various disciplines across the social sciences and humanities, which has given this study the scope to draw significantly from both historical and political insights to explain the problem of Colombian security. Area studies scholars are often 'foreign' specialists looking from outside, but are nevertheless committed to celebrating the uniqueness of the places they study, not the wind-tunnel of statistical regression. Area studies offers a 'bottom-up' approach that challenges recent theories by focusing on the internal dynamics of violence at a local level.⁴⁶

Secondly, it has allowed me to leverage my existing research skills and previous experience in Latin America. During my undergraduate degree I was fortunate to have the opportunity to spend twelve months in Argentina. This time was used to build up my proficiency in the Spanish language and write my dissertation on the ground using local data. This project examined the role of human rights organisations in the democratisation of Argentina from 1976 to 1983. Despite little knowledge of Spanish or how to build research networks, during the year I was able to make significant links with human

⁴⁶ Robert H. Bates, 'Area Studies and Political Science: Rupture and Possible Synthesis,' *Africa Today*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (1997) pp. 123-131.

rights organisations, namely *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* and by the end of my time in Argentina I was fluent in Spanish. This experience was incredibly beneficial, not only in terms of gaining important linguistic and research skills but also in exposing me to the realities of modern Latin America.

During my visit in 2007, Argentina was reeling from the collapse of its economy. For Argentinians, democracy and a free market economy had not lived up to its promises of providing security for its people. During the historic trials of various military generals who ruled the country and were responsible for the disappearance of an estimated 30,000 people, the hidden hand of the security state reappeared. Jorge López was a key witness in this trial. During the military dictatorship he was tortured by security officials and detained for three years until 1979. In 2007, almost 30 years after his horrifying experience, he once again disappeared. Thousands marched in the streets of Buenos Aires during this trial demanding answers to his whereabouts. Fingers were pointed at many directions, however his disappearance remains a mystery. The events resonated for me and underlined the way in which the personal related to the political with Latin American security.

My interest in human rights naturally led me to the case of Colombia, the Latin American anomaly. In the course of my current research project it has dawned on me that Colombia's experience could well be the future for other democratic Latin American states. The banality of human rights abuses under the guise of democracy in this region of the world shocked me in 2007 and continues to have this effect today. One of the great difficulties in carrying out modern historical research in Latin America is the lack of archival material available - this is not uncommon in developing countries. There is a significant lack of resources to carry out declassification, even of inert records, as well as a desire of the authorities not to disclose their more controversial activities to the public.

While Colombian history is littered with violence the written record is elusive. Many of the human rights abuses in this country have taken place at the

hands of the government or government aligned paramilitary groups who control the written record. Meanwhile, investigative journalists, academics, activists and out-spoken members of Colombian society who might generate an alternative account have been repressed. Many have been victims of sexual violence, torture and in many cases death.⁴⁷ Lack of official governmental material, together with an absence of what we might call a counter-archive, makes contemporary historical research in Colombia a difficult task.

The University of Warwick also placed limits on the work for this project out of an appropriate concern for researcher safety. These restrictions did not impede my work unduly. During my two-month research trip, I was required to keep my work limited to the capital city, Bogotá. Although Bogotá is not the centre of violence in Colombia, it is the political and academic epicentre of the country. Here I was able to work as a visiting Research Fellow at the *Centro de Recursos para el Análisis de Conflictos* (Conflict Analysis Research Centre, CERAC). CERAC is one of the leading research institutes in Colombia. The centre collects valuable data on violence in the country using press and local sources. This centre was vital in providing primary material in the form of press clippings from a wide variety of sources from 1946 to present day as well as secondary literature from Colombian sources. Both of these resources are costly and difficult to come by from outside of Colombia. In addition, CERAC also provided me with access to their archives, which contain useful insights and conflict analysis from a wide-range of Colombian academics and on the ground information from local sources in the various conflict-ridden areas of the country.

This thesis attempts an ambitious historical analysis of Colombian security from 1946 to present day in an effort to demonstrate the unchanging nature of the conflict. The intention behind this '*longue durée*' is to resist the tendency

⁴⁷ Jineth Bedoya Lima is one of Colombia's most well known journalists. She was abducted at a state prison during a work related visit. She was subsequently raped and tortured. See Jineth Bedoya Lima, 'Outlook,' *BBC World Service*, http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p0139wl2/Outlook_Jineth_Bedoya_Lima/.

to divide Colombia into epochs imposed by phases of American security concerns – first counter-communism then counter-narcotics, then finally counter-terrorism. This has, in turn, imposed a demanding research schedule. Whilst it would have been desirable to have spent longer in Colombia and travelled widely for local data collection, this was not possible due to funding and security constraints. Even with the widest geographical access, the political constraints on declassification in Colombia ensured that most of the pertinent files for security in the period after 1946 remain closed.

Fortunately, archival material from the US and UK diplomatic records has offset this shortfall. Both of these countries have had long histories of economic and political interest in Latin America. The governments of the US and UK have enjoyed diplomatic representation in various forms in Colombia's main cities of Bogotá, Medellín and Cali for decades. Their diplomats not only sent home volumes of local documentation but also spoke confidentially to key government personnel, and in some cases even to resistance figures, recording their opinions. As a result, a huge amount of information relating to the internal politics of Colombia has been amassed in Washington and London.

Diplomacy is an almost universal institution, generating diplomatic records of a remarkable consistency for regions of the world that otherwise present area studies with demanding problems. They offer avenues of study for countries where the governments conspire to resist the study of their own recent history. Arguably, the methods and content of diplomatic history have much to offer other areas of scholarship, including area studies, but as a field diplomatic history is perceived as being somewhat detached from other areas of political-scientific study. Some have argued that the departure of diplomatic history from the philosophical mainstream of both political science and of history in general, is problematic and 'has left the field in dire straits'.⁴⁸ This thesis has sought to create a methodological alliance between area studies and diplomatic history. Indeed, one suspects that new inter-disciplinary

⁴⁸ Karl W. Schweizer & Matt J. Schumann, 'The Revitalization of Diplomatic History: Renewed Reflections,' *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2008) pp. 149-186.

alliances across a range of fields will assist diplomatic history in finding new traction and even a new vision.⁴⁹

The research approach taken by this thesis therefore contains a certain amount of irony. At a theoretical level it seeks to escape the “Americanising” notions of US foreign policy specialists and the globalising notion of political scientists. Yet it is, at one and the same time, dependent on the diplomatic representatives of the very same phenomena for its primary sources. Perhaps this is not so strange. Latin American studies itself is largely a projection of US government initiatives.⁵⁰ Moreover, government representatives in foreign lands in many ways resemble area studies scholars. They spend long periods of time in a country, learn a language, read local newspapers, work with the local population in various capacities and as a result gather types of information that are not always available from other means of historical data collection, such as interviewing. In this regard, the use of US and UK archival sources, some of which have been obtained early through FOI requests, has been a major factor in supporting this research project. As it develops further, the UK shift from a 30-year rule to a 20-year rule will hopefully uncover yet more pertinent material.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Laura McEnaney, 'Personal, Political, and International: A Reflection on Diplomacy and Methodology,' *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (2012) pp. 769-772.

⁵⁰ Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, 'Latin American Studies and United States Foreign Policy,' *Il Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2012) pp. 8-12.

⁵¹ Ravi Arvind Palat, 'Fragmented Visions: Excavating the Future of Area Studies in a Post-American World,' *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, Vol. 19, No. 3, Social Science Concepts (1996) pp. 269-315.

Chapter One

Representations of the Colombian Conflict

The Colombian conflict has persisted for almost seventy years. For decades, it has been by far the most troubling humanitarian crisis in the Western Hemisphere. Colombia has emerged as the archetypal conflict of the global South – a long, intractable internal war with a myriad of irregular armed actors. Across the academic sub-disciplines of the social sciences that relate to the study of security and conflict in the global South, the representation of violence is varied. For scholars of international security, the understanding of violence in the global South has been shaped by the various epochs that relate to broader international dynamics such as the Cold War, War on Drugs and the Global War on Terror. Within the field of global governance, scholarly attention has focussed on the impact of the forces of globalisation on the dynamics of intrastate conflict. For development economists, rational choice theory has underpinned the understanding of civil wars and a strong emphasis on the political economy of violence has emerged as a central point of reference.

Contemporary explanations of conflict offer details insights into the dynamics of civil conflict in the global South. However, the heavy emphasis on generalised dynamics of conflict has resulted in the neglect of local dynamics and the internal histories of conflict-ridden countries of the global South. This thesis calls for a 'bottom up' approach to conflict analysis through the application of insights from the trans-disciplinary field of Area Studies. This allows the research to draw from a variety of literature and data that relates to the internal politics, society, economy, history and geography, which provides a more nuanced understanding to the development of conflict and violence. In terms of contemporary relevance, the anticipation is that through a localised

understanding of conflict we are better placed to consider policies for transitional justice and peace in conflict-ridden countries.

Colombia makes an excellent case study for 'bottom up' conflict analysis. Firstly, there is a great deal of research in the disciplines of International Security, Governance and Development Economics that relate to the security dilemmas faced in Colombia. This provides an excellent insight into the broader theoretical debates as well as policy prescriptions that have been applied to dealing with insecurity and violence in the country. Secondly, although country studies of Colombia have featured less frequently in the realm of Latin Americanist literature, a wealth of research has been carried out by Colombian academics. This covers a wide variety of literature that relates to the internal politics, society, economy, history and geography. Perhaps one of the biggest challenges faced by scholars of International Security, Governance and Development Economics is the linguistic barrier – the vast majority of the literature in the Spanish language. This thesis overcomes this barrier by making use of rich local research. Finally, the duration of the conflict allows the thesis to offer a longitudinal analysis of internal developments of the conflict in Colombia from 1946 to the present day in a nuanced manner that takes into account both broader international dynamics, local and regional ones as well as continuities over time.

This chapter addresses current approaches to the understanding of the Colombian conflict. It offers a critique of current approaches and highlights how an Area Studies approach that takes into consideration the internal politics, society, economy, history and geography can help us gain a better understanding of some of the key questions surrounding Colombian violence – what is the role of the Colombian state? How has the structure of Colombian society shaped the development of violence? What are the key features of the economy and how has this impacted the formation of armed groups? What can the history of violence in Colombia tell us about contemporary modes of violence? How has the geography of the country stimulated the growth of violence in certain regions?

Representations of the Colombian Conflict

Colombian history is a history of war. Since 1946 it is estimated that 10 million people have died in this country as the result of a melange of violent activity that encompasses every kind of low intensity conflict. In their quests to find a solution to the Colombian problem, academics, journalists and policymakers alike have expended much ink on defining the conflict. In academic debates, Colombia can be represented as a “new war”,⁵² a “greedy” war,⁵³ a fragile state,⁵⁴ a society at war,⁵⁵ or as an internal armed conflict.⁵⁶ In journalistic accounts, the Colombian conflict is heralded as an imperialist war waged by the United States in its backyard.⁵⁷ Governmental representations of the conflict analyse the violence from several perspectives that define the violence as armed groups struggling to take over power, a democratic nation-state under the threat of narco-terrorism, and a low intensity armed conflict.⁵⁸

The plurality of definitions surrounding the conflict has important political consequences. Each definition has represented the conflict in a particular way and placed emphasis on specific dynamics. With every definition of the conflict comes a varying proposition on how to deal with the situation. Possible solutions range from military action to rid the country of the ‘enemy’ to political solutions involving negotiations with irregular armed groups.

⁵² Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999).

⁵³ Paul Collier, ‘Doing Well Out of War: An Economic Perspective’ in Mats Berdal and David M. Malone (eds.) *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000); Paul Collier, ‘Causas Económicas de las Guerras Civiles y sus Implicaciones para el Diseño de Políticas,’ *El Malpensante*, Vol. 30, May-June (2001).

⁵⁴ James A. Piazza, ‘Incubators of Terror: Do Failed and Failing States Promote Transnational Terrorism?’, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 52, No. 3 (2008) pp. 469-488.

⁵⁵ Elsa Blair, *Muertes Violentas: La Teatralización del Exceso*, (Medellín: Universidad de Antioquia, 1999).

⁵⁶ Liliana Franco, ‘El Mercenarismo Corporativo y la Sociedad Contrainsurgente,’ *Estudios Políticos*, Vol. 21, July-December (2002) pp. 55-82.

⁵⁷ Mario A. Murillo, *Colombia and the United States: War, Unrest and Destabilization* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2004); Grace Livingstone, *Inside Colombia: Drugs, Democracy and War* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

⁵⁸ Josefina Echavarría, *In/Security in Colombia: Writing Political Identities in the Democratic Security Policy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010) p. 3.

Definitions are powerful tools. They have the power to name, to qualify certain aspects as relevant and to disqualify others, therefore placing value on specific dynamics.⁵⁹ According to Richard Jackson, definitions qualify the actors involved, the character of their struggle and the ways of dealing with a situation. Thus, 'language has a reality making effect; it is a way of constructing reality and not merely reflecting it.'⁶⁰

No consensus has been reached on the definition of the Colombian conflict. The vast accumulations of policy, academic and journalistic texts that deal with this violent conflict illustrate the difficulties of grasping the Colombian reality through almost seven decades of violence. The emergence of various representations of the Colombian conflict is problematic for three reasons. Firstly, representations of conflict are largely driven by external factors, such as the end of the Cold War, the US declaration of the War on Drugs and the onset of the Global War on Terror. As a result, generalised international armed conflict classifications and developments within the study of wars and security have conceptually shaped analyses of the Colombian situation.

Secondly, there is emphasis on change in the nature of violence rather than continuities. For instance, the representation of Colombia's insurgent groups has shifted over time from communist guerrilla groups, drug lords, to terrorists. In more recent times the term 'narco-terrorists' has been employed to define the insurgent groups.⁶¹ Finally, representations of violence are used by the Colombian government, its allies and the internationally community to further political projects. The representation of the Colombian conflict as a war fuelled by the "greed" of armed groups through their involvement in the drugs trade has proved popular amongst the policy elite in the nation's capital, Bogotá. As a result, counternarcotic and counterinsurgency operations and chemical fumigation have been the favoured methods of countering the cultivation and production of illegal narcotics and armed groups in Colombia

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 19.

⁶⁰ Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counter-terrorism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005) p. 23.

⁶¹ Dario E. Teicher, 'The Decisive Phase of Colombia's War on Narco-Terrorism,' *The Counterproliferation Papers*, Future Warfare Series, No. 28 (2005) pp. 1-45.

with catastrophic effects. Whilst the cultivation and production of drugs in Colombia poses the authorities with serious problems, the excessive emphasis on drugs does not reflect the complex lineage of conflict and social unrest in the country. If the definitions of conflict do not reflect the Colombian reality, then the proposed measures to deal with the situation are misplaced.

International Security Literature

The role of the United States as the primary economic, cultural and political power in the Americas has been explored extensively in academic literature. Successive Colombian administrations have altered the representation of the conflict according to the perceived threats to US national security. This is partly due to the close relationship between the two states since Colombian support to the Korean War and the resources available to Colombia from its northern ally. Accordingly communism, drugs and terrorism are the three banners under which the Colombian conflict has been represented. Scholarly literature is largely representative of these three grand narratives, which have effectively divided contemporary Colombian history to the extent that it is not seen as one continuous cycle of violent conflict. The role of the US as a key driver in the Colombian situation is well documented in critical international relations literature.⁶²

New Wars Debate

The conceptualisation of the Colombian conflict is greatly shaped by theories of civil conflict. Since the 1990s, two influential trends in scholarship have informed many of the academic and policy analyses of the Colombian conflict:

⁶² Doug Stokes, *America's Other War: Terrorizing Colombia* (London: Zed Books, 2005); Noam Chomsky, *Rogue States: the Rule of Force in World Affairs* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000); Bert Ruiz, *The Colombian Civil War* (Jefferson North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2001); Livingstone, *Inside Colombia*; Murrillo, *Colombia and the United States*.

“new wars”,⁶³ and “greed vs. grievance”.⁶⁴ Although these theories offer a useful insight in to the some of the dynamics of civil conflicts, they have also served to dehistoricise and delegitimise the political nature of rebellion in Colombia by focussing on “new” and “criminal” elements of the conflict. In addition, they have had a significant impact on the language and representation of the armed actors, which has periodically changed over almost seven decades of violent conflict according to external grand narratives.

Mary Kaldor is the instigator of the “new wars” theory. Her study, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, conceptualises the spate of contemporary civil wars during the 1990s, using Bosnia-Herzegovina as a model. The main thrust of this theory is that the objectives, actors, impact, and organisation of these “new wars” seem to differ markedly from the Clausewitzian notion of war as battle between opposing forces. In contrast to “old” wars, Kaldor argues that the dynamics of globalisation are a key causal factor behind “new wars”. “New wars”, according to this study, are characterised by the following: state failure and a social transformation driven by the intensification of global interconnectedness and liberal economic forces; the breakdown of public authority leading to ‘irregular’ armies; an increase in ethnic conflicts rather than ideology and territory; a phenomenal rise in civilian casualties; the targeting of civilians as objects of war; a dependence on internal sources of finance, and massive international involvement in the form of foreign media, aid organisations, military advisers, and volunteer forces.⁶⁵

⁶³ Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*.

⁶⁴ Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, ‘Greed and Grievance in Civil War,’ *Policy Research Working Paper*, Paper No. 2355 (Washington D.C: World Bank, 2001); Paul Collier, ‘Rebellion as Quasi-Criminal Activity,’ *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 44, No. 6 (2002) pp. 838-852.

⁶⁵ Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, pp. 1-12.

Greed vs. Grievance Debate

The second, and arguably most influential, school of thought for the analysis of the Colombian conflict is “greed vs. grievance”. Led by Paul Collier of the World Bank, this theory controversially argues that from an economic viewpoint armed groups are criminal organisations. In sharp contrast to previous “grievance”⁶⁶ related theories, Collier argues that motives of armed groups are largely for personal gain and are not fundamentally about obtaining popular support. For Collier, every armed groups needs to infuse their warriors, and indeed the general population, with ideals that legitimise taking arms and dying for a cause. Injustice, oppression and grievances are therefore merely part of the discourse and serve to conceal the character of organised criminal activities. Rebel groups therefore invest in public relations to maintain the support of the warriors and of international financial sources and the grievance is largely a consequence of their own need for legitimation rather than the real cause for their struggle.⁶⁷

An Area Studies Approach to the Colombian Conflict

The disciplinary divide between the Social Sciences and Area Studies has been an on-going debate in academic circles for decades.⁶⁸ Social scientists

⁶⁶ Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1970); Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (London: Yale University Press, 1968); Walker Connor, *Ethno-Nationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Barrington Moore Jr., *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (White Plains, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1978); Edward N. Muller, ‘Income Inequality, Regime Repressiveness, and Political Violence,’ *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (1985) pp. 47-61.

⁶⁷ Collier, ‘Causas Económicas de las Guerras,’ 30.

⁶⁸ Mark Tessler, Jodi Nachtwey and Anne Banda, ‘Introduction: The Area Studies Controversy’ in Mark A. Tessler, Jodi Nachtwey and Anne Banda (eds.) *Area Studies and Social Science: Strategies for Understanding the Middle East* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999) pp. vii-xxi; Robert Bates, ‘Area Studies and the Discipline: A Useful Controversy?’, *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. XXX, No. 2 (1997) pp. 166-169; Peter A. Hall and Sidney Tarrow, ‘Globalization and Area Studies: When is Too Broad Too Narrow?’ in Patrick O’Meara, Howard D. Mehlinger

have an implicit focus on global trends and forces, whereas Area Studies specialists develop knowledge of specific countries and regions. This thesis seeks to bridge this divide by establishing a symbiotic relationship between the two areas. Area studies must build on the general theoretical frameworks that highlight global trends and complement this with insights from a country level analysis of violence and security. Equally, area specific knowledge can contribute to the understanding of wider dynamics by providing in depth analyses which social scientists rely on to produce accurate generalisations of global trends.⁶⁹

This thesis presents a strong case of the application of an Area Studies approach to the study of violence conflict and security of the global South. Scholarly work in the areas of International Security, “new wars” and “greed vs. grievance” have provided us insights into civil conflict and some of the wider factors at play – international power relations, globalisation and transnational criminality, which will be discussed at greater length in chapters two and three. However, generalised explanations of violence in global South fail to sufficiently provide explanatory framework as local dynamics are neglected. An Area Studies approach allows for a multifaceted and internalised analysis of conflict that can provide a more nuanced understanding of insecurity. In the case of Colombia, insights from the internal politics, society, economy, history and geography reveal a complex lineage of violence that are rooted in the issue of land.

History of Conflict in Colombia

Colombia’s history is littered with bloody conflicts that continue until today. This is not an uncommon phenomenon for countries that experience civil war. The political, economic and humanitarian impact of conflict is devastating and makes states more susceptible to future problems. One of the main ways in

and Roxana Ma Newman (eds.) *Changing Perspectives on International Education* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2001) pp. 96-100.

⁶⁹ Hall and Tarrow, ‘Globalization and Area Studies’, p. 98.

this thesis challenges contemporary approaches to the study of conflict is by taking into account the impact of the history of violence in Colombia which have shaped the political, social and economic landscape of the country.

The localised approach here takes into consideration the violent state-making process in the country.⁷⁰ Colombia has been characterised by high levels since colonial times and has lamentably staggered from one type of collective violence to another ever since. The focus of this thesis is the most recent phase of chronic violence from 1946 to present day – the ‘longest spell of internal political violence anywhere in the modern world’.⁷¹ It seeks to examine the conflict as a process of increasing radicalisation of the Colombian political system, which has resulted in a violent and dysfunctional democracy.

There have been numerous civil wars throughout Colombian history. Kaldor’s assertion that liberal economic forces can drive conflict is correct, however this is far from a new phenomenon. For instance, the worldwide rise for the demand of coffee and the subsequent fall in prices was one of the main contributing factors for the War of a Thousand Days (1899-1902), in which as estimated 100,000 Colombians perished.⁷² One of the main continuations of conflict in Colombia is the link between liberal economic development and violence. The commercialisation of agriculture has led to the emergence of conflicting interests between the peasantry and the landed elite since the creation of the republic.⁷³ The breakdown in public authority must be seen in the context of the agrarian issue. The failure of the Colombian state to arbitrate agrarian conflict has entrenched the use of violence to settle

⁷⁰ Frank Stafford and Marco Palacios, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); David Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself* (Oxford: University of California Press, 1993).

⁷¹ Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín, Tatiana Acevedo and Juan Manuel Viatela, ‘Violent Liberalism? State, Conflict and Political Regime in Colombia, 1930-2006,’ *Crisis States Working Papers*, Paper No. 19 (November 2007) p. 3.

⁷² Charles W. Bergquist, *Coffee and Conflict in Colombia, 1886-1910* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1986) p. 36.

⁷³ Frances Thomson, ‘The Agrarian Question and Violence in Colombia,’ *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (2011) p. 351.

accounts in the country, well before the cultivation and production of narcotics and recent wave of globalisation.

The War of Thousand Days, which saw an estimated 100,000 killed, ended in 1902 with the signing of peace treaties between the Liberal and Conservative political parties. Following 44 years of relative peace, violence erupted in 1946 and has never ended. Violence during the 1940s and 1950s is largely framed in terms of partisan loyalties.⁷⁴ Whilst Liberal and Conservative political parties existed elsewhere in Latin America, the depth of party affiliation is unique to Colombia. It is the only country in which the political parties that dominated politics in the nineteenth century continue to wield power today. Indeed, party affiliation was so strong in Colombia that loyalties were almost hereditary. Partisan violence was a key element of violence in the mid-1940s. In the elections of 1946, power switched from the hands of the Liberals to the Conservatives sparking violence across the country.

Colombia's political system has been historically divided over the issue of land. Indeed, this is a problem that continues to today. The question of agrarian reform has been at the core of Colombia's violence and political agenda since the 1930s. During the presidency of Alfonso López Pumarejo (1934-1938) a series of social reforms, known as *La Revolución en Marcha* (The Marching Revolution) were introduced.⁷⁵ These included agrarian reform, the implementation of public education, universal male suffrage and trade union reform, which greatly alarmed the Colombian political parties. Not only did the reforms deepen the divides between the two leading parties, but they also sowed factionalism within the political system leading up to the bloody civil war that began in 1946. Popular unrest over socioeconomic grievances reveals the internal pressures between the landed elite and lower

⁷⁴ Daniel Pécaut, *Orden y Violencia: Evolución Socio-Política de Colombia entre 1930 y 1953* (Bogotá: Editorial Norma, 2001); Paul Oquist, *Violencia, Conflicto y Política en Colombia* (Bogotá: Instituto de Estudio Colombianos, 1978); John C. Pollock, 'Violence, Politics and Elite Performance: The Political Sociology of La Violencia in Colombia,' *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1975) pp. 22-50.

⁷⁵ Alvaro Tirado Mejía, *La Revolución en Marcha y la Reforma Constitucional de 1936* (Bogotá: Universidad Externado de Colombia, 1985).

classes as well as the growing problem of rural disputes over land titles, tenant struggles and land invasions by peasant squatters to use large swaths of unused or underused parts of large estates.

Repeated cycles of violence have resulted in the following: firstly, the consolidation of elite political power between the two warring political parties – the Liberals and the Conservatives. These two parties have signed power-sharing agreements that have excluded ‘third way’ political movements and suppressed democratic movements. Secondly, violence has exacerbated the issue of land tenure shifted social and political struggles in new directions. This has resulted in traits of class conflict and increasing hostility between *campesinos* and the Colombian elite. The consolidation of huge swaths of land have resulted in a marked increase of new social actors, such as an emerging independent workers movement and peasant struggles aligned with agrarian associations. Thirdly, political repression has become institutionalised in order to deal with future threats, a feature that has characterised violence in Colombia until present day. Finally, repeated cycles of violence have established the existence of organised criminal bands and new social actors.

Through an exploration of the history of violence in Colombia a more complex picture of the security situation emerges. This challenges current explanations of violent conflict by emphasising the political nature of violence in the country with land as a central point of contention. For Kaldor, contemporary conflicts, or “new wars” mobilise citizens around identity politics rather than ideology. Identity-based conflicts are an unanticipated side effect of the globalisation process that has been nurtured under the loss of legitimacy of post-colonial states. Global integration not only eroded the autonomy of states and their monopoly on the legitimate use of force but also allowed non-state actors, such as organised criminal networks and paramilitary groups, to pursue their own selfish goals through exclusionist and nationalist policies. “New wars” are therefore involve state power as well as various private and non-state actors, in which ‘identity politics’ is a means by which political elites reproduce their power. Hence in “new wars” ethnic cleansing has been used to achieve

political control. Territories are purged of their minorities through the use of population displacement techniques and hearts and minds are now won through fear and hate. “New wars” are therefore not directed at opposing sides, but against civilian populations.⁷⁶ Whereas in “old” wars these were considered to be undesirable and illegal side effects of conflict, identity politics and systematic violence are ‘central to the mode of fighting in “new wars”’.⁷⁷

Kaldor is correct in the assertion that civil wars are directed at civilian populations. However, this is not a new phenomenon in Colombia. Millions of civilians have died as a consequence of Colombia’s numerous civil wars throughout the country’s history. The civilian population of this country has always suffered as a consequence of state policies and, in particular, the inability of successive governments to arbitrate agrarian conflicts has been a causal factor. Indeed, *La Violencia* reflects in many ways what Mary Kaldor defines as a “new war”. Arguably, state failure, social transformation driven by the intensification of global interconnectedness and liberal economic forces; the breakdown of public authority leading to ‘irregular’ armies; a phenomenal rise in civilian casualties; the targeting of civilians as objects of war are all characteristics that can be observed in *La Violencia*.

For Kaldor and Collier, the element of criminality is central to violent conflict. The analysis of violence in Colombia on a historical basis lends credence to this argument. The emergence of armed groups has led to a need of raising funds to make funds, however the extent to which the high levels of criminality can be considered as “greed” is questionable and will be subject to greater discussion in chapter three. An examination of the dynamics of violence on a historical basis reveals the diversity of violence that has continued to shape the nature of conflict in the country: state sponsored terror, guerrilla activity, privatised paramilitary forces and criminality. The relationship between rebellion and criminality has been at the centre of a heated debate amongst scholars and has serious implications for the way the Colombian conflict is perceived. Kidnapping was one of the most common elements of bandit

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 53.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 106.

activity and subsequent armed Colombian groups have practised this to an aberrant extent. The conflation of activities between guerrillas and bandits is a real component of the conflict and demonstrates that the unstable boundaries between armed groups exists but must be seen in the context of the state's role in the perpetuation of violence.

Kaldor is correct in her assertion that liberal economic forces can drive social transformations and violence. This is arguably the case in Colombia since the late nineteenth century. This is linked to Colombia's response to the spectacular rise in the price of coffee in the late 1880s and early 1890s and marks the beginning of the Colombian land struggle. Colombian land policy during this period privatised large swaths of public land, and rather than creating a large class of small farmers, this process led to the consolidation of large estates in the most economically productive regions of the country. Agricultural entrepreneurs asserted rights of private property over areas that were occupied by peasant settlers and gave rise to resistance movements and widespread confrontations in the form of rural protest and land invasions.⁷⁸ According to a study by Catherine LeGrand, there were as many as 450 major confrontations between 1875 and 1930.⁷⁹ Rural protest and land invasions have been a regular occurrence throughout the twentieth century and beyond. Criminal activities associated with rural protest include invasions, kidnapping and cattle rustling and have been used by various peasant movements, including insurgent groups, since the late nineteenth century to present day.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Catherine LeGrand, 'Los Antecedentes Agrarios de la Violencia: El Conflicto Social en la Frontera Colombiana, 1850-1936' in Gonzalo Sánchez and Ricardo Peñaranda (eds.) *Pasado y Presente de la Violencia en Colombia* (Bogotá: Fondo Editorial CEREC, 1986) p. 109.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 101. Major confrontations are defined as involving more than 25 settlers.

⁸⁰ For a recent analysis see: María Eugenia Pinto Borrego, Andrés Vergara Ballen and Yilberto Lahuerta Percipiano, 'Costos Generados por la Violencia Armada en Colombia: 1999-2003,' *Archivos de Macroeconomía*, Departamento Nacional de Planeación (2004) pp. 9-10; Charles Parkinson, 'Cattle rustling menaces LatAm Communities,' *Insight Crime*, September 26, 2013; 'Antonio Sampaio: FARC Renounces Kidnapping, Turns to Cattle Rustling,' *IISS Voices*, February 29, 2012; for a historical analysis see: Jane M. Rausch, *Colombia: Territorial Rule and the Llanos Frontier* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999) pp. 113-114.

Through the emphasis of broader trends and international dynamics the role of the Colombian state is a missing dimension of current explanatory frameworks. Through the examination of state responses and policies to the security dilemmas faced by the country, we are able to reposition the state as an actor in the conflict. This is particularly important when considering the level of human rights abuses carried out at the hands of the state and the central role of land as a point of contention for violence in Colombia. In contrast to the nostrums of political scientists, class-based explanations have framed the work of Colombianist historians and Area Studies specialists. The role of Colombian elites and the choices made by them in almost seven decades of violence have shaped the dynamics of the conflict from issues of land tenures, the decision to implement a two-party power sharing pact, military-paramilitary collusion and the displacement of millions in the process of economic development. Whilst attempts at reform by some members of the Colombian elite illustrate their acknowledgement of the issue of land well into the 20th century; successive failures to deal with these deep-rooted problems led to the continuation and escalation of rural and urban violence. In line with the “greed” thesis, which undermines the role of the disruption of traditional social structures through modernisation, class-based explanations for insurgency and violence have also been largely overlooked in political science literature in recent years.

Colombian Politics

An internalised approach to the study of the Colombian conflict allows us to delve deeper into the role of the state and wider political dynamics. One of the most peculiar features of Colombian politics is the democratic nature of politics. Elections have taken place every four years despite huge levels of security threats and the country has a functioning two party system. However, the two party system in itself has been the source of political insecurity. The Liberals and Conservatives have a history of armed factions that have resulted in a series of bloody conflicts highlighted above. In the process of peace

making the two political parties have made power sharing pacts which have resulted in an exclusionary political system.

For Collier, traditional grievance based approaches are misplaced. Drawing on an impressive range of statistical data on civil wars across the world since 1945, the stark and unequivocal conclusion of Collier's work suggested that 'grievance-based explanations of civil war' were 'seriously wrong'.⁸¹ According to his study, political exclusion is not a useful indicator for the probability of civil war. However, the localised approach used in thesis presents a strong challenge to this argument. Following the horrors of *La Violencia* the political elites of Colombia joined forces form a coalition power-sharing pact, the *Frente Nacional*. The *Frente Nacional* institutionalised the control of the two parties over political offices and formal political participation well into the 1970s. This had the effect of trivialising the democratic process by dividing up government posts evenly between Liberals and Conservatives, regardless of electoral results. According to Jonathan Hartlyn, the result was that alternative political movements were excluded from the mainstream political process. In other words meaningful opposition became anti-systemic, fuelling leftist insurgencies.⁸²

Political exclusion from the democratic political process had two important effects on the development of violence. Firstly, it institutionalised state sponsored terror through the use of military repression to 'pacify' communities of Liberal and communist peasants – known as 'independent republics' – that organised to resist persecution and then fought to retain their autonomy. This is of particular significance as it led to the formation of the FARC, the world's most powerful insurgent group during the 1960s. Secondly, political exclusion radicalised the populist ANAPO support into formation of yet another insurgent group, the M-19, as a result of the 1970 election, in which a broad consensus of alleged fraud emerged. Finally, in a bid to strengthen the

⁸¹ Paul Collier, 'Doing Well Out of War: An Economic Perspective' in Mats Berdal and David M. Malone, (eds.) *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000) p. 91.

⁸² Jonathan Hartlyn, *The Politics of Coalitional Rule in Colombia*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

political ties between the Liberal and Conservative parties, the *Frente Nacional* coalition effectively abandoned the politically sensitive issue of agrarian question and rural grievances. Importantly, this led emergence of new armed actors and radicalised the peasantry, many of whom by the end of the 1970s had opted to cooperate with rural guerrilla organisations.

The elitist nature and exclusionary policies of the Colombian political system reveal two important driving factors for violence. Firstly, it illustrates the role of the state in the perpetuation of violence – a factor that is not emphasised in current analyses of violence conflict; and secondly, that Collier's argument that political exclusion does not have a significant impact is misplaced. Importantly, this analysis lends support to the wider argument presented in this thesis which illustrates the political nature of violence in Colombia.

Colombian Society

Within Colombia a wealth of research has examined the societal impact of violence in the country. Dedicated centres of research, such as the *Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica* and the *Centro de Recursos para el Análisis de Conflictos* have analysed a wide range of issues including the impact of violence on the Afro-Colombian community, women and children as well policy recommendations for the reintegration of tens of thousands of former combatants. The Colombian government defines the current situation within the country as a narco-struggle.⁸³ However, Colombian scholars, such as Eduardo Piazza and William Ramírez, have questioned the classification of the conflict as a civil war and questioned whether it could be better understood as a 'society at war.'⁸⁴ For William Ramírez the lack of a social contract within Colombia is a key causal factor of the national situation:

⁸³ Echavarría, *In/Security in Colombia*, p. 23.

⁸⁴ Nasi, Ramírez and Lair 'La Guerra Civil;' Posada Carbó, 'Guerra Civil;' Nasi, Ramírez and Lair, 'Repuesta al Debate 14.'

La historia de nuestro país es la de un contracualismo coactivo nunca resuelto y, en consecuencia, caracterizado por el hecho de que desde varios ángulos del poder social dominante se han impulsado contradictorias alternativas de hegemonía nacional sin que desde ninguna de ellas se logre el monopolio legítimo de una fuerza que permita articular el inconexo tejido de la Nación.⁸⁵

The history of our country is of a coercive social contract, which has never been resolved. It is therefore characterised by various angles of the dominant social class that have pushed for contradictory alternatives of national hegemony. However, as none of the ruling classes can achieve a legitimate monopoly, it gives way to a disjointed nation.

Through an examination of the Colombian situation as a 'society of war', mass violent conflict can be widely explored. The complicated nature of the Colombian conflict cannot be simply reduced to left-wing guerrillas fighting right-wing self-defence groups and the armed forces. The violence involves a myriad of actors, which includes non-combatants. Colombian citizens fight each other and often provide support, intelligence and assistance to various armed groups. Peace in a 'society at war' cannot be achieved by purely military means. Peace requires the state to address the economic and security grievances in the country, and therefore a socio-political solution to the violence is required.

A localised approach to the study of conflict that has been applied to this thesis enables the exploration of the role played by a wide variety of social and political actors. In a country with deep inequalities in land tenure and where the agrarian question has led to the formation and widespread support for irregular armed groups, it is particularly important to explore the role of agrarian movements that are absent from current broad explanatory frameworks of violence conflict.

⁸⁵ William Ramírez, '¿Guerra Civil en Colombia?', *Análisis Político*, Vol. 46 (2002) p. 154, quoted in Echavarría, *In/Security in Colombia*, p. 23.

The neglect of this group of social actors in contemporary analysis is due to wider internal problems. Despite the condition of the rural peasants operating as the fundamental driver for much of the instability in Colombia and despite the fact that this sector of the population has endured the majority of human rights violations in the country, there are few serious analytical studies of the peasantry. The lack of scholarly attention in this area in part reflects the high illiteracy rates amongst the rural population; very few of them are able to write or contribute to the literature of their struggle and theirs is a 'lost voice' amongst Colombia's diverse political constituencies. Many of those who were initially vocal figures in the peasant struggle either later took up arms with one of the country's guerrilla groups or died during confrontations with the Armed Forces. Peasants also face unique difficulties regarding the organisation and representation of their interests.⁸⁶ Their struggle is often occluded by being framed as a regional or particularly local issue, whereas in reality in a country like Colombia, the rural class are at the core of an agricultural economy.

During the 1970s around half of the total population of Colombia lived in rural areas. Agriculture provided 30 per cent of the GNP and 70 per cent of Colombia's export earnings. Poverty, the lack of state presence in rural areas and the abandonment of agrarian reform during this period led to radicalisation of the peasantry under the ANUC. Although spates of land invasions by rural *campesinos* have occurred throughout Colombia's history, those of the 1970s posed a serious threat to Colombia's internal security. Between 1971 and 1975 alone around 2000 haciendas were invaded.⁸⁷ This increasingly open confrontation between the peasantry and the political elite became one of the most prominent axes of the Colombian conflict. The exploration of the political actions of land activists sheds further light on the confrontations between the elite and the peasantry. Importantly this supports the wider argument of the importance of grievance-based

⁸⁶ León Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement in Colombia: Struggles of the National Peasant Association, 1967-1981* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. i.

⁸⁷ Alejandro Reyes Posada, *Guerreros y Campesinos: El Despojo de la Tierra en Colombia*, (Bogotá: Editorial Norma, 2009) p. 29.

explanations of the conflict and provides a 'bottom up' approach to the understanding of social conflict in the country.

Economy

The political economy of war is a frequent point of reference for Development Economists. For Collier, the importance of exporting primary commodities in developing countries drives conflict. Primary commodities are more likely to be a good proxy for the availability of 'lootable' resources.⁸⁸ This is measured as a share of primary commodity exports in gross domestic product (GDP). Primary commodity production does not depend upon complex networks of information and transactions, as is the case for manufacturing. Furthermore, it is highly profitable as it is based on the exploitation of natural endowments. In many cases such exports usually originate from rural areas where organised military forces or rebel organisations are able to impose predatory taxation by targeting established trade routes. Rebel organisations in particular have an advantage over governments and organised military forces with regards to taxation over primary commodities, as they are able to levy higher taxation in kind. Tax is therefore collected in the form of a non-cash commodity.

The relationship between the export of primary commodities and violent conflict is worthy of exploration. Rural violence in many countries, including Colombia, can be traced back to the cultivation and production of non-manufacturing goods, such as coffee. In more recent times, the upsurge of violence in Colombia has been linked to the increase in the cultivation in coca, which is processed to make cocaine. Coca, like any other crop must be cultivated, which makes the importance of exploring the link between primary commodities and violence conflict through an agrarian perspective even more pressing. Whilst Collier's work explores useful links between primary commodities and armed groups, it implies that resources simply exist for predation. The management of resources and specifically the role of the state

⁸⁸ Collier, 'Doing Well Out of War,' p. 93.

in this area are not addressed. This study proposes a more nuanced approach by taking into account the role of the state in the management of resources and land reform.

The explanation for why young men join rebellions is tied to income-earning opportunities. If young men only face the option of poverty, they might be more inclined to join a rebellion for better opportunities. Collier approximates income-earning opportunities by the amount of the average number of years of education received. As education in the developing world is disproportionately supplied to young men, the differences in the average educational endowment between societies reflect much larger differences in the educational endowments of young males.⁸⁹ In short, Collier measures the economic agenda by primary commodities, the proportion of young men in the society, and the endowment of education. His study finds that whilst a higher proportion of young men in a society increase the risk of conflict, the greater the educational endowment, the lower the risk.⁹⁰

Collier's theory assumes that rebellion offers economic opportunities. This is in stark contrast to the realities faced by combatants. Colombia's largest insurgent group, the FARC, does not pay its combatants a salary.⁹¹ Combatants endure extremely difficult living conditions in the country's rural areas, which are characterised by mountainous and jungle terrain. Perhaps more importantly, those who join the FARC do so for life. There are little material incentives for peasants to join such an insurgency. In terms of educational endowment, Collier's study explores a useful indicator on the likelihood of a young Colombian male to join an insurgency, however, this study is severely limited in providing indicators on the likelihood of a female to join an insurgency. For instance, in Colombia it is estimated that as many as

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p. 94.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 97.

⁹¹ Gutiérrez Sanín, 'Criminal Rebels?', p. 11; Juan Guillermo Ferro and Graciela Uribe, *El Orden de la Guerra, Las FARC-EP: Entre la Organización y la Política* (Bogotá: CEJA, 2002); Jeanie Gong, 'Rebels with a Cause,' *Council on Hemispheric Affairs*, July 6, 2010.

40 per cent of FARC combatants are female.⁹² For both male and female combatants in Colombia, indicators such as the lack of legal employment, underemployment and ultimately economic grievances would shed further light on this area and provide useful details on the conditions that have led to young men and women in rural areas to join the ranks of various insurgencies and paramilitary organisations in Colombia.

Certain dynamics of the Colombian conflict have changed perceptibility in recent decades. Increased levels of globalisation, economic recession, and expanded access to international flows of funds and weapons in the post-Cold War era have all accumulated to the diversification of violence. This time period has seen the growth of the number of armed combatants and the spread of the violence to previously unaffected areas of the country. However, following over almost seven decades of violence, the dysfunctional relationship between the government and its people has not been addressed. Theories of civil conflict do not account for the role of the state and disregard economic and security grievances. Colombia's paradoxical democracy has allowed the government to follow highly militarised policy prescriptions, with little checks on the country's military and intelligence services. The fumigation of crops, mass human rights abuses at the hands of the authorities, the political genocide of the Colombian left and the military-paramilitary links has deepened the mistrust of the traditional political elite and in particular the police and armed forces.

How natural resources play a pivotal role in civil war in the post-Cold War era is a matter of considerable controversy.⁹³ Examining the Colombian conflict

⁹² Karla J. Cunningham, 'Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism,' *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (2003) p. 179. Also see: Andrea Méndez, *Militarized Gender Performativity: Women and Demobilization in Colombia's FARC and AUC* (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Queen's University, Canada, 2012); Natalia Herrera and Douglas Porch, 'Like Going to a Fiesta' - The Role of Female Fighters in Colombia's FARC-EP,' *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (2008) pp. 609-634.

⁹³ Various arguments include: Collier and Hoeffler 'Greed and Grievance in Civil War'; Keen, *The Economic Functions of Violence*; Michael Klare, 'The New Geography of Conflict,' *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 80, No. 3 (2001) pp. 49-61; Michael L. Ross, 'Oil, Drugs and Diamonds: The Varying Roles of Natural Resources of Civil

through the lens of the “greed” school highlights the economic factors, which have contributed to the intensity and duration of the war in Colombia. However, there is little discussion of the role of economic actors – from foreign companies involved in natural resource extraction, the financial and banking sector that launder unimaginable sums of money,⁹⁴ insurance and private security firms, global arms manufacturers and brokers, local and international drug traffickers, to rural coca and poppy growers with few alternatives who derive benefit from the economy of war and contribution to the continuation of the conflict.⁹⁵ Despite the enormous body of literature on the drugs trade, comparatively, there is comparatively little research on how licit trades, such as coffee, oil and the mining of gold, coal and emeralds have contributed to the political economy of war in Colombia.

There one point of agreement amongst almost all scholars of the Colombian conflict: the coca boom abruptly changed the dynamics of the war. The 1980s marked the worldwide boom of the drugs trade, setting the scene for critical change in drug producing nations, such as Colombia. Accordingly much of the literature has explored the changing dynamics of violence, and in particular the political economy of war. The “greed” school provides insightful perspectives on civil wars and resource predation, however this is a gross simplification of any conflict. This thesis does not disregard the importance of the illicit trades in diversifying violence in Colombia. However, it does seek to clarify how continuing economic and security grievances that have characterised the dysfunctional relationship between the Colombian state and its people has fundamentally driven violence since 1946 to present day.

War’ in Karen Ballentine and Jake Sherman (eds.) *The Political Economy of Armed Conflict: Beyond Greed and Grievance* (Boulder, CO: Rienner Publishers, 2003) pp. 47-72.

⁹⁴ David A. Andelman, ‘The Drug Money Maze,’ *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 73, No. 4 (1994) pp. 94-108.

⁹⁵ Alexandra Guàqueta, ‘The Colombian Conflict: Political and Economic Dimensions’ in Karen Ballentine and Jake Sherman (eds.) *The Political Economy of Armed Conflict: Beyond Greed and Grievance* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003) pp. 74-75.

In Colombia, one of the most unequal and economically stratified Latin American countries, the 'narrative of grievance' resonates with reality. Peasant rebellions have existed since the privatisation of public lands during coffee boom of the nineteenth century. Historically, the Colombian political system has not afforded access to parties other than the Liberals and Conservatives.⁹⁶ Sporadic attempts at opening up the political system led to the political genocide of the left from the mid-1980s.⁹⁷ Members of peasant leagues and movements have been systemically tortured and murdered over decades by paramilitaries and the police and armed forces. The governmental incompetency stretches beyond its failure to protect the lives of its citizens. In economic terms, the problem of unemployment and underemployment was ignored despite stark warnings from the International Labour Organisation during the 1970s.⁹⁸ Workers' strikes and protests have been brutally repressed over decades. Economic and security grievances are at the core of the Colombian armed conflict. Collier's suggestion of a 'narrative of grievance' driving civil conflicts reflect a misrepresentation of the experiences of those living in destitute and violent conditions over decades. Importantly, like Kaldor's thesis, it fails to address the role of the state in the perpetuation of conflict.

Geography

State failure in Colombia is a historical problem and not necessarily linked to 'global interconnectedness'. According to the Latin Americanist Harvey F. Kline, 'a strong Colombian state has never existed for the majority of its

⁹⁶ Osterling, *Democracy in Colombia*, p. xviii.

⁹⁷ For more analysis see chapter eight; Javier Giraldo, *Colombia: The Genocidal Democracy* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1996); Andrei Gómez-Suárez, 'Bloques Perpetradores y Mentalidades Genocidas: El Caso de la Unión Patriótica en Colombia,' *Revista de Estudios Sobre Genocidio*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2008) pp. 42-55; Andrei Gómez-Suárez, 'Perpetrator Blocs, Genocidal Mentalities and Geographies: The Destruction of the Unión Patriótica in Colombia and its Lessons for Genocide Studies,' *Journal of Genocidal Research*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (2007) pp. 637-660.

⁹⁸ See chapter seven.

people', a view that is widely held amongst Colombianists.⁹⁹ The lack of state power is largely a result of the country's economic geography and topography, which divides the nation into three racially, culturally and economically distinct regions.¹⁰⁰ State failure can therefore be result of local conditions and the history of state building, which in the case of Colombia have been an important factor in the lack of state presence and the perpetuation of conflict throughout the history of the country. Government programmes to improve the infrastructure of rural areas have been hindered as many rural parts of the country have seen little or no improvement in their living conditions due to lack of resources and difficulties in transportation to implement schemes.

Local level archive data illustrates the problems posed by the topography of the country for the security services. Much of the mountainous terrain, which was a breeding ground for insurgency, was historically difficult for security services to reach for investigating massacres. Indeed, this is persistent problem today. Much of the insurgency and the home of the two leading insurgent groups, the FARC and the ELN are in the southern jungle areas. This has had an important impact of the dynamics of the conflict and the role of civilians as intelligence sources for security officials who are keen for information. Local residents have provided authorities with intelligence, local knowledge and logistical support for decades particularly in rural areas throughout Colombia's violent history, however they have also suffered greatly at the hands of the security services and insurgent groups for their role. Through the analysis of the challenges posed by the country's physical

⁹⁹ Harvey F. Kline, 'Colombia: Lawlessness, Drug Trafficking and Carving up the State' in Robert I. Rotberg (ed.) *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003) p. 161. For other studies on Colombian state failure see: Alex McDougall, 'State Power and its Implications for Civil War in Colombia,' *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (2009) pp. 322-345; Phillip McLean, 'Colombia: Failed, Failing, or Just Weak?,' *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (2002) pp. 123-134; Francisco Leal Buitrago, 'Armed Actors in the Colombian Conflict' in Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt (eds.) *Armed Actors: Organized Violence and State Failure in Latin America* (London: Zed Books, 2004) pp. 87-105.

¹⁰⁰ Frank Stafford and Marco Palacios, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) pp. 1-17; also see: Osterling, *Democracy in Colombia*, pp. 3-6.

geography we are able to examine localised dynamics that include both the problems faced by security officials as well as the role of non-combatants.

Colombian Security in an International Context

For Kaldor, globalisation is the key driver of conflict. It is conceived of as the 'intensification of global interconnectedness – political, economic, military and cultural'.¹⁰¹ This process is presented as contradictory; involving integration and fragmentation, homogenisation and diversification, globalisation and localisation, and is framed as the primary cause of contemporary conflicts. The ideology of Cold War politics provided a common vocabulary on which to build trans-national civil society. During this period, military cooperation increased; state armies were tied into inseparable cooperative international frameworks through military alliances, international arms production and trade, forms of military cooperation, and arms control agreements.¹⁰² Cold War rivals provided economic and diplomatic assistance to Third World states in the competition for control and assistance, deepening their reliance on the outside war and ultimately leading to the erosion of the monopoly of legitimate organised violence.

How important was great power assistance to Colombia? It is generally accepted that there was ideological backing from the USSR to Colombian insurgents from the 1960s. To some degree this is true. Written material such as leaflets and pamphlets and meetings led by left-wing youth movements, some sectors of the clergy and the dissident middle-class in Colombia would make reference to their 'counterparts' across the world. However, the Colombian peasantry hardly needed ideological backing from the USSR. By the mid-twentieth century they acquired decades of experience in organising rural protests and disturbing the economic processes of the agricultural entrepreneurs. Cuban assistance to Colombia is also largely driven by the suspicions of the policymakers in Bogotá and Washington. Whilst Havana certainly provided training to a relatively small number of would be insurgents,

¹⁰¹ Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, p. 71.

¹⁰² *ibid.*, p. 5.

primarily from the ELN, the economic assistance was limited. Kaldor's theory is built on the assumption that Cold War assistance to Third World countries was great enough to drive conflict. In rural Colombia, the seeds were already sown well before the onset of the Cold War due to the land policies implemented in Bogotá.

The new focus on the economics of civil conflicts was prompted by the observable increase in the self-financing nature of combatant activities. Some scholars have interpreted this shift as deeply connected to changes within the global political and economic order.¹⁰³ The end of the Cold War marked the decline in foreign state patronage for state and non-state combatants throughout the globe. Whilst in some countries, such as Mozambique, El Salvador and Nicaragua, the withdrawal of external support helped induce rebel movements into peace agreements, in other cases, such as Colombia, it is seen to have impelled rebels to seek out alternative modes of financing their campaigns.

For both Kaldor and Collier external support was central to the emergence and growth of armed groups during the Cold War. In the case of Colombia, declassified material and memoirs from defectors of armed groups raise serious doubts about the level of international assistance to insurgent groups.¹⁰⁴ Whilst the "greed" school raises important questions of economic motives, it fails to recognise the lack of legal economic opportunities in conflict-ridden countries. In Colombia, the rise of the cultivation and production of narcotics and the increase of popular support for insurgent groups is not coincidentally linked to the end of the Cold War, but the fall of the peasant movement in the 1970s and repressive conditions in rural areas.¹⁰⁵

The "greed vs. grievance" theory has led to a new conceptualisation of civil war. Conventionally, civil wars are seen as engendering complete economic

¹⁰³ Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Security and Development* (London: Zed Books, 2001); Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*.

¹⁰⁴ Jaime Arenas, *La Guerrilla Por Dentro: Análisis del E.LN. Colombiano* (Bogotá: Ediciones Tercer Mundo, 1971).

¹⁰⁵ See chapter seven.

breakdown and anarchy, however this new body of literature understands this situation as having the potential of creating 'alternate system of profit, power and protection.'¹⁰⁶ There is an element of truth in this assertion, however it must be understood in terms of country-specific factors relating to the political, economic and security conditions. Colombia's 'war-system' is tied to the institutional failure of the Colombian government in arbitrating rural conflict.¹⁰⁷ Collier's suggestion that 'economically rational' individuals drive all armed conflicts misinterprets violent conflict in the global South. Importantly, like Kaldor's theory it does not give enough weight to the role of the state in perpetuating the 'war system'.

Conclusion

In parallel to the Colombia conflict, a veritable war of words has been conducted over how we might frame it. International armed conflict classifications and war studies developments have shaped analyses of the Colombian situation in diverse ways. In the post-Cold War era, civil conflicts in the Balkans and the horn of Africa diverted the attention of scholars to the nature of these conflicts, which challenge the traditional understanding of war. The theories of "new wars" and "greed vs. grievance" have shaped scholarly debates of the Colombian conflict through their analyses of the causal factors of state conflicts and the social transformations within societies in a global perspective. Indeed, globalisation creates conditions that facilitate the growth of transnational criminal organisations, such as drug cartels, however, it also generates a paradox for a country which struggles to keep control of its territory – whilst the state is asked to withdraw from the social and economic sphere, it is also simultaneously forced to combat the growing violence more effectively to secure regional stability.

¹⁰⁶ Mats Berdal and David Keen, 'Violence and Economic Agendas in Civil Wars: Some Policy Implications,' *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (1997) p. 797.

¹⁰⁷ Nizah Richani, *Systems of Violence: The Political Economy of War and Peace in Colombia* (Albany: State University of New York, 2002) p. 3.

Notably, recent classifications of armed conflicts argue that the changing nature of conflicts illustrate their non-political character despite calls by the international community to recognise the political struggle of the conflict in order to reach a peaceful end. All of these classifications owe their origins to political or academic agendas that originate - in part at least – outside Colombia. Importantly, none of these discussions pay significant attention to the relationship between the Colombian state and its people and localised dynamics. This chapter has provided an insight into a more nuanced way of understanding conflict that takes into account the larger classifications of conflict and the shortcomings of such analyses. It is one of ambitions of this thesis to examine Colombian security through Colombian eyes, grounding it in local concerns and hopefully bringing the conception of the conflict a little closer to home.

Chapter Two

New Wars Research: Globalisation and Civil Conflict

The recent tranche of civil wars research has emphasised international dynamics to further our understanding of conflict in the global South. The previous chapter discussed how the theories of “new wars” and “greed vs. grievance” have shaped analyses and representations of civil conflict and offered an area studies approach grounded in local dynamics to highlight the shortcomings in contemporary approaches. This chapter furthers this contribution through an analysis on interaction the relationship between local, regional and global dynamics in driving violent conflict. In both academic and policy circles, the forces of globalisation and “greed” are hailed as the most important causal factors for civil conflict in the global South. Whilst these classifications have shed light on the dynamics of intra-state conflict, civil conflicts are not a homogenous phenomenon. The origins, motivations and objectives of violence in every conflict vary considerably, to the extent that it is difficult, if not impossible, to comprehensively theorise this phenomenon on a global scale. However, in order for social scientists to provide more accurate generalisations on global trends, it is important to take into consideration more localised, area specific knowledge.

Increased levels of globalisation have undoubtedly had an impact on civil conflict. The “new wars” literature provides an effective critique on globalisation, however much of the literature in this area does not take give sufficient emphasis to local or even regional dynamics in insecure and violent countries. In particular, it fails to sufficiently recognise the historical processes of violent conflict in the global South as there is an excessive emphasis on recent ‘global trends’ or Western foreign policy, particularly that of the United States. The “new wars” literature is bound through a critique of globalisation and in doing so has perhaps unintentionally stripped the governments of

conflict zones of a role in the perpetuation of violence. Globalisation is the seen as the key driver of conflict and accordingly, the solutions proposed by “new wars” scholars are problematically global initiatives and again do not consider the action that governments in conflict states can take in order to help overcome insecurity and violence.

The concept of globalisation has emerged as a point of departure for numerous academic debates. From questions of global political economy, global development agenda, global humanitarian crises to global terror and global criminality, the emphasis on global solutions to global problems are the talking pointing of numerous international organisations, governments, academics and third sector groups. Much can be gained from understanding global trends. Globalisation has resulted in increasing interdependency and between states and the impact of this must be subjected to critical analysis. However, there is also a danger in the focus on global trends. Paradoxically, it can limit our knowledge by leading to a neglect of more local and even regional trends. Although global changes and pressures have undoubtedly had an impact on the security of Colombia, most prominently through the explosion of the drugs trade, we must also consider the structural problems rooted in the domestic political, social and economic spheres of the country and the relationship between these dynamics on a historical basis.

This chapter provides a detailed discussion of the “new wars” school by focussing on the work of three leading scholars in contemporary academic literature, Mary Kaldor, Mark Duffield and Paul Rogers. It follows with an exploration of the external and internal, global and local dichotomies and how this relates to the phenomena of violent conflict. It is anticipated that this will tease out the relationship between these scholars as well as the divergences amongst them which will provide a conceptual framework from which to explore the case of the Colombia – a local conflict in a globalised world.

Mary Kaldor: “New Wars”

The end of the Cold War ushered a new era in international politics. The largely peaceful wave of democratisation and the end of a number of longstanding civil conflicts that were fuelled by superpower rivalry created a consensus that a reduction in armed conflict would occur. The concept of humanitarian intervention became widely accepted by the international community as a means to prevent and resolve conflicts. However, parallel to these positive developments, the end of the Cold War was also followed by a spate of civil conflicts in the Balkans, the Caucasus and Africa marking a shift in scholarly attention from superpower rivalry to “new” civil conflicts. Over the last decade, a number of scholars have argued that qualitative changes have occurred in the nature of contemporary conflicts.¹⁰⁸ The argument holds that it is now possible to view the ‘modern’ conflict, particularly civil war, as a departure from ‘earlier’ forms of conflict.

Mary Kaldor’s study, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, conceptualises the spate of contemporary, civil wars in these regions, using Bosnia-Herzegovina as a model. The main thrust of this theory is that the objectives, actors, impact, and organisation of these ‘new’ wars seem to differ markedly from the Clausewitzian notion of war as battle between opposing forces. In contrast to ‘old’ wars, Kaldor argues that the dynamics of globalisation are a key causal factor behind “new wars”. “New wars”, according to this study, are characterised by the following: state failure and a social transformation driven by the intensification of global interconnectedness and liberal economic forces; the breakdown of public authority leading to

¹⁰⁸ Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999); Mark Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples* (London: Polity Press, 2007); Paul Rogers, *Losing Control: Global Insecurity in the Twenty First Century* (London: Pluto, 2002); Other examples of this literature include: Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: Free Press, 1991); Lawrence Freedman, *The Revolution in Strategic Affairs, Adelphi Paper 318* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for IISS, 1998); Michael Ignatieff, *Virtual War: Kosovo and Beyond* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2000); Kalevi J. Holsti, *The State, War, and the State of War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Chris Hables Gray, *Post-Modern War: The New Politics of Conflicts* (London: Routledge, 1997).

'irregular' armies; an increase in ethnic conflicts rather than ideology and territory; a phenomenal rise in civilian casualties; the targeting of civilians as objects of war; a dependence on internal sources of finance, and massive international involvement in the form of foreign media, aid organisations, military advisers, and volunteer forces.¹⁰⁹

For Kaldor, globalisation is conceived of as the 'intensification of global interconnectedness – political, economic, military and cultural'.¹¹⁰ This process is presented as contradictory; involving integration and fragmentation, homogenisation and diversification, globalisation and localisation, and is framed as the primary cause of contemporary conflicts. The ideology of Cold War politics provided a common vocabulary on which to build trans-national civil society. During this period, military cooperation increased; state armies were tied into inseparable cooperative international frameworks through military alliances, international arms production and trade, forms of military cooperation, and arms control agreements.¹¹¹ Cold War rivals provided economic and diplomatic assistance to Third World states in the competition for control and assistance, deepening their reliance on the outside war and ultimately leading to the erosion of the monopoly of legitimate organised violence. According to Kaldor, the decline of state legitimacy gives rise to rivalry among non-state actors, and the distinction between public and private authority is blurred as the state's control and monopoly over violence declines, spreading criminality, corruption and inefficiency. In short, globalisation presents two processes in the "new wars" thesis. Firstly, it brings about changes in the state, particularly the erosion of state authority; secondly, it generates increased opportunities for economic gain in civil war as a result of both legal and illegal trans-border trade.

Violent civil conflict since of the end of the Cold War is generally linked with an environment that implicates a range of non-state and state actors. Central to this environment is the erosion of state power, which Kaldor sees in the

¹⁰⁹ Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, pp. 1-12.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 71.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 5.

context of neo-liberal economic forces and globalisation that undermine state authority and power and form a new political economy of war. Within this vacuum of state authority, a range of new militaries and privatised violence made up of decaying remnants of state armies, paramilitary groups, self-defence units, mercenaries and international troops, engage in new forms of violence, often associated with ethnic allegiances and competition over the control of natural resources or criminal opportunities.¹¹² It has been argued that the use of light weapons such as rifles, machine-guns, hand-grenades and landmines amongst these groups is the product of a long and sophisticated technological evolution since World War II, which was further encouraged by the biggest military build up during the Cold War.

For Kaldor, “new wars” mobilise citizens around identity politics rather than ideology. Identity-based conflicts are unanticipated side effects of the globalisation process that have been nurtured under the loss of legitimacy of post-colonial states. Global integration not only eroded the autonomy of states and their monopoly on the legitimate use of force but also allowed non-state actors, such as organised criminal networks and paramilitary groups, to pursue their own selfish goals through exclusionist and nationalist policies. “New wars” are therefore political conflicts, involving state power as well as various private, non-state actors, in which ‘identity politics’ is a means by which political elites reproduce their power. Hence in “new wars” ethnic cleansing has been used to achieve political control. Territories are purged of their minorities through the use of population displacement techniques and hearts and minds are now won through fear and hate. “New wars” are therefore not directed at opposing sides, but against civilian populations.¹¹³ Whereas in “old” wars these were considered to be undesirable and illegal side-effects conflicts, identity politics and systematic violence are ‘central to the mode of fighting in the new wars’.¹¹⁴

¹¹² *ibid.*, p. 92.

¹¹³ *ibid.*, p. 53.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 106.

“New wars” take place in the context of ‘an extreme version of globalisation’.¹¹⁵ Liberalisation and state support leads to a collapse of territorially based production and armed forces are sustained via remittances, diaspora fundraising, external governmental assistance and the diversion of international humanitarian aid. However, in a number of cases valuable commodities continue to be produced, for example drugs in Afghanistan and Colombia. Various forms of illegal trading are key sources of income, which provide alternative sources of funding for non-state actors to sustain violence activities over a prolonged period of time.¹¹⁶ The new globalised political economy of war, therefore not only damages the region of conflict itself, but also damages the economies of neighbouring regions through the spread of refugees, identity-based politics and illegal trade. It creates regional clusters of fragility and war economies that can be observed in the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Horn of Africa, Central Africa, West Africa, Central Asia and the Middle East, that are characterised by internationalised western global interventions.

Foreign assistance in the new political economy of war is integral to “new wars”. In the context of the collapse of domestic production, Kaldor puts forth a number of ways that foreign assistance is crucial as part of the new economy: remittances from abroad to individual families, direct assistance from diaspora living abroad, assistance from foreign governments and humanitarian assistance. The latter two arguably form the most influential forms of foreign assistance and have received much scholarly attention. Governmental assistance, according to Kaldor, has largely dried up following the end of the Cold War as both regular forces and guerrillas relied on their superpower patrons.¹¹⁷ However, since the end of the Cold War neighbouring states have often provided assistance for various political and economic reasons. For example, in Zaire the opposition was supported by Rwanda in an

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, 101.

¹¹⁶ For further studies on the ‘negative’ sides of globalisation see Mats Berdal and David M. Malone, *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000); David Keen, *The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil War*, Adelphi Paper 320, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Michael Renner, *The Anatomy of Resource Wars* (Washington, DC: Worldwatch Institute, 2002).

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 103.

attempt to prevent Hutu militiamen from operating from refugee camps. Humanitarian intervention since the end of the Cold War has increased dramatically; however Kaldor concludes that such initiatives have ultimately failed as “new wars” are still interpreted in traditional terms and have served the purpose of sustaining conflict rather than avoiding it. This has been achieved through the provision of humanitarian aid, which provides a source of income for warring parties, the legitimisation of war criminals by negotiating and through the attempts to find political compromises based of exclusivist assumptions.¹¹⁸

Kaldor calls for cosmopolitan law enforcement rather than a peacekeeping force. The suggestion here is that the international community should abandon its current policy of pushing for negotiated solutions as peace negotiations work conversely by raising the profile of warring parties and extend public legitimacy to war criminals.¹¹⁹ Kaldor advocates a form of ‘global overwatch’ whereby states and international organisations monitor and enforce human rights and humanitarian law, which would allow for outsiders to intervene in domestic affairs to stop civilian violence. This is framed in the context of globalisation where cosmopolitan governance would fill the void left by the erosion of the state and its inability to govern its territory and avoid civil conflict.

Kaldor’s “new wars” thesis raises some important theoretical questions contemporary violence. Proxy Cold War conflicts, state collapse, globalisation, the end of the Cold War and the emergence of identity politics have all arguably had an impact of the changing mode of warfare. However, it is incredibly problematic to assert a general departure. Kaldor’s articulation of the historical understanding of war in general and the changes in war and politics in the current period arguably overstate the features that are identified;

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 10.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 119.

spatial context, human impact, political economy, and social structure of conflict can also be observed in earlier conflicts to varying degrees.¹²⁰

The orthodox definition of international security is premised on the military defence of territory. This has to some degree sidelined human security and social factors. However, international security can no longer be solely conceived of as the defence of national territory against 'external' military threats. The security agenda now incorporates political, economic, social, and environmental dimensions, and increasingly the greatest threats to security for many people in the world come from disease, hunger, environmental contamination, crime, and unorganised violence, or even from the state itself, rather than from an 'external' force. This evolving security agenda explores the links between violence and factors such as socio-economic inequality, divided societies, human rights abuse, poverty, migration, economic disruptions, diaspora communities, and international economy and security discourse, which is essential to our understanding of contemporary conflicts.

Mark Duffield: The Conflict-Development Nexus

The nature of security has changed from state security to human insecurity creating multiple threats to global stability. Whereas Kaldor's focus is on the implications of globalisation in internationalising threats, which creates the need for international solutions to the problem of human insecurity, Mark Duffield argues that the West's war on insecurity is the product of a neo-colonial division of the world between the rich and the poor. *Development, Security and Unending War* provides an alternative to the mainstream perspective of "new wars", humanitarian interventions, and the merging of the fields of development and security by international actors to counter "new wars".

¹²⁰ Martin Shaw, 'The Contemporary Mode of Warfare? Mary Kaldor's Theory of New Wars, *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2000) p. 179.

According to Duffield the end of the Cold War brought significant changes for conflicts. Not only has there been a shift from inter-state to civil wars, but also an international denial of legitimacy to warring parties within 'ineffective' states has emerged as result of the end of the Cold War.¹²¹ The "new wars" label of cruelty and barbarity and their threat to global security was used as a moral justification for the increased interventionism of the 1990s. Duffield argues that the concept of human security should not be understood by its common definition as 'prioritising people rather than states' but as a form of long-distance bio-politics, that is, 'effective states prioritising the well-being of populations living within ineffective ones'.¹²² A rather cynical, however novel way of looking at the wave of western humanitarian and peace interventionism in the post-Cold War period is presented which interprets 'human security' and 'state fragility' as a form of bio-politics or technologies of power aimed at controlling people living on the margins of global society. Whilst those who live in the West are 'insured' and therefore self-reliant through welfare systems, development policy is aimed at encouraging the Third World to be self-reliant and remain 'uninsured'.

Since the end of the Cold War there has been a conceptual debate about the nature of security. Governments, NGOs and the UN have insisted that development requires security as globalisation, with all its benefits, has also brought into existence a radically interconnected world that presents a more dangerous situation of a multitude of threats and uncertainties. The underdevelopment of the Third World and the non-insured life is presented as a dangerous threat to international security, which foments armed conflicts, criminal activities, massive displacements and terrorism. According to Duffield, the permanent emergency posed by these threats demands that states play a central role in the protection and security of the non-insured or self-reliant life and has defined the moral grounds for Western interventions through the responsibility of the West to 'protect'. The struggle to achieve global human security has therefore been prioritised by the West as a

¹²¹ Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War*, 111.

¹²² *ibid.*, p. 122.

'governmentalising technology'.¹²³ Although the concept of human security within policy and the merging of development and security is often portrayed as positive and progressive, Duffield argues that these shifts are highly problematic and un-progressive as globalisation has led to an international environment in which Western NGOs and powerful states have a major role in the governance of Third World states drawing on the example of Mozambique and Afghanistan.

For Duffield, the contemporary security-development nexus is novel. New security concerns focus on 'underdevelopment as a source of conflict, criminalised activity and international instability' rather than 'the threat of traditional interstate wars'.¹²⁴ However, one might legitimately question how novel this development is. For example, the Marshall Plan also recognised the links between underdevelopment, political instability and violence. Furthermore, 'security' in political terms has always placed importance upon economic concerns. According to Duffield, development discourse is shaped by the remaking of fragile states. Technologies of security – humanitarian intervention, sustainable development and human security – are used to examine the fragile states as a relation of international governance.¹²⁵ Duffield takes this argument further by assessing the implications of 9/11 on the human security agenda. Throughout the 1990s failed states, especially those of limited strategic importance to the West, ranked low on the security agenda. However, 9/11 and the perceived advent on an unending war against terror has made the need to rebuild 'ineffective' states a priority in extending the West's external sovereign frontier.¹²⁶ State failure in this context has gained a new significance as an enduring technology of governance associated with occupation. Wars are therefore seen as a consequence of human insecurity and underdevelopment; hence development is increasingly seen as a form of conflict prevention.

¹²³ *ibid.*, pp. 113-114.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 7.

¹²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 159.

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 160.

Duffield describes “new wars” in terms of trans-border networks of state and non-state actors. Both are inextricably tied to the global shadow economy. As Kaldor also advocates, in these networks the distinctions between people, armies and generals are blurred. However, Duffield adds to this argument in *Global Governance and New Wars* by asserting that the governance of fragile states is achieved through the reintegration of the global South into the economies of the North – based on illegal or extra-legal forms of exchange. The concept of the global shadow economy is a part of globalisation and the new formal system of interconnections of trade and money. These networks involve violence; however the difference between war and violent peace is one of amplification or increased intensity of these relationships.¹²⁷

Duffield presents a pessimistic analysis of the relationship between global governance and contemporary forms of warfare. Although both Duffield and Kaldor agree that post Cold War conflicts are characterised to some degree by state failure, intensification of globalisation, liberal economic forces, ‘irregular’ armies; a rise in civilian as compared to military casualties; a dependence on internal sources of finance, and massive international involvement; the focus on human security has created divergences in the “new wars” debate. Kaldor advocates that the solution to global insecurity is human security. The alternative to military force is therefore the containment of global instability within fragile states, which would require global engagement from international community around human security and development – cosmopolitan law enforcement. Duffield effectively critiques Kaldor’s idealised view of the progressive nature of new forms of global governance and human development. In his view, the human security approach is problematic as it globalises the problems of instability by making the West responsible for world security. This creates a racist bio-political division between the ‘insured’ and the ‘uninsured’, which threatens Western security. According to Duffield, interventionist development techniques are continually reinvented through the process of human securitisation. The focus of the west to make the Third World self-reliant and remain uninsured fails to

¹²⁷ Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars* (London: Zed Books, 2001) p. 191.

bridge the development gap; it divides regions, favours policies of containment and encourages militarisation and thus allows the west to engage in an unending war.¹²⁸

Paul Rogers: Global Security

Paul Rogers furthers this argument in *Losing Control: Global Security in the Twenty-First Century*. His study demonstrates how current attempts by the US to tackle global insecurity through a reliance on military power projection are not only likely to fail but will lead to an increasingly militarised and insecure global environment. Rogers argues that the post-Cold War security paradigm is fundamentally misguided. Countering contemporary security threats, such as crime, disease, poverty, violence, and terrorism through military force is fundamentally unsustainable.¹²⁹ The security paradigm of the twenty-first century is described with the US as the world's pre-eminent military power, which is faced with threats to its own security and wider economic and political interests, despite no other states being able to match its military power. According to Rogers, this security paradigm is a result of the Cold War legacy, which saw the development of a remarkable range of military technologies and nuclear confrontation, which allowed for a process of maintaining large military forces. In this view, the Cold War gave way to the development of a range of military technologies that could ensure future conflicts. Military security therefore remains the ultimate guarantee of Western well-being.

Since the end of the Cold War military advances have been primarily geared towards counterinsurgency. There has been a greater emphasis on acquiring weapons for long-range strike and special operations forces, both of which as form crucial elements for military posture. In this context, special operations forces act principally in low intensity conflicts and engage diverse conflicts and security interests in the global South. The increase in training available to

¹²⁸ Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War*, p. 4.

¹²⁹ Paul Rogers, *Losing Control*, p. 8.

friendly regimes in Latin America provides an indication for these shifts. For example, during the Cold War US forces were involved in many internal conflicts, most commonly aiding conservative governments fighting left-wing insurgency. However, during the 1990s the training of foreign armies, especially those involving US Special Forces operations forces, had expanded considerably and involved counter-insurgency training in support of local elites. In 1998 alone, around 2,700 special operations troops were involved with training the armed forces of every one of the 19 Latin American states and nine Caribbean states, including armies in Guatemala, Colombia and Suriname – all of which have been widely condemned for human rights abuses.¹³⁰

The underdevelopment of the South is increasingly portrayed as a threat to global insecurity. Although the liberal market system has delivered significant economic growth, it has persistently failed at delivering social justice, therefore widening the rich-poor gap and breeding insecurity. The main driving force in this inequality, according to Rogers, has been the post-colonial trading system and its endemic imbalances, which have been further exacerbated by globalisation and the exploitation of labour markets. Rogers argues that the impact of globalisation and its socioeconomic elements is particularly marked in the field of education and literacy where there are an increasing number of marginalised people in the global South that are aware of their marginalisation and of the rich-poor gap. This leads to an increasingly knowledgeable poor and a 'revolution of unfulfilled expectations' that forms a prominent feature of many of the insurgencies and instability in Latin America, North Africa and the Middle East.¹³¹

Furthermore, the industrialised North has become progressively more dependent on physical resources from the South fuelling global insecurity. The costs to extract deposits of key minerals, such as ores, coal, oil and gas in many industrialised states have increased significantly in recent years, marking a resource shift that has resulted in many physical resources

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

¹³¹ *ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

acquiring strategic significance. This has increasingly resulted in conflicts in the global South and presents the potential for many more. For example, the civil conflict in Zaire and much of its politics in the past 40 years since independence has been dominated by the competition for the control of Shaba province – a rich mining region for radium, uranium as well as diamonds.¹³² For Rogers, the current economic system fails to deliver economic justice and there are now firm indicators that it is not environmentally sustainable. The combination of the rich-poor divide and limits to current forms of economic growth is likely to lead to a crisis of unsatisfied expectations within an increasingly informed global majority of the disempowered.

Rogers forecasts the future of global security. This is explored through a contemporary assessment of the impact of growing military technologies, the global wealth disparity and environmental constraints. The conclusion reached presents a disturbing picture of global security where these issues will influence the spread and development of conflict in the coming decades. In this context, the increasingly informed global majority of the disempowered is likely to involve itself in conflicts, such as anti-elite action; migrants will become more radicalised; conflicts over physical resources will intensify leading to globalised insurgency.¹³³ The common response to the range of contemporary conflicts will be one of regaining and maintaining control, rather than addressing root causes – the impact of the liberal market system, which will be achieved through Western states, especially the US, depending upon security and intelligence capabilities as well as development aid for local and regional elites. For Rogers, September 11 is interpreted as reinforcing all the core elements of the security paradigm and is demonstrative how the major effort is concentrated on maintaining control of an unstable and evidently violent world.¹³⁴ In this context, defence budgets will continue to increase, counter-insurgency and anti-terrorism will form the primary focus of warfare, bases will be maintained in 'regions of potential threat' and long-range force

¹³² *ibid.*, p. 93.

¹³³ *ibid.*, p. 91.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 149.

projection will be enhanced - the efforts to maintain control therefore lead to a war with no decisive end.

Rogers' holds a radical view of militarism led by the US. He asserts that that the rich global core of capitalism cannot remain secure if the majority of the world remains impoverished and excluded. His alternative approach to global insecurity encompasses arms control and disarmament, fair trade, massive debt cancellation, quadrupling of development aid, implementation of a green economy and the creation of an international standing force of 20,000 observers for conflict preventing interventions. As these threats cannot be overcome by traditional military control, he argues that an approach based upon sustainable security is required which attempts to address the roots causes of global instability. For example, socio-economic divisions would require changes to international trade. Threats from climate change would require rapid transition away from carbon emissions to energy conservation and renewable sources of energy provision.

The "new wars" debate is now more than a decade old. This discussion of the leading commentators in this area of research has demonstrated the convergences and divergences in the literature. For Kaldor, the perils of globalisation have led to internationalising threats and calls for international solutions to the problem of human insecurity. Duffield and Rogers take a much more critical view of global governance and international solutions. For Duffield, internationalised solutions deepen the reliance of the global South on the West and have effectively created neo-colonial division of the world between the rich and the poor. Rogers add to the debate with his argues that the impact of globalisation and its socioeconomic elements is particularly marked in the field of education and literacy where there are an increasing number of marginalised people in the global South that are aware of their marginalisation and of the rich-poor gap.

"New wars" scholars share a consensus on the negative impact of globalisation for the security of the global South. Whilst detractors have focussed their concerns on whether "new wars" are distinct from earlier forms

of conflicts, particularly in the post-Cold War era, the debate within the “new wars” literature is firmly grounded on a critical view of globalisation.¹³⁵ Indeed, global processes such as free or increased levels of trade, movement of capital, expansion of extractive industries have impacted local dynamics. The success of the international drugs trade has been undoubtedly facilitated by these global trends, and the money extracted from this industry has been one of key ways in which paramilitaries, armed criminal groups and insurgents have waged war.¹³⁶ This thesis uses interdisciplinary insights from violence in Colombia on a historical basis that broadens the current characterisation of violent conflict through the deployment of regional and local perspectives to complement the global ones.

The Relationship between the Global, Regional and Local

One of the main challenges that this thesis presents to the “new wars” school is that it is largely representative of broader scholarly shifts. Arguably, the discovery of “new wars”, rather like the discovery of “new terrorism”, tells us more about the sociology of knowledge within academia in developed states than it does about conflict in the global South.¹³⁷ In their rush to claim new paradigms that critique the impact of globalisation, academics have arguably been drawn into a process that parallels globalisation itself. General assertions about “new wars” have reduced a range of diverse conflicts across the global South to a series of stereotypes that arguably neglect crucial regional and local factors that have driven violence in Colombia long before the contemporary wave of globalisation.

¹³⁵ Edward Newman, ‘The ‘New Wars’ Debate: A Historical Perspective is Needed,’ *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (2004) pp. 173-189; Jacob Mundy, ‘Deconstructing Civil Wars: Beyond the New Wars Debate,’ *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (2011) pp. 279-295; Erik Melander, Magnus Öberg and Jonathan Hall, ‘Are ‘New Wars’ More Atrocious? Battle Severity, Civilians Killed and Forced Migration Before and After the End of the Cold War,’ *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 15, no. 3 (2009) pp. 505-536.

¹³⁶ Toby Seddon, ‘Drugs, the Informal Economy and Globalization,’ *International Journal of Social Economics*, Vol. 35, No. 10 (2008) pp. 717-728.

¹³⁷ Kanishka Chowdhury, ‘Interrogating “Newness”: Globalization and Postcolonial Theory in the Age of Endless War,’ *Cultural Critique*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (2006) pp. 126-161.

The relationship between the global, regional and local currently constitutes as the missing dimension in the “new wars” literature. External grand narratives and broader international dynamics such as the Cold War, War on Drugs and most recently, the Global War on Terror have formed the basis of understanding violence in the global South and, in particular Colombia. For Kaldor, superpower rivalry and Cold War politics resulted in economic and diplomatic assistance to states in the global South, including Colombia. This resulted in the phenomena of proxy-Cold Wars. Duffield explores the state of emergency posed by external threats demands that Western states play a central role in the protection and security of the ‘non-insured’ of the global South and has defined the moral grounds for Western interventions through the responsibility of the West to ‘protect’. Rogers adds that countering threats with military force is fundamentally unsustainable and deeply problematic.

The United States sees itself as the primary economic, cultural and political power in the Americas. Bilateral relations between the US and Colombia are the strongest in the hemisphere. Military cooperation between the two states dates back to the Korean War and Colombia has frequently relied on its northern ally for political support as well as military aid to counter its internal security threats. During the Cold War, US and USSR rivalry led to the two states to consider Colombia as one of the key stages of the numerous proxy Cold Wars. However, in this regard it is also important to consider the Cold War dynamics within Latin America to provide a regional perspective to broader international dynamics. Latin America was home to a number of ideological brands of Communism and Marxism that encompassed a wide range of civil society. Rural *campesinos*, students, revolutionary Roman Catholic clergymen, and trade unionists, together with members of the middle class joined various social movements including insurgent groups during the 1960s and 1970s.

Cold War politics were intertwined with regional and local dilemmas. The power of the Catholic Church, deep levels of inequality, elitist and often brutal political systems and Falangist political exports from Spain created social unrest across Latin America. The success of the Cuban Revolution signified

an important turning point. Arguably, the Cuban Revolution was not just Cuban, it was a Latin American revolution that involved people from the far flung corners of the region. In Colombia, these factors thrown in with a catastrophic humanitarian crisis following *La Violencia* in which 200,000 civilians were killed and millions displaced as well as the establishment of a power sharing pact between the two political parties provided the ripe conditions for insecurity and the emergence of insurgent groups.

The roles of actors and conflict dynamics must be evaluated at the global, regional and local level. At the global level, the world's most powerful states compete for military, diplomatic, economic and cultural superiority. Latin America was at the forefront of superpower rivalry for both the United States and USSR. However, on a regional level these wider international dynamics have interacted with the region's political systems. Whilst these factors are certainly important, this thesis places the state at the centre of the analysis with an emphasis on the role of the national government in meeting local demands in the context of social unrest and insurgency.

The critical view of globalisation presented by "new wars" scholars provides an insight into the negative aspects of globalisation. This thesis presents local perspectives that lend credence to a number of these analyses. Rogers' claims of the socioeconomic impact of globalisation are particularly important in this regard. The marginalisation of rural poor in Colombia and increasing economic divide between the rich and poor have been a central element of the narrative of various insurgent groups. In 2013, the country's largest insurgent group called for free and universal education to be included in the current peace talks as a meaning of tackling the development deficit between the rural and urban communities of Colombia.¹³⁸ Rogers' conceptualisation of insurgencies in the global South includes characteristics such as anti-elite action, radicalisation and physical resource conflicts. In Colombia, the mining of gold, emeralds and oil in rural areas have featured as the central point of contention, not only between insurgents, paramilitaries and the state but also

¹³⁸ 'Colombia's Peace Deals in Depth: Rural Reform,' *Colombia Reports*, September 25, 2014.

involving local communities who see environmental degradation and little difference in their menial incomes.

The global demand and rising price of gold and emeralds and mining of coal are particularly salient. According to the *Oficina Internacional de Derechos Humanos – Acción Colombia*, the Colombian mining boom has led to the emergence and increase of social conflicts with hundreds of struggles taking place in rural areas between civilians, armed groups, state security forces and international corporations.¹³⁹ Social indicators show that large-scale mining activity in the four principle departments for these industries – Antioquia, Bolívar, Quindío and Tolima – have seen no substantial improvement in levels of poverty and extreme poverty. Moreover, open cast mining has led to the loss of agricultural lands, access to water and the quality of water has deteriorated and rural populations have experienced a loss of work.¹⁴⁰ According to the *Contraloría General de la República* (Colombian Comptroller General), an independent authority within the Colombian government for fiscal control, the economic benefit of the global demand for Colombia's raw products is also questionable with problematic local effects.¹⁴¹

The extractive sector does not necessary equal economic development for Colombia. A report from the Colombian Comptroller shows that there are significant tax losses to the state. A lack of transparency, a wide range of deductions, rebates and exemptions to income tax resulted in the Colombian state until a 'mini-tax reform' in 2011. Also tax losses have decreased to around 57 per cent, the Colombian government today still fails to generate income through taxation of extractive industries.¹⁴² Mining and oil extraction areas also overlap with human rights abuses. An estimated 80 per cent of human rights violations, 87 per cent of forced displacement, 78 per cent of crimes against trade unionists, 89 per cent of crimes against indigenous

¹³⁹ 'Extractive Industries, Natural Resources and Human Rights in Colombia,' *Oficina Internacional de Derechos Humanos – Acción Colombia*, October 2013.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Minería en Colombia: Fundamentos para Superar el Modelo Extractivista*, *Contraloría General de la República*, May 2013.

¹⁴² *ibid.*

communities and 90 per cent of crimes against Afro-Colombian communities in the country occur in mining and oil municipalities.¹⁴³ This not only highlights the relationship between globalisation and local dynamics, but also illustrates that the drugs trade is far from the only industry that is contributing to the complexities of the Colombian conflict.

In order to combat the problems presented by globalisation, a global response is certainly needed. This is a solution advocated by Kaldor who sees cosmopolitan law enforcement as an alternative to military force. This would involve global engagement from international community around human security and development. However, global governance structures are also problematic. Economic development as a means to achieving security, as shown by the case of extractive industries in Colombia, illustrates the negative impact of this. Duffield effectively critiques Kaldor's idealised view of the progressive nature of new forms of global governance and human development. In his view, the human security approach is problematic as it globalises the problems of instability by making the West responsible for world security and economic development. By placing the state at the centre of the analysis of the Colombian conflict, this thesis argues for the structural changes within the country as a starting point for implementing strategies for peace.

Conclusion

Kaldor, Duffield and Rogers are bound together by a common understanding of globalisation as a key causal mechanism of "new wars". Globalisation has not only transformed the cultural, economic and political matrix of global society, it is remaking 'relations of violence'. Scholars writing in this vein present accounts that attempt to explain changing forms of organised violence in relationship to broader and deeper changes at the level of the world order. Whereas Kaldor asserts that globalisation has played a key role in the

¹⁴³ *ibid.*

merging of war, organised crime and the widespread violations of human rights and that a cosmopolitan approach is required as a response to these wars, Duffield argues that the merging of development and security leads to the governance of Third World states that pose a threat to global security. Rogers' study adds to this conceptual debate by analysing global security through the legacy of the Cold War - proliferation of weapons, global ecosystem and liberal market. Within this literature a general consensus has emerged which argues that the current methods for dealing with global insecurity have created an environment of unending war, whereby current conflicts have no decisive end. However, the ways in which to approach global security remains contested; whilst Kaldor and Rogers call for the implementation of a global over-watch, Duffield argues that such measures have already led to so-called 'governance states' in the Third World.

The "new wars" literature has broadened the definition of 'security'. It offers a comprehensive critique of the impact of globalisation. However, rather than explaining the dynamics of conflict, this literature raises serious questions for scholars of violent conflict. The questions here are – has the objective nature of warfare changed? What are the links between global, regional and local dynamics? My research will further this argument through an analysis of the Colombian conflict from 1946 to present day. It combines the global approaches highlighted here with a localised, national-level perspective of the development of violent conflict through a comprehensive assessment of the relationship between the Colombian state and its people.

Chapter Three

The Civil War Debate and the Colombian Conflict

The Colombian conflict has lasted for almost seven decades and has attracted diverse explanations. These can be broadly divided into two categories. One category sees perpetrators as acting rationally for gain within their own preference system in ways that can be measured numerically. The other category sees perpetrators as being motivated by a range of more elusive drivers embedded within religion, culture or collective memory that are broadly less amenable to statistical analysis or comparison. Numbers and rational choice – what we might call the political economy of violence – is a growing trend in international security. Moreover, the increasing use of formal models has made the field of conflict analysis highly respected. Yet Area Specialists, and in this case “Colombianists”, often feel that the increasing emphasis on numbers and rational choice has obscured the need to utilize a variety of other important modes of analysis.¹⁴⁴ This chapter explores Collier’s numerically driven “greed” thesis in greater depth and in particular the riposte offered by area studies scholars working on Colombia. It illustrates the shortcomings of the “greed” thesis by exploring the different facets of violence in Colombia and taking into account a local perspective. Particular considerations are given to historical factors, illuminating continuities, permutations and synergies of violence over space and time and the inner workings of Colombia’s political, economic and social problems, which form the main thrust of this thesis.

Recent research on civil conflicts on a global level places a strong emphasis on the material motives of combatants. As we have already seen in chapter one, this spate of research led by economist Paul Collier argues that the

¹⁴⁴ Robert H. Bates, 'Area Studies and Political Science: Rupture and Possible Synthesis,' *Africa Today*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (1997) pp. 123-132.

distinction between “greed” and “grievance” is important in understanding the motivation for civil war.¹⁴⁵ Drawing on an impressive range of statistical data on civil wars since 1945, the stark and unequivocal conclusion of Collier’s work suggested that ‘grievance-based explanations of civil war’ were ‘seriously wrong’.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, the conclusions of his study had a major impact upon policy prescriptions to deal with civil wars as well as academic debates. The long-standing view that civil strife related to rising expectations and relative deprivation,¹⁴⁷ the disruption of traditional social structures through modernisation,¹⁴⁸ ethnic cleavages and nationalism,¹⁴⁹ and inequality,¹⁵⁰ which are perceived as grievances, cause civil conflict was fundamentally called into question.

The debate over the motivation for civil war dates back to the 1960s. The Correlates of War Project (COW), led by political scientists at the University of Michigan, laid the foundation for the quantitative analysis of civil war. In recent times, economists, namely Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, have used data from the COW project to apply rational choice theory and econometric analyses to macro-statistics on 140 civil conflicts that have occurred

¹⁴⁵ For literature on the greed school of thought see: Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, ‘Greed and Grievance in Civil War,’ *Policy Research Working Paper*, Paper No. 2355 (Washington D.C: World Bank, 2001); Paul Collier, ‘Rebellion as Quasi-Criminal Activity,’ *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 44, No. 6 (2002) pp. 838-852; James Fearon and David Laitin, ‘Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,’ *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1 (2003) pp. 91-106; Mats Berdal and David Malone, (eds.) *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000).

¹⁴⁶ Paul Collier, ‘Doing Well Out of War: An Economic Perspective’ in Mats Berdal and David M. Malone, (eds.) *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000) p. 91.

¹⁴⁷ Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, University of Princeton Press: 1970).

¹⁴⁸ Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (London: Yale University Press, 1968).

¹⁴⁹ Walker Connor, *Ethno-Nationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

¹⁵⁰ Barrington Moore Jr., *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (White Plains, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1978); Edward N. Muller, ‘Income Inequality, Regime Repressiveness, and Political Violence,’ *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (1985) pp. 47-61.

worldwide since 1945.¹⁵¹ Similar studies, led by James Fearon and David Laitin, also interpret large data sets and conclude that economic inequality and identity cleavages are ubiquitous and therefore not reliable predictors of civil war.¹⁵² Importantly, the findings of the “greed” school are valid for many conflict-ridden countries, including Colombia. Firstly, civil conflicts are more likely to occur in countries with low national income. A dependence on primary export goods and abundant natural resources are associated with a higher risk for civil war. Secondly, non-or partial democracies are more prone to civil war than those ruled by authoritarian dictatorships. Thirdly, countries with fewer resources are less able to effectively deal with rebellions. Finally, access to lootable resources prolongs the longevity of a rebellion.

Broadly speaking, the greed school is correct in these assertions. However, as an explanatory framework for the motivations of violence, the “greed” school does not illuminate the complexity of the internal dynamics of protracted civil conflicts. Specifically, in the case of the Colombian conflict, Collier’s theory depoliticises the conflict and delegitimises rebellion, therefore disregarding internal drivers of violence – political, economic and security grievances in the form of poverty, political exclusion and human rights abuses in a cycle of violence and insecurity that has persisted for almost seven decades. It is not only important to take into the political, economic and social conditions in which violence develops but also the relationship between armed conflict and multiple forms of violence and criminality.

This chapter highlights the various dimensions of the violence in Colombia. These consist of three main features: political violence, insurgent activity and the criminal activity. The intractability of this conflict is largely a result of the complex linkages between these different types of violence and the failure of the Colombian state to arbitrate these conflicts over decades. Lamentably, the range and intertwining of these factors is often misconstrued through cross-national analyses and simplified creating a tendency to support policies that

¹⁵¹ Collier and Hoeffler, ‘Greed and Grievance in Civil War;’ Collier, ‘Rebellion as Quasi-Criminal Activity.’

¹⁵² Fearon and Laitin, ‘Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War.’

do not enhance the prospects for peace. Despite recent successes against the FARC and the highly militarised policies of Uribe's administration, which continue under the current presidency of Juan Manuel Santos, peace still eludes Colombia. The predatory activities of armed groups are an established reality. However, the excessive focus on the criminal nature of insurgencies has driven a reductionist approach that impairs the identification of a robust and sustainable peace strategy. The use of macro-level data sets to test hypotheses about civil war do not take into consideration micro-level behaviour of irregular combatants, civilians and state actors is problematic. In this regard, the arguments presented by Collier with relation to state weakness and the political economy of war are subjected to critique and are more nuanced manner of understanding the complexities of the Colombian conflict are presented.

The Debate over 'Greed' and 'Grievance'

The greed school has been the subject of a robust critique by a number of civil conflict experts. Much of this criticism has focussed upon the methods used by Collier. Leading scholar of violent civil conflict, Nicolas Sambanis, argues that Collier's model is flawed by its failure to incorporate different types of political violence, external influences and the role of state capacity.¹⁵³ Sambanis' research model draws on twenty-one case studies and combines case study work with the a formal quantitative approach of analysing civil war onset and war avoidance. By combining statistical and case study work, he argues that we can be in a better position to understand the political processes that lead societies into civil war. In particular, this method enables the exploration of the causal mechanisms through which independent variables in the Collier-Hoeffler and Fearon-Laitan models influence the dependent variable, which indicates the distinction between 'greed' and 'grievance' illusory.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Nicholas Sambanis, 'Using Case Studies to Expand Economic Models of Civil War,' *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 2, Issue. 2 (2004) pp. 259-279.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 261.

The central question of what constitutes as 'greed' and 'grievance' looms large. In the case of Colombia, Collier's model assumes that young men with low levels of education with lack of opportunities will engage in rebellion. This is problematic in two regards. Firstly, it ignores the fact that current female membership of the FARC is estimated between 30 to 40 per cent.¹⁵⁵ Secondly, it is unclear why economic grievances in areas of low education and opportunities should be considered as 'greed' and not a grievance. In short, if economic opportunities are scarce and can drive rebellion, as it has done in Colombia, low income should not be considered to be 'greed'. The argument for economic opportunity presented by Collier provides an indication to what influential factors in determining the duration of violent conflict, however it is not a useful indicator when determining the causality of violence in Colombia. Micro-level and macro-level determinants of civil war do not always directly correspond to local conditions. In Colombia, the political system has bred elitism, inequality and political exclusion for decades. The geography of the country effectively splits the country into three racially, culturally and economically distinct regions. The wide array of violence in the country is associated with riots – *la Violencia*; crime – banditry during and following *la Violencia*, drugs trade, illegal mining trade; genocide of the political left; insurgency, paramilitarism as well as state-sponsored forms of violence.

State Weakness

For Collier, war occurs because of three interacting determinants – preferences, opportunities and perceptions. Preferences for private gain, or 'greed' lead to political violence if there are opportunities to rebel. Whereas, grievance is simply rhetoric used to legitimise a person's decision to engage in appropriation. In short, the primary cause of civil war is the opportunity to loot combined with the opportunity to organise to organise an insurgency or

¹⁵⁵ Anne Phillips, 'Fighting Mad: Why Women Turn to the FARC – and How the FARC Turns on Them, *Foreign Affairs*, June 1, 2012.

rebellion. Rebellion is therefore sustained through the looting of natural resources, extortion of local populations and local support, and is less likely to occur in the case of a strong state. State strength in Collier's model is not well theorised and is particularly problematic as it is measured by the country's economic strength in terms of the gross domestic product on a per capita basis (GDP).¹⁵⁶

The question of state strength or weakness is a central part of the theorisation of violent conflict and country analyses of the Colombian conflict. The reason for this is twofold: for country-level analysts or Colombianists the country is characterised by the paradox of democratic governance and stable economic development. However for rational choice theorists, who examine conflict on a macro-scale, state strength or weakness is a useful indicator for transnational analyses. Civil war is most certainly a problem for the poor in the world. It is a phenomenon that is present in less economically developed countries, however GDP per capita in itself do not a useful indicator of state strength or weakness. Bruce Bagley, a Latin American security expert, theorises the role of the state and explores it in its ability to 'penetrate society, extract resources from it and regulate conflicts within it'. This includes the 'ability of state authorities to govern legitimately, to enforce the law systematically, and to administer justice effectively throughout the national territory'.¹⁵⁷

State weakness in this regard plays a significant role in the development of violence in Colombia. However, the country is not a failed nation state. Colombia boasts the position as Latin America's oldest and most stable functioning democracy. Throughout the country's history as a republic a civilian president has governed Colombia with regular elections taking place every four years.¹⁵⁸ Both presidential and congressional elections are held on

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ Bruce M. Bagley, 'Globalization and Transnational Organized Crime: The Russian Mafia in Latin America and the Caribbean,' paper presented at the 23rd Conference of the Latin American Studies Association, Washington DC, quoted in Vanessa Joan Grey, 'The New Research on Civil Wars: Does it Help us Understand the Colombian Conflict?,' *Latin American Politics and Society*, Vol 53, No. 3 (2008) p. 71.

¹⁵⁸ Since the creation of the republic and the constitution in 1886, the military has only seized power on one occasion in 1953. Led by General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla,

schedule and political power has periodically transferred between the country's two main political parties, the Liberals and Conservatives. Economically, Colombia is Latin America's fourth-largest economy and is characterised by slow but steady economic progress. Since the mid-1940s the economy has seen almost uninterrupted positive growth. The country is well endowed with rich soils and favourable climates, making Colombia self-sufficient in the production of food, coal and oil. Colombia has successfully diversified its exports, which today include coffee, oil, coal, emeralds, bananas, textiles, cut flowers as well a range of agricultural and industrial products. The country escaped the well-documented debt crisis of the 1980s that consumed the economies of other Latin American states. Colombia's history of democratic governance and stable economic growth in a region with a history characterised by military dictatorships and boom and bust economies'.¹⁵⁹ The country's policymakers have managed national accounts far better than their Latin American counterparts.

However, despite positive political and economic indicators, Colombia's history is littered with violence. Since the creation of the republic, the country has almost always battled with this phenomenon. Persistent bloodshed throughout the country's history is the most obvious failure of the political system. Since the onset of the civil war *La Violencia* (1946-1958), Colombia has consolidated its position as one of the most violent nations in the world and spent the majority of the last 68 years under a state of siege. Since 2002, the country has seen a reduction in levels of violence, however the human cost in Colombia remains intolerably high. A report by the Geneva Declaration of Armed Violence shows that between 2004 and 2009, Colombia was one of only five countries in the world that saw more than 1000 violent deaths per year, along with the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Sri Lanka and

this military coup had the support of the two political parties and lasted until 1958. See chapter five for this period of Colombian history.

¹⁵⁹ Robert H. Dix, *The Politics of Colombia* (New York: Praeger, 1987) p. 11; David Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself* (London: University of California Press, 1993) p. vii; Jorge P. Osterling, *Democracy in Colombia: Clientelist Politics and Guerrilla Warfare* (Oxford: Transaction Publishers, 1989) p. ix.

Sudan.¹⁶⁰ Colombia has been historically characterised by a peculiar mix of democracy, steady economic growth and chronic levels of violence. Democratic governance has existed alongside an undeclared civil war for almost seven decades, a claim very few, if any, countries in the world could attest to. Indeed, Colombia's democracy could be described as almost mythical during some periods of its history – a range of irregular armed actors from insurgents, paramilitaries, criminal bands have emerged to challenge the state as well as competing groups vying for control of territory and resources.

Colombian state weakness must be examined in terms of the poor choices of the political elite and intra-elite divisions. The government in the nation's capital, Bogotá, has never successfully established itself throughout the country's territory. Indeed, the state has also never held a monopoly on the use of force, basic infrastructure is lacking outside the country's three main cities and it has failed to protect property and the habitants of these regions.¹⁶¹ The failure of the Colombian state to fulfil its role has resulted in the emergence of various armed groups that have adopted state-like functions in areas of control. The tradition of self-defence as a means of resolving rural disputes has existed throughout the republic's history. Rural communities have organised and themselves in response to threats and the landowning elite have built private forces to protect their properties. The failure of the state to arbitrate conflict is part of one of its greatest structural weaknesses.

Political Economy of Violence

The most important scholarly text to emerge in recent years on the political economy of Colombian violence is *Systems of Violence: The Political Economy of War and Peace in Colombia*. Nizah Richani's book, as the title suggests, argues that the systemic interlacing relationship among actors in the Colombian conflict, their respective political economy and the overall

¹⁶⁰ Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, 'Global Burden of Armed Violence,' 2011.

¹⁶¹ Grey, 'New Research on Civil Wars,' p. 71.

political economy of the system has led to a 'war system' in the country. In this context the following conditions, which are all present in Colombia, have led to the creation of a 'war system': firstly 'failure of the institutions, the channels, and the prevailing political mechanisms to mediate, adjudicate, or arbitrate conflicts among antagonistic social and political groups'. Secondly, 'the antagonists' success in adapting themselves to conflict by establishing a "positive political economy" through accumulating political and economic assets that make the condition of war the best available option given the balance of power and the higher costs of peace'. Finally, 'a balance of forces among the conflicting groups or actors that results in a comfortable impasse'.¹⁶² In this context, the interdependence between organised crime, the state and opposition is particularly important in highlighting the complexities of violence.

The problems associated with application of the "greed" thesis to Colombia have been recognised by the country's leading experts on the conflict. Colombian political scientist, Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín, has offered the strongest challenge to the "greed" school from within in the country. For Gutiérrez Sanín, the 'Colombian war seems to offer very nearly the ideal conditions' for the Collier's evaluation of 'rebellion as a form of criminality'. However, empirically the 'criminal rebels thesis fails even in the Colombian case'. Economic incentives for FARC and ELN insurgents are practically non-existent. Combatants are subjects to harsh living conditions and a lifetime service in which 'death looms large over warriors.'¹⁶³ Moreover, if economic motivations were to drive young men and women to join armed groups, then it would be expected that more join paramilitary groups, such as the AUC, who pay salaries. This is simply not the case in Colombia. The number of armed combatants associated with insurgent groups outnumbers those that have joined paramilitary organisations.

¹⁶² Nizah Richani, *Systems of Violence: The Political Economy of War and Peace in Colombia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002) pp. 3-4.

¹⁶³ Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín, 'Criminal Rebels? A Discussion of War and Criminality From the Colombian Experience,' *Crisis States Working Papers*, Paper No. 27 (April 2003) p. 1.

Colombian insurgent groups see their revenues from illegal trades as serving purposes that are clearly strategic and political. Strategic activities include maintaining armies capable of fighting paramilitaries, launching attacks on the armed forces, linking urban cells, buying sophisticated weaponry, producing munitions, and expanding territory.¹⁶⁴ Collier and like-minded scholars argue that the material motives of insurgent groups are illustrated by their predatory actions that maximise revenue. Engagement in the drug trade is cited as clear example of predatory behaviour. However, research led by analysts at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) counters this assertion. It is argued here that that activity, such as political kidnappings (not for ransom) and blowing up oil pipelines, depletes rather than augments the insurgents' material resources.¹⁶⁵ In areas under FARC control, the insurgent group assumes state-like functions. These range from adjudicating local and familial disputes, regulating economic transactions, enforcing 'laws', and organising public projects.¹⁶⁶ The creation of a broad-based political party further illustrates the efforts of the FARC to influence municipal decision-making. Furthermore, the consistent agenda of the FARC on agrarian and social issues, their relentless efforts to gain political power (through violence, votes, or a negotiated settlement) are evidence of that agenda cannot be reduced to "greed" alone.

"Greedy" wars are 'doomed to failure'.¹⁶⁷ Gutiérrez Sanín is not the first to argue this case. Military strategists from Napoleon to von Clausewitz have contended that armies require ideology, as those which run on the premise of

¹⁶⁴ Marc Chernick, 'Economic Resources and Internal Armed Conflicts: Lessons from the Colombian Case,' in Cynthia J. Arnson and I. William Zartman, (eds.) *Rethinking the Economics of War: The Intersection of Need, Creed and Greed* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 2005) pp. 178-205.

¹⁶⁵ United Nations Development Program (UNDP), *El Conflicto, Callejón con Salida: Informe Nacional de Desarrollo Humano para Colombia 2003* (Bogotá: PNUD, 2004).

¹⁶⁶ María Clemencia Ramírez, *Between the Guerrillas and the State: The Cocalero Movement, Citizenship and Identity in the Colombian Amazon* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011) pp. 167-182.

¹⁶⁷ Gutiérrez Sanín, 'Criminal Rebels?,' p. 2; Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín and Luisa Ramírez Rueda, 'The Tense Relationship Between Democracy and Violence in Colombia, 1974-2001,' in Jo-Marie and Philip Mauceri, (eds.) *Politics in the Andes: Identity, Conflict, Reform* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004) pp. 228-246.

looting are more easily defeated in combat. Combatants that are primarily motivated by self-interest are more likely to desert under threat.¹⁶⁸ Gutiérrez Sanín's assessment of the FARC's almost five decade long war against the Colombian state illustrates the clear distinction between rebel movements and criminal syndicates. In criminal groups, successions are often decided by violent means and death. They are rife with mistrust and internal feuds that lead to fragmentation.¹⁶⁹ The FARC is the world's most successful rebel movement. It is a cohesive organisation that demands collective action and the sacrifice of life from its members. Material gain is not a rational choice for an insurgent group if material incentives are the ultimate goal, as waging war is costly. Combatants require a range of goods in a state of war, including arms, ammunition, food, medical equipment and medicines. Colombian insurgent groups have found themselves on the negotiating tables with the government on numerous occasions since the 1980s. This is indicative of a desire for peace. Although the success of these negotiations is questionable, if insurgents were solely motivated by material incentives it would be highly unlikely that negotiations would have ever taken place.

Conflict conditions may also accelerate resource development in Colombia. Kalyvas's model of civil war violence highlights the absence of 'a clear, unequivocal, and fixing dividing line between combatants and non-combatants', which is of particular importance for exploring the link between conflict conditions and resource development.¹⁷⁰ Kalyvas critiques the scholarly tendency to focus only on perpetrators of violence and their motivations, and demonstrates that when non-combatants are excluded from analysis, it is quite possible to 'completely miss the fact that the information used to make violence happen may come from civilians, usually closely linked to the victims.'¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Grey, 'The New Research on Civil Wars,' p. 66.

¹⁶⁹ Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín, 'Telling the Difference: Guerrillas and Paramilitaries in the Colombian War,' *Politics and Society*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (2008) p. 7.

¹⁷⁰ Stathis Kalyvas, 'The Urban Bias in Research on Civil Wars,' *Security Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (2004) p. 24.

¹⁷¹ Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) p. 180.

By placing emphasis on “greed”, many of the contributing factors that lead to a situation of civil war are disregarded. For Nicholas Sambanis, previous episodes of collective violence significantly increase risk of the onset, protraction and reoccurrence of civil war. Civil war, according to his study is therefore best understood as a ‘phase in a cycle of violence’.¹⁷² This enables a broader understanding of civil conflict that takes into consideration a wide range of organised violence from foreign occupations, politicides, mass riots, gang violence, organised crime, to wars of self-determination as well as state sponsored violence. It enables an analysis that looks beyond events to mark the onset of civil war and examine processes of violence. This argument holds tremendous value for the study of the Colombian conflict.

Colombia’s Cycle of Violence: 1946 to Present Day

Today, violence in Colombia is largely interpreted as associated with the drugs trade. However, area studies scholars, and particularly Colombianists, have long drawn attention to the violent state-making process in the country.¹⁷³ Colombia has been characterised by high levels since colonial times and has lamentably staggered from one type of collective violence to another ever since. The focus of this thesis is the most recent phase of chronic violence from 1946 to present day – the ‘longest spell of internal political violence anywhere in the modern world’.¹⁷⁴ It seeks to examine the conflict as a process of increasing radicalisation of the Colombian political system and society. The question of what constitutes the onset of a civil war is central to the ‘greed’ school of thought. This section presents the Colombian conflict as one continuous cycle of violence with a particular emphasis on the political system, economic and security grievances and the emergence of a

¹⁷² Sambanis, ‘Using Case Studies,’ pp. 268-269.

¹⁷³ Frank Stafford and Marco Palacios, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); David Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself* (Oxford: University of California Press, 1993).

¹⁷⁴ Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín, Tatiana Acevedo and Juan Manuel Viatela, ‘Violent Liberalism? State, Conflict and Political Regime in Colombia, 1930-2006,’ *Crisis States Working Papers*, Paper No. 19 (November 2007) p. 3.

myriad of armed actors. It aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the 'greed' school through the incorporation of country-level analysis.

For much of the beginning of the twentieth century, Colombia was at peace. The War of Thousand Days, which saw an estimated 100,000 killed, ended in 1902 with the signing of peace treaties between the Liberal and Conservative political parties. Following 44 years of relative peace, violence erupted in 1946 and has never ended. Violence during the 1940s and 1950s is largely framed in terms of partisan loyalties.¹⁷⁵ Whilst Liberal and Conservative political parties existed elsewhere in Latin America, the depth of party affiliation is unique to Colombia. It is the only country in which the political parties that dominated politics in the nineteenth century continue to wield power today. Indeed, party affiliation was so strong in Colombia that loyalties were almost hereditary. In *La Mala Hora* (In Evil Hour) Colombia's most successful novelist, Gabriel García Márquez, vividly describes the generation of armed conflict due to entrenched partisan loyalties, which stretched across all sectors of Colombian society.¹⁷⁶ Partisan violence was a key element of violence in the mid-1940s. In the elections of 1946, power switched from the hands of the Liberals to the Conservatives sparking violence across the country. However, partisan affiliations do not wholly explain the pervasiveness of violence from 1946 to present day.

The question of agrarian reform has been at the core of Colombia's violence and political agenda for many decades. During the presidency of Alfonso López Pumarejo (1934-1938) a series of social reforms, known as *La Revolución en Marcha* (The Marching Revolution) were introduced.¹⁷⁷ These included agrarian reform, the implementation of public education, universal

¹⁷⁵ Daniel Pécaut, *Orden y Violencia: Evolución Socio-Política de Colombia entre 1930 y 1953* (Bogotá: Editorial Norma, 2001); Paul Oquist, *Violencia, Conflicto y Política en Colombia* (Bogotá: Instituto de Estudio Colombianos, 1978); John C. Pollock, 'Violence, Politics and Elite Performance: The Political Sociology of La Violencia in Colombia,' *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1975) pp. 22-50.

¹⁷⁶ Gabriel García Márquez, *La Mala Hora* (Barcelona: Nuevas Ediciones de Bolsillo, 1999).

¹⁷⁷ Alvaro Tirado Mejía, *La Revolución en Marcha y la Reforma Constitucional de 1936* (Bogotá: Universidad Externado de Colombia, 1985).

male suffrage and trade union reform, which greatly alarmed the Colombian political parties. Not only did the reforms deepen the divides between the two leading parties, but they also sowed factionalism within the political system. In the election of 1942, the Conservatives were so deeply divided that the party lent its support to a dissident Liberal candidate.

Popular unrest over socioeconomic grievances reflected the growing pressures. Rural areas saw disputes over land titles, tenant struggles and land invasions by peasant squatters to use large swaths of unused or underused parts of large estates. Urban centres were growing at an accelerated pace. Growth in the country's capital Bogotá and other cities, such as, Medellín and Barranquilla was largely a result of the increased levels of industrial output, which between 1929 and 1945, doubled its share of total domestic output.¹⁷⁸ For López, the neglect of the poor was not only wrong, but also dangerous for the development of the country. Unfortunately, the majority of neither his own party nor the opposition shared his sentiments. Hounded by allegations of corruption and under pressure from the opposition, López resigned from office in 1945. Although *La Revolución en Marcha* was largely a failure in terms of policy outcomes, López had awoken the hopes of the masses quicker than any political party could satisfy.

In contrast to the nostrums of political scientists, Colombianist historians and Area Studies specialists have emphasised the problems of the Colombian state. The role of Colombian elites and the choices made by them in almost seven decades of violence have shaped the dynamics of the conflict from issues of land tenures, the decision to implement a two-party power sharing pact, military-paramilitary collusion and the displacement of millions in the process of economic development. Whilst attempts at reform by some members of the Colombian elite illustrate their acknowledgement of the issue of land well into the 20th century; successive failures to deal with these deep-rooted problems led to the continuation and escalation of rural and urban violence. In line with the “greed” thesis, which undermines the role of the disruption of traditional social structures through modernisation, class-based

¹⁷⁸ Bushnell, *Making of Modern Colombia*, p. 186.

explanations for insurgency and violence have also been largely overlooked in political science literature in recent years.

Colombian politics and society at the eve of the 1948 election was deeply fragmented. One of the rising stars of the political scene was Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, a young Liberal lawyer who had abandoned his party to form his own radical movement.¹⁷⁹ Gaitán's humble origins, his denouncement of the oligarchy and the traditional political parties certainly struck a chord with the Colombian masses, however was not enough to secure an electoral victory. The Conservative candidate, Mariano Ospina Pérez, won the election in the midst of bitter infighting and spreading rural violence. The failure of the government to control violent factions of their parties resulted in systematic violence against Liberals in a bid to take control of local municipalities and departments. Gaitán's stand against the system of 'tolerated violence' took the form of huge popular demonstrations.¹⁸⁰ Although he was 'cordially disliked by most of the party's establishment', Gaitán was the Liberal party's 'most magnetic personally'.¹⁸¹

On 9 April 1948, Gaitán was shot dead assassinated in downtown Bogotá as he left his office for lunch. This constituted a cataclysmic event in Colombian history. The violence that followed, misnamed as 'el Bogotazo'¹⁸² was one of the largest insurrections in the history of Latin America. The reaction following his death illustrated that despite the elimination of the charismatic and popular leader, social turmoil was set to strengthen. In the wake of this event, the

¹⁷⁹ The literature of Gaitán is scarce, however some important works include: Gonzalo Sánchez, *Los Días de la Revolución: Gaitanismo y Nueve de Abril en Provincia* (Bogotá: Centro Cultural Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, 1983); Herbert Braun, *The Assassination of Gaitán: Public Life and Urban Violence in Colombia* (London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); W. John Green, *Gaitanismo, Left Liberalism and Popular Mobilization in Colombia* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2003); Richard R. Sharpless, *Gaitán of Colombia: A Political Biography* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburg Press, 1978); Arturo Álape, *El Bogotazo: Memorias del Olvido* (Bogotá: Casa de las Americas, 1983); W. John Green, "'Vibrations of the Collective": The Popular Ideology of Gaitanismo on Colombia's Atlantic Coast, 1944-1948,' *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 76, No. 2 (1996) pp. 283-311.

¹⁸⁰ Gutiérrez Sanín, Acevedo and Viatela, 'Violent Liberalism?', p. 11.

¹⁸¹ Bushnell, *Making of Modern Colombia*, p. 201.

¹⁸² 'Bogotazo' refers to the riots that took place in Bogotá following the assassination of Gaitán. The -azo suffix signifies violent augmentation.

fortitude of the social and political structures came to light; once the revolt was quelled in the nation's key urban centre, politics returned to the nineteenth century routine, shedding any signs of social mobilisation that had been constructed. Although the death of Gaitán signalled the onset of *La Violencia*, this catalytic event was the culmination of violence that had broken out since 1946. A tense situation, which had been brewing under the surface since the election of 1946, finally came to a head and took the country into an abyss of violence.

La Violencia lasted until 1958, killing an estimated 200,000. A further 600,000 Colombian were injured and thousands fled their homes in what was not even an openly acknowledged war. It can be concluded from these figures that at least twenty per cent of the Colombian population was directly affected by *La Violencia* and its aftermath between 1946 and 1966.¹⁸³ Although *La Violencia*, as often seen in partisan terms, and therefore disregarded as a nodal point of reference for the what is referred to as the 'contemporary Colombian conflict', economic and security grievances were the fundamental drivers of violence. This is illustrated by the various elements of violence, which include state repression, politicides, rural rebellion, local feuding and banditry. Although the number and variety of non-state actors involved have increased since *La Violencia*, the fundamental elements of violence continue to shape nature and texture of the Colombian conflict until today.

In terms of the "greed vs. grievance" theory, *La Violencia* illustrates the problems associated with Collier's narrow definition of civil war. At what point does malign violence and an urban uprising such as *el Bogotazo* transform into a civil war? If one were to define civil war in terms of the death count, *La Violencia* would certainly constitute as one. Although criminality and banditry were widespread during this period, it would be grossly misleading to suggest

¹⁸³ Germán Guzmán, Orlando Fals Borda, and Eduardo Umaña Luna, *La Violencia en Colombia: Un Proceso Social, Tomo I* (Bogotá: Ediciones Tercer Mundo, 1962); Germán Guzmán, Orlando Fals Borda, and Eduardo Umaña Luna, *La Violencia en Colombia: Un Proceso Social, Tomo II* (Bogotá: Ediciones Tercer Mundo, 1964).

that these factors drove the Colombian uprising.¹⁸⁴ For the *campesinos* of rural Colombia 'guerrillas were made by *La Violencia*'.¹⁸⁵ The reality of an entire generation of Colombian children and adolescents from 1948 that were socialised in the guerrilla unit is not a facetious claim. Self-defence groups that emerged during *La Violencia* were not only a political force but also held a significant place in the social hierarchy of conflict regions; for many people who had been part of this socialisation process choosing their path in life as a guerrilla was as normal as choosing any other career. This is a persistent problem. The use of child soldiers is a case in point. In 2010, a report by the Medellín-based NGO, Humanitarian Diplomatic Mission concluded that Colombia has the fourth-highest number of child soldiers in the world behind Burma, Sudan and Congo, with estimates of up to 14,000 children under the age of 18 active in insurgent, paramilitary and militia groups.¹⁸⁶ In 2003, Human Rights Watch documented case histories of child combatants, which showed that children in rural Colombia have often observed, become victims of domestic violence or violent crimes long before they join an armed group.¹⁸⁷ World Bank interviews with hundreds of low-income Colombians also reveal intergenerational causal links among different forms of violence.¹⁸⁸

The importance of *La Violencia* has been severely neglected by scholars of civil conflict. The 'end' of this phase of violence is marked by the implementation of a power-sharing agreement by the leaders of the Conservative and Liberal parties in 1958 known as *el Frente Nacional* (The National Front). This 'peace' pact brought with it more problems and failed to resolve old tensions. Colombian elites set aside their differences in order to end a short period of military rule and forged a new power-sharing pact that successfully ended inter-party killings; however it failed to establish peace in

¹⁸⁴ Gonzalo Sánchez and Donny Meertens, *Bandoleros, Gamonales y Campesinos: El Case de La Violencia en Colombia* (Bogotá: El Áncora, 1984).

¹⁸⁵ Gonzalo Sánchez, 'War and Politics in Colombian Society,' *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2000) p. 32.

¹⁸⁶ 'Up to 14,000 Colombian Children Recruited by Armed Groups,' *Colombia Reports*, February 12, 2010.

¹⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch Report, "You'll Learn Not to Cry:" *Child Combatants in Colombia* (New York, Human Rights Watch, 2003).

¹⁸⁸ Gray, 'The Colombian Conflict,' p. 76.

the territory. The government used military repression to 'pacify' bandits as well as communities of Liberal and communist peasants – known as 'independent republics' – that organised to resist persecution and then fought to retain their autonomy. The *Frente Nacional* institutionalised the control of the two parties over political offices and formal political participation well into the 1970s. This had the effect of trivialising the democratic process by dividing up government posts evenly between Liberals and Conservatives, regardless of electoral results. According to Jonathan Hartlyn, the result was that alternative political movements were excluded from the mainstream political process. In other words meaningful opposition became anti-systemic, fuelling leftist insurgencies.¹⁸⁹

The beginning of the Colombian conflict is contested across disciplines. For Area Studies scholars and historians, Colombia has suffered a series of civil wars throughout its history.¹⁹⁰ Theorists of civil conflict cite the 'coca boom' of the late 1970s as an indicator for the onset of war. For security analysts, American-backed counter-insurgency operations in guerrilla strongholds in the early 1960s mark the beginning of the contemporary conflict. The conflation of Colombia's insurgent groups with drug traffickers is wholly inaccurate and conceals a much more complicated reality. Drug traffickers and insurgents are fundamentally distinct; if global demand for illicit drugs was to miraculously disappear, whilst drug traffickers may cease to exist, the insurgents may well persevere. The goals of these two groups may overlap in some situations, however their primary objectives are diametrically opposed: insurgents traffic drugs in order to finance rebellions, however the cartels have not deliberately financed rebels. The insurgents do not protect traffickers from the state or other armed actors, however they may protect farmers from state actors. Insurgents have also acted as middlemen between farmers and traffickers, sometimes strengthening the leverage of small producers. Moreover, the land reform policies sought by insurgent groups are anathema to drug lords, who are themselves recent landowners.

¹⁸⁹ Jonathan Hartlyn, *The Politics of Coalitional Rule in Colombia*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

¹⁹⁰ Bushnell, *Making of Modern Colombia*.

The unresolved agrarian question has had a lasting impact on the relationship between the peasantry and the Colombian state. The 1970s saw the radicalisation of the peasantry under the *Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos* (ANUC, the National Association of Peasant Users). Land invasions sponsored by the ANUC spread across the departments of Boyacá, Huila and Tolima in October 1971. Between 1971 and 1975 around 2000 *haciendas* (large estates) were invaded.¹⁹¹ This increasingly open confrontation between the peasantry and the political elite became one of the most prominent axes of the Colombian conflict. The failure of the ANUC to thwart the government's counter-reformist policies contributed to the later success of armed guerrilla groups. Whilst the drugs trade is often cited in the orthodox literature as the key factor leading to the growth of Colombia's armed groups, three factors were central to the increasing support for insurgency in rural areas: economic and security grievances, and the demise of the ANUC by the end of the 1970s. The Colombian state's abandonment of agrarian reform during the 1970s therefore directly correlates with an increase of armed conflict, which is a key element of the violence ignored by contemporary theorists of civil conflict.¹⁹²

The neglect of the internal drivers of conflict in Colombia is largely ignored in recent accounts of the conflict. The origin of the conflict is often associated with either the beginnings of the insurgent groups in the early 1960s for US foreign policy analysis, or else the 'cocaine boom' of the 1980s for civil war theorists.¹⁹³ As the internal antagonisms of the Colombian conflict have been

¹⁹¹ Alejandro Reyes Posada, *Guerreros y Campesinos: El Despojo de la Tierra en Colombia* (Bogotá: Editorial Norma, 2009) p. 29.

¹⁹² Orthodox accounts that focus on drugs as the driver include: Francisco E. Thoumi, *Political Economy and Illegal Drugs in Colombia: Studies on the Impact of the Illegal Drug Trade* (New York: Lynne Rienner, 1994); Rafael Pardo, 'Colombia's Two-Front War,' *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 1 (2000) pp. 64-74; Bruce M. Bagley, 'Colombia and the War on Drugs,' *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (1988) pp. 70-92.

¹⁹³ The literature on this period of Colombian history is scarce, however one of the most informative texts in this area is: León Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement in Colombia: Struggles of the National Peasant Association, 1967-1981* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Also see: Bruce Michael Bagley, *The State and the Peasantry in Contemporary Colombia* (Meadville, PA:

generally side-lined, with the drugs trade forming as one of the main focal points of violent conflict in the country, the history of the peasantry features little in literature where “greed” and US actions and drugs are seen as the most fundamental driving factors for violence. The focus on insurgents and the drug trade is problematic as it diminishes the role played by other armed forces in drug trafficking and perpetrating violence. Contrary to popular belief, the paramilitaries and national armed forces have actually played a larger role in the drug trade than the insurgent groups. Although, during the 1990s right-wing paramilitary groups dramatically expanded their ranks and improved their public image, according to sources from the US State Department, the paramilitaries were responsible for more murders and massacres than any other armed group in Colombia. Furthermore, Colombian government sources attribute three-quarters of all extrajudicial killings during the 1990s to the paramilitaries.¹⁹⁴

The 1980s saw the initiation of a long process of negotiations between the guerrilla organisations and the Colombian government. Both the “new wars” and the “greed vs. grievance” theories would suggest that the drugs trade and the criminal activity associated with it drove the high levels of violence and increased paramilitarism in Colombia. However, the ideological collusion between the state and paramilitary forces is undeniable and this element is central to explaining the sustained attacks on various elements of Colombian society, including human rights activists, journalists, union leaders and peasants. The political genocide of the left in Colombia during the 1980s could not have been possible if it was not for the collusion of the state and paramilitary forces that were bound by their common goal of countering the guerrilla forces as part of a subterranean struggle that had little to do with narcotics.

The paramilitary phenomenon is a direct result of policies implemented by the Colombian government. From 1964, a counterinsurgency decree authorised

Allegheny College, Latin American Issues, 1988); Hartlyn, *The Politics of Coalition Rule*.

¹⁹⁴ UNDP, *El conflicto, callejón con salida*.

self-defence units until state-sponsored militias were declared unconstitutional in 1989, following public outrage over the atrocities committed by such groups. However, despite the change of law, atrocities by the paramilitaries saw a marked increase during the 1990s. International human rights organisations documented the continued collusion between the paramilitaries and specific military brigades.¹⁹⁵ Paramilitaries have carried out civilian massacres and high-profile assassinations with impunity, whilst some government agencies have attempted to prevent and prosecute such crimes, illustrating the weakness of such agencies relative to the power of military and civilian elites that support paramilitary actions. Furthermore, these discrepancies reveal the fragmentation of the state apparatus and the insufficient power of civilian elites that oppose paramilitary goals and methods.

Since 1948 a state of siege has been renewed periodically making it an almost permanent feature of political life in Colombia. The state of siege is a juridical institution, which is 'put into effect to deal with irregular situations in the public life of the country'.¹⁹⁶ Under state of siege, the Executive is able to implement decrees that 'abrogate rights by transferring broad judicial and political powers to the military, with no or little civilian oversight'.¹⁹⁷ Decree 1290 passed in 1965 cleared the way for civilians accused of 'subversive activities' or supporting guerrilla groups to be sent to military courts where proceedings were secret and legal rights for the defendants were suspended. President Turbay's Decree 1923 of 1978, aptly named the Security Statute, gave the police judicial powers to deal with the 'disturbance of public order' covering a broad range of social protest. For the leading Colombian historian Francisco Leal Buitrago, these conditions allowed the Armed Forces 'to

¹⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch Report, *Colombia – The Ties That Bind: Colombia and Paramilitary Links* (Washington DC: Human Rights Watch, 2000).

¹⁹⁶ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Organization of American States, *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in the Republic of Colombia*, June 1981. See part E for Rules to Constitutional Exceptions and State of Siege.

¹⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch Report, *Colombia's Killer Networks: The Military-Paramilitary Partnership and the United States* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1996) p. 16.

expand its autonomy in matters of public order to unprecedented levels'.¹⁹⁸ Courts martial for civilians continued until 1987 and were reintroduced in 1996. This is most troubling as the term 'subversive activities' came to encompass a wide range of actions by civilians. 'Government critics, trade unionists, community organisers, opposition politicians, civic leaders, and human rights activists' along with 'non-violent protestors for land, education, human rights, better wages, health care, public services' were labelled as subversives.¹⁹⁹ For the former Colombian Defence Minister, General Camacho Leyva, social protest was referred to as the 'unarmed branch of subversion'.²⁰⁰

The Colombian political system has allowed groups of Colombian elites to advance their political and economic interests with relative autonomy. In the search of explanations for long-lasting conflict, the poor choices of the Colombian elites have been emphasised by Colombianists. Leading historian of Colombia, David Bushnell argues that the leaders of the Liberal and Conservative parties established a 'fratricidal' pattern in the nineteenth century when the masses were used as cannon fodder in a series of highly violent civil conflicts.²⁰¹ Philip Mauceri argues that because party elites viewed the state in instrumental terms, party competition was prone to result in armed conflict.²⁰²

Colombia's elites have been aware of the importance of the issue of land for many decades. On several occasions, Colombia's elites have attempted to tackle the problem by attempting to increase the legitimacy of the state and

¹⁹⁸ Francisco Leal Buitrago, *El Oficio de la Guerra: Seguridad Nacional en Colombia* (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo Editores, 1994) p. 55.

¹⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch Report, *Colombia's Killer Networks*, p. 20.

²⁰⁰ Elsa Blair Trujillo, *Las Fuerzas Armadas: Una Mirada Civil* (Bogotá: CINEP, 1993) p. 134. Also see: Human Rights Watch Report, *Colombia's Killer Networks: The Military-Paramilitary Partnership and the United States* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1996) p. 20

²⁰¹ Bushnell, *Making of Modern Colombia*.

²⁰² Philip Mauceri, 'States, Elites and the Response to Insurgency,' in Jo-Marie Burt and Philip Mauceri, (eds.) *Politics in the Andes: Identity, Conflict and Reform* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004) pp. 146-163.

address the forces undermining it.²⁰³ However, these have largely failed due to the fissiparous nature of Colombian political parties. The failure of the implementation of well-needed land reform in the 1930s and 1960s illustrates the difficulties faced. A further example of this would be the sabotage of the peace efforts of the government of Belisario Betancur (1982-1986) by regional elites and the armed forces command.²⁰⁴ Negotiations with the FARC resulted in the demobilisation of combatants and the founding of a popular, non-violent political party, Unión Patriótica (UP). The murder of thousands of UP members that followed was carried out by paramilitaries affiliated with regional and military elites. Intra-elite divisions were also evident when the military stormed the Palace of Justice in 1985, which had been seized by the urban guerrilla group, the M-19. Allegedly, the military destroyed the government building without Betancur's orders, killing all the members of the Supreme Court and dozens of employees.²⁰⁵

Conclusion

The increasing emphasis on numbers and rational choice has obscured the reality of violent conflict in Colombia. This chapter has illustrated the pressing need to utilize a variety of important modes of analysis for the study of violent conflict. If the Colombian government were to defeat the insurgent forces and continue with their recent successes, the demise of insurgency would not necessarily mark the end of organised violence. Whilst the desire for material gain is a major factor in the case of Colombia, analysts whose examination only includes rebels and illegal armed actors overlook key ideological and sociological dimensions of the violence and in particular the role of the state in the perpetuation of violence and the problems associated with the political system. Earlier cycles of violence and unresolved issues of land tenure have

²⁰³ Grey, 'The New Research on Civil Wars,' p. 75.

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*

²⁰⁵ 'State Department Cable says Colombian Army Responsible for the Palace of Justice Deaths, Disappearances,' The Colombia Documentation Project, US National Security Archive, George Washington University.

fed subsequent cycles of conflict in Colombia. The most recent cycle of violence, from 1946 to present day, requires an in depth analysis of the economic and security grievances that have fuelled violence in Colombia.

Chapter Four

Colombia's Forgotten Conflict: *La Violencia*, 1946-1957

La Violencia is the forgotten period of modern Colombian history. The undeclared war killed an estimated 200,000 Colombians, marking one of the bloodiest periods of Colombian history. Remarkably, the ferocity of violence during this period is largely unaddressed in scholarly literature. This thesis brings *La Violencia* out of the shadows of history by restoring its position as the beginning of the contemporary conflict and illustrates how this period of violence consolidated Colombia's dysfunctional democracy, which is characterised by the political exclusion of the left and political factionalism amongst the elite. These are the central elements of the structural weaknesses of the Colombian state that have driven political and social instability. In order to understand the complexity of violence in Colombia today, we must examine the historical nature of violence in the country and look to the problems associated with the political system as a fundamental element in driving violence.

The framing of this event underlines its importance. Within Colombia, the term '*La Violencia*' functions to signify a wide range of meanings. For the oligarchs and Colombian elite, *La Violencia* was a 'partisan conflict'; for those *campesinos* who mobilised in an organised manner, *La Violencia* is characterised as '*la revolución*'. By contrast, those people in the interior, coffee-making regions saw *La Violencia* as a 'great historical process'. It is important to note the fissiparous nature the definitions of *La Violencia* within different sections of Colombian society, since they are indicative of the very different conception of anarchy that undoubtedly overtook Colombia for a decade despite its 'great democratic tradition'. At the heart of academic and political inquiries which have baffled historians and political scientists alike is

the driver of an increasingly bitter division in Colombian society, which has in turn led to various interpretations of what type of conflict *La Violencia* was.

The neglect of *La Violencia* in academic literature is part of a larger problem. Despite the status of being one of the most violent nations in the western hemisphere, Colombia is the least studied of the major Latin American countries.²⁰⁶ Scholarly neglect of the country is due to the trend of comparative analysis of countries within the discipline of Social Sciences. The economic and political development of Colombia has historically differed from its Latin American counterparts; it has been historically framed as the region's 'anomaly'.²⁰⁷ As a result, the country has not featured highly within academic literature. Indeed, *La Violencia* is largely seen as an anomaly in itself.²⁰⁸ Accordingly, much of the scholarly literature on this period of Colombian history has sought to define *La Violencia*.

Area studies scholars have dominated the discourse on *La Violencia*. Over the decades several competing hypotheses have emerged on the origin of *La Violencia*. These divergent accounts have led to the characterisation of this conflict either as a partisan struggle, a delayed nineteenth century civil war or as a popular uprising.²⁰⁹ During the 1960s, a number of rather generalised theories were developed to explain *La Violencia*, which attributed the violence in Colombia to the transition of society from 'pre-modern' to 'modern' or to partisan rivalries in which the masses blindly followed the dictates of

²⁰⁶ David Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself* (Oxford: University of California, 1993)

²⁰⁷ Bushnell, *Making of Modern Colombia*, p. vii; also see: Robert H. Dix, *The Politics of Colombia* (New York: Praeger, 1987) p. 11; Jorge P. Osterling, *Democracy in Colombia: Clientelist Politics and Guerrilla Warfare* (Oxford: Transaction Publishers, 1989) p. ix.

²⁰⁸ James L. Zackrisson, 'La Violencia in Colombia: An Anomaly in Terrorism,' *Conflict Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (1989) pp. 5-15.

²⁰⁹ Germán Guzmán Campos, Orlando Fals Borda and Eduardo Umaña Luna, *La Violencia en Colombia: Un Proceso Social, Tomo I* (Bogotá: Ediciones Tercer Mundo, 1962); Germán Guzmán, Orlando Fals Borda, and Eduardo Umaña Luna, *La Violencia en Colombia: Un Proceso Social, Tomo II* (Bogotá: Ediciones Tercer Mundo, 1964); Germán Guzmán Campos, *La Violencia en Colombia: Parte Descriptiva* (Cali: Ediciones Progreso, 1968).

competing political elites.²¹⁰ Whilst these early studies offered some insights into the scope of the violence, the literature raises the question of how political tensions among the political elites in Bogotá drove the more distant citizens in rural areas to take up arms. Did partisan affiliation take precedence over all other types of identity in Colombia?

La Violencia engulfed almost the entirety of Colombia. Partisan affiliation may have provided the initial catalyst for the emergence of violence; at least in some areas of Colombia, however this explanation is limited in accounting for the heterogeneous nature of the conflict. All sectors of Colombian society were responsible for the perpetration of violence: Conservatives, Liberals, Communists, Catholics, Protestants, wealthy elites, *campesinos*, farmers and bandits.²¹¹ The motivation for carrying out violence also varied amongst these groups. Conservatives carried out attacks against Liberals in order to seek reparations for previous sixteen years of 'Liberal oppression'. The *Partido Comunista Colombiano* (Colombian Communist Party, PCC) provided support to Liberal guerrillas and rural self-defence groups. Catholics fought Protestants in order to gain influence over the population. Violent confrontations took place between wealthy elites and *campesinos*. Bandits, or criminals, took part in general lawlessness and were 'an obvious result of a volatile political and economic history'.²¹²

Theories of civil conflict have not been applied to this period of Colombian violence. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, *La Violencia* has been largely framed as an anomaly of violence or a partisan war and therefore unrelated to later episodes of violence. For the historian and intelligence expert, James L. Zackrisson, *La Violencia* was a 'unique phenomenon':

²¹⁰ Richard Weinhart, 'Violence in Pre-Modern Societies: Rural Colombia,' *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (1966) pp. 340-347; Vernon Lee Fluharty, *Dance of the Millions: Military Rule and Social Revolution in Colombia 1930-1956* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1957); Robert Williamson, *Toward a Theory of Political Violence: The Case of Rural Colombia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968); James L. Payne, *Patterns of Conflict in Colombia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

²¹¹ Zackrisson, 'La Violencia in Colombia,' p. 5.

²¹² *ibid.*, pp. 5-8.

'it was partisan, but not organised; it was rural, seldom urban; it was seldom anti-establishment, but was sometimes encouraged by the establishment; it was not against a dictatorship, but it created a dictatorship; it was not religiously orientated; it was not among the poor, but rather predominantly among the prosperous small farmers; it was not against the armed forces, but was finally controlled by the armed forces'.²¹³

Zackrisson's description highlights the complexities of *La Violencia* and more generally cases of mass violence. Importantly, it also illustrates the difficulties of defining a civil war. The emphasis on partisan rivalries in the literature as the driving force for violence does not take into consideration the element of revolt or rebellion. The framing of *La Violencia* as an anomaly or exceptional case of violence does not fit academic notions of civil war. As a result, theorists of civil conflict and US foreign policy specialists have largely overlooked the importance *La Violencia* for understanding the current problem of violence in Colombia.

Secondly, theories of civil conflict are largely based on external grand narratives. Both the "new wars" and "greed vs. grievance" literature assumes that external support was central to the emergence and growth of armed groups in the global South as a result of Cold War super rivalry. This raises serious questions about the conceptualisation of violence in the global South, and particularly Colombia, prior to external assistance and the Cuban revolution.

La Violencia reflects in many ways what Mary Kaldor defines as a "new war". Arguably, state failure, social transformation driven by the intensification of global interconnectedness and liberal economic forces; the breakdown of public authority leading to 'irregular' armies; a phenomenal rise in civilian casualties; the targeting of civilians as objects of war are all characteristics

²¹³ *ibid.*, p. 9

that can be observed in *La Violencia*. In terms of the “greed vs. grievance” theory, *La Violencia* illustrates the problems associated with Collier’s narrow definition of civil war. At what point does malign violence and an urban uprising, such as *el Bogotazo* transform into a civil war?²¹⁴ If one were to define civil war in terms of the death count, *La Violencia* would certainly constitute as one. Although criminality and banditry were widespread during this period, it would be grossly misleading to suggest that these factors drove the Colombian uprising.²¹⁵ For the *campesinos* of rural Colombia ‘guerrillas were made by *La Violencia*’.²¹⁶ Scholars outside of Colombia have ignored *La Violencia*’s as a significant point of reference for the contemporary conflict in favour of a focus on the emergence of armed groups during the 1960s and the ‘cocaine boom’ of the 1980s. Moreover, the link between *La Violencia* and the current conflict is often reduced to descriptive accounts that merely trace the biographical paths of those guerrillas that emerged during the 1940s and 1950s and went on to be leading figures of the FARC.²¹⁷

The element of criminality is not new to Colombia. An examination of the dynamics of *La Violencia* reveals the diversity of violence, which has continued to shape the nature of conflict in the country: state sponsored terror, guerrilla activity, privatised paramilitary forces and criminality. The relationship between rebellion and criminality has been at the centre of a heated debate amongst scholars and has serious implications for the way the Colombian conflict is perceived. Kidnapping was one of the most common elements of bandit activity and subsequent armed Colombian groups have practised this to an aberrant extent. The conflation of activities between guerrillas and bandits is a real component of the conflict and demonstrates

²¹⁴ Colombia’s capital, Bogotá, erupted following the death of the popular politician, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán.

²¹⁵ Gonzalo Sánchez and Donny Meertens, *Bandoleros, Gamonales y Campesinos: El Caso de La Violencia en Colombia* (Bogotá: El Áncora, 1984).

²¹⁶ Gonzalo Sánchez, ‘War and Politics in Colombian Society,’ *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2000) p. 32.

²¹⁷ For example: Manuel Marulanda Vélez, also known as ‘Tirofijo’ or ‘Sureshot’ due to this reputed ability to accurately aim firearms, who went on to become the Commander-in-Chief of the FARC. Marulanda Vélez was part of a group of Liberal *campesinos* in the coffee-producing department of Quindío who rose up in arms in 1948 against the Conservative aligned police forces.

that the unstable boundaries between armed groups exists but must be seen in the context of the state's security apparatus. Partisan violence is one key element of *La Violencia*, however this was largely related to the increasing factionalism within Colombia's Liberal and Conservative parties, which by 1946 had extremist wings on both sides that perpetrated violence against the masses in order to gain control of local municipalities.

Partisan Violence

Colombian history consists of series of bloody civil wars. The first civil war known as the *Guerra de los Supremos* – War of the Supremes – began in 1839 and has defined the shape of Colombian politics until the twenty-first century. The war was principally fought between the supporters of Simón Bolívar, *el Libertador*, and the supporters of Francisco de Paula Santander, one of the leaders of Colombian independence. The *Guerra de los Supremos* ended in 1841 and led to the formation of the Liberal and Conservative political parties that have largely dominated Colombian politics to the present day.²¹⁸ The historical roots of the Colombian political system sharply differentiate the texture of Colombia's politics from those of other Latin American states as the two traditional parties retained their monopoly of power and were also the sources of violent contention throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century. Numerous conflicts throughout the republic's history were waged in the name of the two leading political parties.

One of the most fascinating episodes of Colombia's violent history is the decade long conflict known as simply *La Violencia* – the violence. Little is known of *La Violencia* beyond Colombian borders. However, it forms an extraordinary episode within Colombian history and indeed twentieth-century

²¹⁸ Fernán E. González, *Partidos, Guerras e Iglesia en la Construcción del Estado-Nación en Colombia, 1830-1900* (Medellín: Carreta, 2006); Fernán González, 'La Guerra de los Supremos (1839-1841) y los Orígenes del Bipartidismo,' *Boletín de Historia y Antigüedades*, Vol. 97, No. 848 (2010) pp. 5-64; Gonzalo Sánchez, *Guerra y Política en la Sociedad Colombiana* (Bogotá: Áncora Editores, 1991) pp. 15-16.

political violence. Although this century saw more social revolutions and upheavals than any other across the globe, nevertheless *La Violencia* was an exceptional case of mass violence for its time. As one prominent writer observed 'no other country in Latin America – and few nations of the world – have in mid-twentieth century experienced internal violence and guerrilla violence as has Colombia'.²¹⁹ It was an unexpected orgy of violence that marked the largest armed conflict in the Western hemisphere since the Mexican revolution. However, whilst one may have expected that the intense levels of conflict that have ravaged Colombia would lead to an increased study of *La Violencia*, conversely the horrors of this episode seem to have led many scholars to neglect this extraordinary episode in contemporary Colombian history.

Traditionally, *La Violencia* is framed as a partisan struggle. To some degree this is assertion holds an element of truth. The Colombian oligarchy, consisting of Liberal and Conservative political parties, used rural *campesinos* as cannon fodder in order to gain control of local areas and municipalities. However, *La Violencia* broke out during a permanent state of crisis in which there was an increasingly open confrontation between the ruling elite and the masses following the Conservative victory in 1946 by Mariano Ospina Pérez. The question of agrarian reform has been at the core of Colombia's violence and political agenda for many decades. During the presidency of Alfonso López Pumarejo (1934-1938) a series of social reforms, known as *La Revolución en Marcha* (The Marching Revolution) were introduced.²²⁰ These included agrarian reform, the implementation of public education, universal male suffrage and trade union reform, which greatly alarmed the Colombian political parties. Not only did the reforms deepen the divides between the two leading parties, but they also sowed factionalism within the political system. In the election of 1942, the Conservatives were so deeply divided that the party lent its support to a dissident Liberal candidate.

²¹⁹ Robert H. Dix, *Colombia: The Political Dimensions of Change* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969) p. 360.

²²⁰ Alvaro Tirado Mejía, *La Revolución en Marcha y la Reforma Constitucional de 1936* (Bogotá: Universidad Externado de Colombia, 1985).

Popular unrest over socioeconomic grievances reflected the growing pressures. Rural areas saw disputes over land titles, tenant struggles and land invasions by peasant squatters to use large swaths of unused or underused parts of large estates. Urban centres were growing at an accelerated pace. Growth in the country's capital Bogotá and other cities, such as, Medellín and Barranquilla was largely a result of the increased levels of industrial output, which between 1929 and 1945, doubled its share of total domestic output.²²¹ For López, the neglect of the poor was not only wrong, but also dangerous for the development of the country. Unfortunately, the majority of neither his own party nor the opposition shared his sentiments. Hounded by allegations of corruption and under pressure from the opposition, López resigned from office in 1945. Although *La Revolución en Marcha* was largely a failure in terms of policy outcomes, López had awoken the hopes of the masses quicker than any political party could satisfy.

Colombian politics and society at the eve of the 1948 election was deeply fragmented. One of the rising stars of the political scene was Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, a young Liberal lawyer who had abandoned his party to form his own radical movement.²²² Gaitán's humble origins, his denouncement of the oligarchy and the traditional political parties certainly struck a chord with the Colombian masses, however was not enough to secure an electoral victory. The Conservative candidate, Mariano Ospina Pérez, won the election in the midst of bitter fighting and spreading rural violence. The failure of the government to control violent factions of their parties resulted in systematic violence against Liberals in a bid to take control of local municipalities and

²²¹ Bushnell, *Making of Modern Colombia*, p. 186.

²²² Gonzalo Sánchez, *Los Días de la Revolución: Gaitanismo y Nueve de Abril en Provincia* (Bogotá: Centro Cultural Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, 1983); Herbert Braun, *The Assassination of Gaitán: Public Life and Urban Violence in Colombia* (London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); W. John Green, *Gaitanismo, Left Liberalism and Popular Mobilization in Colombia* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2003); Richard R. Sharpless, *Gaitán of Colombia: A Political Biography* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburg Press, 1978); Arturo Álape, *El Bogotazo: Memorias del Olvido* (Bogotá: Casa de las Americas, 1983); W. John Green, "'Vibrations of the Collective': The Popular Ideology of Gaitanismo on Colombia's Atlantic Coast, 1944-1948," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 76, No. 2 (1996) pp. 283-311.

departments. Gaitán's stand against the system of 'tolerated violence' took the form of huge popular demonstrations.²²³ Although he was 'cordially disliked by most of the party's establishment', Gaitán was the Liberal party's 'most magnetic personally'.²²⁴

On 9 April 1948, Gaitán was shot dead assassinated in downtown Bogotá as he left his office for lunch. This constituted a cataclysmic event in Colombian history. The violence that followed, misnamed as '*el Bogotazo*'²²⁵ was one of the largest insurrections in the history of Latin America. The reaction following his death illustrated that despite the elimination of the charismatic and popular leader, social turmoil was set to strengthen. In the wake of this event, the fortitude of the social and political structures came to light; once the revolt was quelled in the nation's key urban centre, politics returned to the nineteenth century routine, shedding any signs of social mobilisation that had been constructed. Although the death of Gaitán signalled the onset of *La Violencia*, this catalytic event was the culmination of violence that had broken out since 1946. A tense situation, which had been brewing under the surface since the election of 1946, finally came to a head and took the country into an abyss of violence.

La Violencia stands in need of significant reinterpretation. Whilst *La Violencia* may present itself as being characterised by earlier forms of violence in Colombia where the ideological management of the masses was driven through the elitist political parties, this explanation neglects agency of the masses in rural and urban Colombia. In stark contrast to past confrontation, in the case of *La Violencia*, the conduct of military activity was assumed by the people, in particular the peasantry. It is this context of mass violence that we see the emergence of organised guerrilla groups, criminal bands and

²²³ Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín, Tatiana Acevedo and Juan Manuel Viatela, 'Violent Liberalism? State, Conflict and Political Regime in Colombia, 1930-2006,' *Crisis States Working Papers*, Paper No. 19 (November 2007) p. 11.

²²⁴ Bushnell, *Making of Modern Colombia*, p. 201.

²²⁵ 'Bogotazo' refers to the riots that took place in Bogotá following the assassination of Gaitán. The -azo suffix signifies violent augmentation.

paramilitary forces deployed on the part of owners of large estates to protect their assets.

This chapter proposes that the conflict was indeed the result of a power struggle between the political elites of the country. However, this was exacerbated by complex socio-economic and social tensions in the country that made for an explosive conflation of violence that lasted over a decade. The archival material deployed here gives an insight into the internal divisions within the Colombian political elite and shows that fear of the possibility of an extreme Communist or Nazi/Falangist movement taking hold was at the heart of the political tensions. Catholic religious identity, socioeconomic strife and the popularity of Gaitán further complicated the already existing fears of the political elite leading to widespread state sponsored terrorism and the emergence of rebel forces in the key industrial and agricultural areas such as Llanos, Tolima and Antioquia.

La Violencia was not a simple dual between the Liberal and Conservative parties. Nor were these political parties the sort of conventional political grouping that we associate with the term and we might be better to think of them as social factions. The monopoly of power held by these factions is of particular significance. The country's historical political parties formed a key feature of partisan political activity and preceded the development of citizenship. Whilst in traditional terms, the emergence of political parties is seen as an important step toward democratic and societal development, in Colombia they appeared before the development of the nationhood, therefore representing an archaic or pre-political phenomenon.²²⁶ The peculiarity of the make-up of the political parties is the key to understanding why the partisan struggle served to create supporters of political parties, rather than political actors.

²²⁶ Sánchez, 'War and Politics in Colombian Society,' p. 28. Also see: David Bushnell, 'Política y Partidos en el Siglo XIX: Algunos Antecedentes Históricos,' in Gonzalo Sánchez and Ricardo Peñaranda, (eds.) *Pasado y Presente de la Violencia en Colombia* (Bogotá: CEREC, 1986) pp. 31-40; Malcolm Deas, 'Algunos Interrogantes Sobre la Relación Guerras Civiles y Violencia,' in Gonzalo Sánchez and Ricardo Peñaranda, (eds.) *Pasado y Presente de la Violencia en Colombia* (Bogotá: CEREC, 1986) pp. 41-46.

The Colombian Liberal and Conservative parties had developed deep-seated fears of the each other well before the onset of *La Violencia*. Arguably each nurtured a conspiratorial mindset that suspected the other of preparing to move into the terrain of extra-parliamentary politics. The former feared the anti-communists and their ‘Nazi, Fascist and Falangist’ agenda, which according to Liberal officials had the ‘undeniable support of the clergy’. Conversely, the Conservative party emphasised the ‘failure of the Liberal party to take a stand in conflicts between Communists and so-called anti-Communists’.²²⁷ Editorials written by the former President Santos for the daily newspaper *El Tiempo* before the onset of *La Violencia* reveal a wider narrative, which extends the debate on the partisan politics that were for many years seen to have driven the country to civil war. The source of contention between the two political parties during the 1940s was based around the fear of a Spanish influenced Falangist government or a social revolution. In short, the extreme factionalism of the Colombian system was at core of the political problem.

Indeed, these fears were not unfounded. Well-placed British and American officials serving in Colombia picked up substantial evidence of this and concluded that in March 1945 a revolutionary movement was in motion that included a number of pivotal army officers and members of the clergy, together with support from the Cartagena Naval Base. During the same month 1600 bombs and hand grenades were discovered hidden in a Bogotá cathedral.²²⁸ Inquiries following this episode revealed that the revolutionary movement consisted of mainly inactive servicemen and members of the Conservative party, despite no official sponsorship from the wider political faction. The FBI was watching Colombia closely because of fears of undercover German activity. J. Edgar Hoover worked especially closely with Frederick B. Lyon from the State Department’s Division of Foreign Activity

²²⁷American Embassy, Bogotá and Secretary of State, Memorandum of conversation, Washington DC, July 31, 1945, No Document Number, 5239, RG 59, USNA.

²²⁸American Embassy, Bogotá and Secretary of State, Memorandum of conversation, Washington DC, March 10, 1945, 821.00/3-1745, 5239A, RG59, USNA.

Correlation. Both were agreed that the potential for revolution in Colombia was considerable due to the extremely high cost of living, which caused great unrest among the population who were very critical of the ruling government.²²⁹ This is a repeated observation made by officials working in Colombia during this period and also gives some indication as to why the urban riots of *el Bogotazo* quickly spread to other cities in Colombia.

The labelling of the insurrection is of particular significance. In official memorandums, newspaper reports and later scholarly work, words such as, 'mob', 'riot', 'rising' of April 9 have served to obscure the true reality and diversity of the violence and participants, giving rise to the non-analysis of the crisis.²³⁰ However, a number of scholarly works, such as that of Herbert Braun,²³¹ Arturo Álape,²³² and Gonzalo Sánchez²³³ have been instrumental in bringing in new dimensions to the events across urban centres in Colombia as well in the most remote provisional regions and rural areas. These studies have done much to restore the historical significance of April 9 to contemporary Colombian history and have laid the foundations for the further study of the following period. Following the assassination of the Liberal party leader Gaitán, the logic of suppressing social and political activity was ruthlessly enforced through the dismantling the April 9 rebellion; repression of all vestiges of civic and social protest, including union or workers' organisations; and the widespread terror against *Gaitanistas* and other expressions of the left across the nation, including the Liberal party. This structured form of repression and terror instilled the notion of deviants in society, who had transgressed the 'official' order.

²²⁹J. Edgar Hoover and Frederick B. Lyon, Division of Foreign Activity Correlation, Memorandum of conversation, Washington DC, March 27, 1945, 5239A, 821.00/3-1045, RG59, USNA.

²³⁰ See memorandums of conversation between American Embassy, Bogotá and Secretary of State, Washington DC, April 9, 1948, 821.00/4-948, 5239A, RG 59, USNA.

²³¹ Braun, *The Assassination of Gaitán*.

²³² Álape, *El Bogotazo*.

²³³ Gonzalo Sánchez, *Los Días de la revolución*.

The situation between the two political parties compounded to form a vicious circle of violence. The Liberals continued to proclaim that the 'Conservative Government has the power under the state of siege to put an end to violence; that they (the Liberals) were not responsible for starting the violence and that their interest lies in the reestablishment of peace in the country.' In retaliation, the Conservative government argued that the only effective means to end it and bring about the end of martial law was 'for the Liberals to cease their subversive attitude and recognise the victory of Laureano Gomez'.²³⁴

The Liberal and Conservative parties' peculiarity is rooted in their status as belonging to the same social order and needing each other to survive. Nevertheless they possess an inherent hatred toward one another through almost mythical differences. The element of the partisan struggle during *La Violencia* and fears that each political faction held was very real. The threat of a Falangist government or revolutionary movement felt imminent for many government officials. It is in the context of these fears and permanent state of warfare, the Conservative government implemented a series of measures to curb the violence, increase state control and censorship, which led to resistance to form and organise across Colombia.

The Impact of *La Violencia*

La Violencia had a profound impact on Colombian society. An estimated 200,000 perished and a further 600,000 injured.²³⁵ Millions fled their homes. Incomplete records have hindered research on this period of Colombian history. In many parts of the country, records were simply not kept or were destroyed. Indeed, a great deal of the violence was perpetrated by those figures that were in charge of keeping records – the Colombian authorities.²³⁶

²³⁴ American Embassy, Bogotá and Secretary of State, Memorandum of conversation Washington DC, May 6, 1950, 721.00/6-550, 3281, RG59, USNA.

²³⁵ Campos, Borda and Luna, *La Violencia en Colombia, Tomo I*; Guzmán, Borda, and Luna, *La Violencia en Colombia, Tomo II*.

²³⁶ Norman A. Bailey, 'La Violencia in Colombia,' *Journal of Inter-American Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (1967) p. 562.

Despite the lack of concrete figures for the majority of the country, for the relatively small department of Tolima the records are fairly complete: between 1948 and 1958, 1,993 families left the province (around 8,000 people), 34,730 farms were abandoned and property worth 970,000,000 pesos was destroyed (400-500 million dollars).²³⁷ The term '*La Violencia*' is used in a number of contexts and serves various purposes. It described the barbarity of the conflict and the conflation of violence on different fronts that characterised the struggle – terror, anarchy and insurgency. Most importantly, in official terms, the terminology functions to conceal the social and political effects of the crisis, and also implies the violence is mysterious, unexplainable and without the possibility of calling individuals to account.

Property, production and social relations were all deeply affected. Not only had the loss of human life been enormous, but also the losses in property, harvests and business profits were incalculable. Industrial hubs, such as Líbano in Tolima, and Sevilla in Valle were dislocated due to a sharp increase in violence and a subsequent decline in industry. Other areas such as Armenia, in the department of Quindío, conversely experienced rapid economic growth.²³⁸ Irregular mechanisms to conduct business became commonplace as trade channels for important agricultural products, such as coffee and livestock were altered. For some, *La Violencia* brought wealth and upward mobility, such as merchants. However, in areas under guerrilla control this could also bring obligatory taxes into practice for those working in agriculture, a technique adopted from local bandits in order to raise funds. In areas where the resistance was not successful, thousands of small landholdings were looted, affecting many vulnerable indigenous communities. Hence, *La Violencia* favoured the expansion of agriculturalists that were well

²³⁷ Guzmán, Borda, and Luna, *La Violencia en Colombia, Tomo I*, pp. 293-294. These figures are based on currency estimations from the 1960s.

²³⁸ Armenia, Quindío is known as 'Ciudad Milagro' (Miracle City) due to its unexpected economic growth. For regional analyses of *la Violencia* see: James D. Henderson, *When Colombia Bled: A History of the Violencia in Tolima* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1985); Darío Fajardo, *Violencia y Desarrollo: Transformaciones Sociales en Tres Regiones Cafetaleras del Tolima, 1936-1970* (Bogotá: Fondo Editorial Suramérica, 1978); Mary Roldán, *Blood and Fire: La Violencia in Antioquia, Colombia, 1946-1953* (London: Duke University Press, 2002).

positioned before the conflict exploded and were able to reap the benefits to maintain their initial advantage. The Colombian economy seemed to fare well despite enduring chaos during future decades. This is particularly important for the development of violence in Colombia throughout the twentieth century – intense levels of violence have gone hand in hand with stable economic growth on a national level over decades.

Rituals of violence were important during *La Violencia* in instilling repression. Killing followed a sinister logic in which the method of execution was symbolic where the stripping, mutilating, desecrating bodies sought to communicate the message of intimidation. Such ceremonial killings were important in constructing the 'Other' in Colombian society; cutting out the tongue signified silencing the opposition; eviscerating expectant mothers to eliminate the ability of the Other to reproduce; burning down of houses to banish the Other.²³⁹ The effect of these heinous crimes was the consolidation of a highly stratified society of politically homogenous regions. Economic activity, marriage, selection of godparents and friendships would take place on the basis of party affiliation, transforming the daily life of Colombians.

Killings were carried out with incredible ferocity as crucifixions and hangings became a familiar way of death. Certain methods of killing and torture became commonplace and given specific names, for example: *picar para tamal*, cutting a living body into a number of small pieces, *bocachiquiar*, inducing a slow death through hundreds of small punchers on the body, and an elaborate classification system of the various different ways of beheading which were given different names: *el corte de mica* (monkey cut), *el corte de franela* (t-shirt cut), *el corte frances* (french cut), *el corte de corbata* (neck-tie cut).²⁴⁰

²³⁹ Novels on *la Violencia* document the atrocities committed during this period. See: Gabriel García Márquez, *La Mala Hora* (Barcelona: Nuevas Ediciones de Bolsillo, 1999); Fidel Blandón Berrío, *Lo que el Cielo no Perdona: Novela Histórica* (Bogotá: Editorial Minerva, 1955); Eduardo Caballero Calderón, *El Cristo de Espaldas* (Bogotá: Ediciones Espirial Colombia, 1954); Manuel Mejía Vallejo, *El Día Señalado* (Barcelona: Ediciones Destino, 1964).

²⁴⁰ Carlos A. Leon, 'Unusual Patterns of Crime During La Violencia in Colombia,' *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 125, No. 11 (1969) pp. 1564-1575; María Victoria Uribe, "Dismembering and Expelling: Semantics of Political Terror in

Children suffered enormously; infants were knifed, young children as young as eight were raped *en masse*. These peculiar manifestations of social dysfunctions indicate the pathological desire to assert the existence of the self and obliteration of the Other. The religious context in which these societal transformations were taking place is particularly important as Colombia at the time prided itself as a deeply Catholic nation. Indeed, religious rhetoric was used to legitimise actions on all sides of this multi-faceted conflict, from Conservatives who saw their support of the government's cause as part of their path as Christians to bands of assassins leaving signs of religiosity at the scenes of their killings to superstitious practices among guerrilla groups.

Historical hindsight shows the reproduction of *La Violencia* wherein each cycle as multiplied to reproduced several others. In the case of this cycle of violence, the political-partisan conflict produced revolutionary and *bandolero* or criminal violence. Armed groups from the police, armed forces, paramilitaries and guerrillas have all adopted similar methods of killing. The dynamics of *La Violencia* are very peculiar and perhaps here lies the explanation why it is not defined as a war. *La Violencia* did not take place in battlefields and the death toll did not consist of enemy casualties; massacres and genocide were commonplace and undertaken by rival groups to resolve antagonisms. The purpose of this war was not to defeat the enemy but to instil fear in a nation where regions were characterised by partisan affiliations. In line with this path, it was the masses that would become the targets of these smaller conflicts.

La Violencia ushered in a number of key changes for the nature of conflict in Colombia. Firstly, structural changes moved the social and political struggle in

Colombia,' *Public Culture*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2004) pp. 79-95. *El corte de mica* (monkey cut) refers to instances where the victim had his head cut off and placed on his chest; *el corte de franela* (t-shirt cut) referred to instances where a machete sliced deep along the line where the throat joins the chest; *el corte francés* (French cut) refers to instances where the skin of the victim was pulled back, exposing the skull while the victim was still alive; *el corte de corbata* (neck tie cut) referred to instances when the machete cut along the incision under the mandible, through which the tongue of the victim was pulled out and made to hang outside like a neck tie.

new directions, showing new traits of class conflict, as there was an increasing hostility between *campesinos* and the Colombian elite. In short, *La Violencia* deepened factionalism with Colombian politics and society. Secondly, political repression became institutionalised, a feature that has characterised violence in Colombia until present day. Thirdly, *La Violencia* established the existence of organised criminal bands. Finally, this period of Colombian violence saw a marked increase of new social actors, such as an emerging independent workers movement and peasant struggles aligned with agrarian associations, which took hold in the coffee-producing regions.²⁴¹

However, the decisive factor that came to dominate the political outlook of Colombian society was *Gaitanismo* – the political movement named after and led by the 1946 Liberal party candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán.²⁴² Strikingly, *Gaitanismo* for a significant period of time was viewed as a variant of the Liberal party. However, *Gaitanismo* varied from the elitist Liberal party by representing the anti-oligarchical movement, opposing both the Liberal and Conservative oligarchies. In recent years, the political discourse of *Gaitanismo* has been explored and reinterpreted as a movement that is distinct of Colombian bipartisanship. The reinterpretation of *Gaitanismo* is particularly important in relocating the debate on *La Violencia*; if *La Violencia* erupted as an opposition to the *Gaitanista* movement, the origins of the conflict are placed on a different premise. The repression of the ‘third way’ is a continuing theme within Colombian politics. The work of the revolutionary priest, Camilo Torres Restrepo in his essay on the effects of *La Violencia* on the peasant mentality is imperative in gaining an understanding on the enduring impact of *La Violencia* on the people and the political conscience of

²⁴¹ See Catherine LeGrand, 'Agrarian antecedents of the Violence,' in Charles Bergquist, Ricardo; Peñaranda and Gonzalo Sánchez, (eds.) *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in a Historical Perspective* (Wilmington, D.E: Scholarly Resources, 1992) pp. 31-50; Charles Bergquist, 'The Labor Movement (1930-1946) and the Origins of the Violence,' in Charles Bergquist, Ricardo; Peñaranda and Gonzalo Sánchez, (eds.) *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in a Historical Perspective* (Wilmington, D.E: Scholarly Resources, 1992) pp. 51-74.

²⁴² Sharpless, *Gaitán of Colombia*; Braun, *The Assassination of Gaitán*.

the peasantry.²⁴³ Camilo Torres found that the participation of the *campesinos* in the conflict and their process of resistance was key in breaking down the traditional structures, submissive mentality and their isolation. This key text highlights the importance of not only seeing *La Violencia* and domination from above, but also from below as a rebellion.

The Gaitanista programme in modern terms was reformist. Whilst it would have cleared the Colombian system of its existing structures that limited social mobility and held power in the hands of the military and political elite, who were often fused, Gaitán sought popular and nationalist goals to broaden political participation of the masses. His inclusive mission set out to integrate *campesinos*, workers as well as various middle-sector groups as active agents into the social and political fabric of the nation.²⁴⁴ The allure of Gaitán's rhetoric for the masses led to a quasi-religious adoration for the Liberal politician, not only in his stronghold in Bogotá but across Colombia. The urban support for Gaitán came from the increasing urbanisation of the country during the 1940s that created ideological niches for alternative ideas of Colombia's social and political make-up.

La Violencia altered Colombia's social, political and economic development. During the 1940s, the 'seigniorial republic' drawn together with the power of the hacienda, church and political parties continued to form the fundamental composition of social, political and economic life, however the emergence of new collective identities, and new networks of socialisation presented significant changes as *campesinos* began to take part in political socialisation in public squares.²⁴⁵ Whilst these social changes presented a potentially conflictive situation for the ruling elite, Gaitán's presence made it truly explosive. His visibility in public squares to address the masses with an array of symbolic gestures, impassioned speeches opposing the forced silence of the *campesinos* resonated with the masses.

²⁴³ Camilo Torres Restrepo, 'Social Change and Rural Violence in Colombia,' in Irving Louis Horowitz (ed.) *Masses Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970) pp. 503-546.

²⁴⁴ Sharpless, *Gaitán of Colombia*, 130.

²⁴⁵ Gonzalo Sánchez, 'War and Politics in Colombian Society,' p. 25.

Gaitán was particularly distinguishable from other Latin American leaders of the time as he represented a number of political incongruities. As noted by the leading Colombianist, Daniel Pécaut, Gaitán represented the political antagonism between the masses and the elite, which made him a populist leader.²⁴⁶ By setting the elite against the masses, Gaitán was raised to the status of social leader, however in the context of intense competition between the Liberal and Conservative parties, he represented the antagonism between the two parties, making him a traditional political leader. Whilst Gaitán inhibited the ability to gain popularity and mass support, he was at the point of intersection for these contradictions; therefore, although Gaitán is seen as the protagonist for collapse of the Colombian state during the 1940s, he was also part of its preservation.²⁴⁷

The repressive nature of *La Violencia* was not homogenous. Nor did it monopolise the entire political stage of the conflict. Indeed, organised resistance was a key element of *La Violencia*, which shaped the evolution of the conflict in later decades as spontaneous and sporadic rebellions would emerge. The closures of regular channels of political expression through the repressive conditions of *La Violencia* lead to the formation of armed defence groups. In this context we see the emergence of Colombia's rebel groups, as a form of self-defence to confront repression. The proposition here is that the beginnings of Colombia's rebel movement are not linked to the politically minded insurrection project that went on to form the ideological backbone of future rebels, but were a reaction to the official line of terror sponsored by the government.

Armed defence groups fulfilled a variety of functions in this context. In the wake of social movements that had been crushed, they played an important role as political actors leading agrarian unions, peasant leagues and indigenous organisations and as representatives of the Liberal and

²⁴⁶ Daniel Pécaut, *Orden y Violencia: Evolución Socio-Política de Colombia entre 1930 y 1953* (Bogotá: Editorial Norma, 2001).

²⁴⁷ Braun, *Assassination of Gaitán*.

Communist political parties. A number of key agricultural locations formed the basis of these organisations that correlated with the agrarian struggle: Sumapaz, South Tolima, and the Eastern Plains. In Sumapaz the movement was led by Juan de la Cruz Verela, an admirer of Gaitán and migrant who came to the region during the troubling 1920s and was later recruited by the Communist Party. In southern Tolima, home to today's guerrilla forces, the Liberal guerrilla groups led by José María Ovieda²⁴⁸ and the Communist guerrilla groups of Isauro Yosa fled from government forces during competition between the two groups in recruiting *campesinos*.

One of the first known interviews with a member of the guerrilla forces during *La Violencia* was published in June, 1950 in the Venezuelan newspaper, *Últimas Noticias*. The interviewee claimed to be the Secretary of the Chief of the Colombian guerrilla forces, named Luis Buitrago of Tunja.²⁴⁹ Buitrago stated that the Colombian guerrilla forces are in complete control of the Llanos of Casanare in Colombia. He went further to add that the rebel movement has organised a government named '*República Libre de los Llanos de Casanare*', with its army, courts, and civil administration as well an army consisting of 60 commandos organised in groups of 40 men each or a total of 2400 guerrillas. Buitrago claimed that the guerrilla forces could have had more men but they were obliged to turn away volunteers due to a lack of arms. However, some of the volunteers now form part of the civil administration and of the courts. According to Buitrago, guerrilla forces occupied the entrances and exits to the Llanos and some strategic mountain ranges. The reporter asked what towns the army held and Buitrago's reply was that they did not wish to occupy towns as this would lead to massacres by 'Falangist aviators'. When asked whether Falangists were Colombians, Buitrago replied that 'Colombians were not capable of shooting their brothers and that the aviators are Spanish.' He stated that the guerrillas have shot down three planes and found documents in the plane to prove that the pilot was a Spanish Falangist. He added, 'Falangist Spain will never realise its

²⁴⁸ José María Ovieda is also frequently referred to as 'General Mariachi.' Gonzalo Sánchez, 'War and Politics in Colombian Society,' p. 33.

²⁴⁹ *Últimas Noticias*, June, 1950.

colonial dream of the re-conquest of Spanish American Indies while the Llanos are fighting'.²⁵⁰ Whilst the numbers of guerrillas operating in the guerrilla group could have been exaggerated by Buitrago, this interview is significant in illustrating the level of organisation and cooperation that existed within guerrilla groups in the early 1950s.

The Colombian government was largely in denial about the level of guerrilla organisation. Official memorandums between Colombian and American embassy officials, including President Ospina, illustrate that by 1950 very little was known of the activities of guerrillas or bandits in the far reaching areas of the country. The reports of armed conflict in the Llanos were brushed off as involving 'bands of robbers and marauders, not Liberals in rebellion'. It was noted that President Ospina stated that he 'wished it really was a revolutionary force instead of gangs of bandits, for then he was sure he could use the Army to crush it'.²⁵¹

La Violencia saw the organisation of rural peasants. The Eastern Plains saw the greatest synthesis of military and civilian organisation under the leadership of Guadalupe Salcedo who was seen as a key figure in the Colombian guerrilla forces at that time. At the onset of the military government of General Rojas Pinilla (1953-1957), an amnesty was issued to local guerrillas. Under this agreement known as *la entrega*, local guerrilla fighters voluntarily gave in weapons in exchange for legal amnesty. Salcedo was however assassinated during the transition to the National Front, a move that went on to further complicate the relationship between the government and the guerrillas, as they were reluctant to accept future amnesty offers.

The reality of an entire generation of Colombian children and adolescents from 1948 that were socialised in the guerrilla unit is not a facetious claim. The FARC prides itself on including some of the oldest guerrillas in the world,

²⁵⁰ American Embassy, Caracas and Secretary of State, Memorandum of conversation, Washington DC, June 19, 1950, 721.00/6/1950, 3281 RG59, USNA.

²⁵¹ Memorandum of conversation between Ambassador Eduardo Zuleta Angel, Jorge Mejía Palacio – Counsellor of Embassy, Willard L. Barber, Sheldon T. Mills, Albert H. Gerberich, April 14, 1950, 721.00/3-1450, 3281, RG 59, USNA.

the most well-known being Manuel Marulanda Vélez who was part of the Liberal guerrilla forces during *La Violencia* in the 1950s. Guerrilla groups were not only a political force but also held a significant place in the social hierarchy of conflict regions; for many people who had been part of this socialisation process choosing their path in life as a guerrilla was as normal as choosing any other career.

Early guerrillas were fundamentally rural in their leadership and areas of activity. However, the urban element to this movement was significant. Urban networks proved to be useful in allowing rural guerrillas to acquire munitions, arms, funds, food, medicine and other necessary commodities, the most important aspect of this assistance came in the form of intelligence and information of the plans and movements of the government forces.²⁵² Guerrilla groups, despite the widespread polarisation in the society, were incredibly diverse causing precarious alliances to occasionally develop in which conflicts would emerge. Conflicts centred on a wide range of issues from territorial control and influence to diverging opinions on the relations between guerrilla groups and their peasant strongholds. Areas with both Communist and Liberal guerrilla presence were particularly problematic, such as South Tolima and Sumapaz. Here divergences such as the battle between agrarian reform and individual private rights caused significant problems between groups signalling the state of anarchy that had overcome in the regions.

By 1953, the embryonic and disparate guerrilla networks that had been set up in earlier years began to take form into a national guerrilla project. Although this ambitious plan had little chance of materialising it served to deter the elites and government forces from exerting power in regions where guerrillas had established themselves. Within some guerrilla units calls for a new property regime, the regulation of production with available resources in accordance considering local needs, creating channels of power and justice and for redefining the relationship between the masses and guerrillas. These

²⁵² Gonzalo Sánchez, 'War and Politics in Colombian Society,' p. 33.

types of demands illustrate a maturing democratic social project and intended to bring about a new state.

Forms of resistance into the *La Violencia* can be categorised into two paths that were taken by participants. According to leading Colombian scholar, Gonzalo Sánchez, a revolutionary path was followed and led to the emergence of the FARC. Despite the official formation of this national guerrilla group took place in 1965, many of its cadres were scarred by the intensity of *La Violencia* and were part of the self-defence groups in the 1950s.²⁵³ Parallel to the revolutionary path was a regressive trail that branched out to variations of political banditry.

On June 13, 1953 the Colombian army broke its long tradition of non-intervention. Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, Commanding General of the Armed Forces assumed the Presidency of Colombia with the support of the two traditional parties in a bid to curb the excessive levels of violence that had engulfed the nation for five years. In a radio address to the nation, Rojas Pinilla promised free elections in Colombia and reiterated that the army would only be in charge until a new government was organised.

During the Rojas Pinilla years there was a marked reduction in levels of violence. Although violence was not on the same scale as the earlier years of *La Violencia*, nightly attempts to murder political personalities and judges continued. Further unrest was fuelled by dissatisfaction with some of the military government's policies. By 1958, the Liberal and Conservative parties ousted Rojas Pinilla from office to form the *Frente Nacional*. This power-sharing pact did little to relieve the situation in Colombia. Over a decade the intensity of violence in Colombia reached unprecedented levels, fermenting

²⁵³ Groups such as el Ejército Popular de Liberación (EPL), el Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) and el Movimiento 19 de Abril – M-19 emerged either as splinter groups of the FARC or the Communist Party. See: Eduardo Pizarro Leongómez, 'Los Orígenes del Movimiento Armado Comunista en Colombia,' *Análisis Político*, Vol. 7, May–August (1979); Gonzalo Sánchez, 'War and Politics in Colombian Society,' p. 35.

the formation of various self-defence groups and Liberal and Communist guerrillas.

Conclusion

For the political elites in Bogotá, *La Violencia* represented the power of the masses and underlined the rise of the third way. There was a remarkable lack of attention paid to the impact of the intense levels of violence. In an attempt to regain control of the country Conservative and Liberal parties joined to form an unprecedented political alliance. It was hoped that the *Frente Nacional* would bring the warring parties together and cure the ills of Colombian society. However, the process of *La Violencia* brought about extraordinary economic, social and political changes. The displacement and killing of thousands, the practice of state sponsored terror, the organisation of guerrillas and the establishment of criminal bands led to deep insecurities from which the Colombian state has yet to recover from. Although the number and variety of non-state actors involved have increased since *La Violencia*, the fundamental elements of violence continue to shape nature and texture of the Colombian conflict until today. The *Frente Nacional* alliance as a solution to the violence emerged as the 'sole party of the oligarchy' and marked the formal exclusion of the third way.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁴ Diego Montaña, *Colombia: País Formal, País Real* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Plantina, 1963).

Chapter Five

The *Frente Nacional*: Reform and Insurgency, 1958-1969

For scholars of Global Governance, Development Economics International Security super power rivalry fuelled violence in the global South. External support was therefore central to the emergence and growth of non-state armed groups during the Cold War. American-backed counter-insurgency operations in the early 1960s and Cuban and Soviet assistance to guerrillas are given salience as the driving factors in the organisation and growth of current insurgent groups in Colombia. Accordingly, foreign intervention and the formal organisation of guerrilla groups in the 1960s dominate conventional accounts of the beginning of the contemporary Colombian conflict.

By contrast, this thesis focuses on the internal driving forces for Colombian insecurity. The proceeding chapter outlined the historical significance of *La Violencia* for the future of the Colombian conflict. It argued that *La Violencia* brought about structural changes which moved social and political struggles in new directions, characterised by increasing hostility between *campesinos* and the Colombian elite; it institutionalised political repression of the ‘third way’; established the existence of organised criminal bands and marked an increase of new social actors, such as an emerging independent workers’ movement and peasant struggles aligned with agrarian associations, which have shaped the nature of violence in Colombia.

Colombian security is often framed by US foreign policy. For the detractors of US intervention, US activities in Colombia during the 1960s are the hallmark of a foreign policy, which resulted in severe “blowback”.²⁵⁵ For proponents of

²⁵⁵ Doug Stokes, *America’s Other War: Terrorizing Colombia* (London: Zed Books, 2005); Noam Chomsky, *Rogue States: The Rule of Force in World Affairs* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000); Grace Livingstone, *Inside Colombia: Drugs, Democracy and War* (London: Latin American Bureau, 2002); Mario A. Murrillo,

US intervention and assistance in Colombia, US activities during this period is representative of the special and longstanding relationship between the two states, which in terms of military cooperation dates back to the Korean War. US-Latin America security expert Dennis M. Rempe describes the ‘unique role played by the United States in facilitating the development of all aspects of Colombia’s internal security infrastructure’.²⁵⁶ Whilst this literature is useful in exploring bilateral assistance between the US and Colombia, there is a significant lack in social-scientific research on Colombian insurgents during the 1960s as both schools of thought have tended to view Colombian security as a blank canvas for descriptions of Cold War era assistance to the Global South. In short, the subject of Colombian security has been seen almost as a sub-set of American national security policy. In response, this chapter seeks to develop an essential new paradigm that situates Colombia more centrally, meanwhile addressing the disturbing absence of the domestic factors within prevailing regional security theories.

The success of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 dramatically increased popular interest in guerrilla warfare and insurgency during the 1960s. As a result there is a sizeable corpus of case-study accounts and journalistic material describing early guerrilla activities across Latin America.²⁵⁷ A world-wide public fascination with Latin American guerrilla leaders, in particular Ché Guevara, arguably led to a somewhat romanticised notion of insurgency.²⁵⁸

Colombia and the United States: War, Unrest and Destabilization (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003); Bert Ruiz, *The Colombian Civil War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2001). The classic statement of the “blowback” thesis, focusing mostly on US foreign policy in Asia is Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Second Edition, 2004).

²⁵⁶ Dennis M. Rempe, ‘Guerrillas, Bandits, and Independent Republics: US Counter-Insurgency Efforts in Colombia 1959-1965,’ *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 6, Issue 3 (2007) p. 304. See also: Dennis M. Rempe, *The Past as Prologue: A History of US Counterinsurgency Policy in Colombia, 1958-66* (Carlisle, PA: United States Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2002); Richard L. Maullin, *Soldiers, Guerrillas and Politics in Colombia* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1971).

²⁵⁷ Excellent examples include Richard Gott, *Guerrilla Movements in Latin America* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1970); Luis Mercier Vega, *Guerrillas in Latin America: The Technique of the Counter-State* (New York: Praeger, 1969).

²⁵⁸ Jon Lee Anderson, *Ché Guevara: A Revolutionary Life* (London: Grove Press, 2010); Ernesto Guevara and Aleida Guevara March, *The Motorcycle Diaries: Notes on a Latin American Journey* (Minneapolis, MN: Ocean Press, 2003); popular films

Ché Guevara in particular enjoyed celebrity and engaged in a degree of self-promotion. Indeed, this is reflected in the vast amount of biographical material in literature and film.²⁵⁹ However, as Timothy P. Wickam Crowley in his seminal work on guerrillas and revolutions in Latin American argues ‘the romantic, journalistic, and military treatments of guerrillas do not constitute sociological analyses’ of Latin American guerrilla movements and revolutions.²⁶⁰

Remarkably, we still know very little about the Colombia’s security as viewed from within the country. Whilst much ink has been expended on the role and impact of US assistance during the 1960s and wider Latin American guerrilla activities, little has been written on the unique internal political and security conditions that led to the formal organisation of people across the spectrum of Colombian society. Rural *campesinos*, students, revolutionary Roman Catholic clergymen, and trade unionists, together with members of the middle class joined various social movements during the 1960s. By the end of the decade Colombia’s situation was unique amongst its Latin American counterparts: the country was home to three active guerrilla groups, all of which had affiliations to different ideological brands of Communism and Marxism.²⁶¹

include Peter Buchman and Benjamin A. Van der Veen, *Ché, El Argentino*, Directed by Steven Soderbergh (France, Spain and United States, 2008); Peter Buchman and Benjamin A. Van der Veen, *Ché: Guerrilla*, Directed by Steven Soderbergh (France, Spain and United States, 2009); José Rivera, *Motorcycle Dairies*, Directed by Walter Salles (Argentine, United States, Chile, Perú, 2004).

²⁵⁹ Phyllis Passariello, 'Desperately Seeking Something: Ché Guevara as a Secular Saint,' in James Hopgood, (ed.) *The Making of Saints: Contesting Sacred Ground* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005) pp. 75-89.

²⁶⁰ Timothy, P. Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992) p. 5.

²⁶¹ Gott, *Guerrilla Movements in Latin America*, p. 227.

Plan LASO and Foreign Assistance

Plan LASO was the centrepiece of US assistance to Latin America during the 1960s.²⁶² It is a frequent point of departure for the analysis of the Colombian conflict.²⁶³ Accordingly, the literature has focussed heavily on US assistance to Colombia under Plan LASO. Explicit US activities in Colombia began in October 1959. A US Special Survey Team with experience in the Philippines, Vietnam, Korea, other parts of Asia and Latin America was sent to investigate Colombia's internal security problems and possible solutions. This was headed by a colourful CIA officer called Hans Tofte, who had been in charge of covert action during the early phase of the Korean War, before being re-assigned to operations in Guatemala in 1953.²⁶⁴

Tofte's team in Colombia included Colonel Napoleon Valeriano (Philippine and US Army), Major Charles T.R. Bohannon, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph T. Koontz, Colonel Berkeley Lewis and Lieutenant Bruce Walker. During two months of travelling around the country and travelling over 23,000 kilometres, the team spent two months meeting with a range of Colombian actors: political and labour leaders, military commanders, incarcerated bandits and guerrilla fighters and guerrilla leaders.²⁶⁵ The survey team in this initial assessment concluded that violence in Colombia was criminal rather than subversive and suggested that both 'banditry and guerrilla warfare could be substantially reduced within a year by employing a special *Lancero* (Ranger) unit as a mobile counter-guerrilla force'.²⁶⁶ Further emphasis was placed on developing the domestic military intelligence service, implementation of psychological warfare and civic action programmes. Any assistance provided

²⁶² Plan LASO refers to the Latin American Security Operation.

²⁶³ See notes on the literature in footnotes 1 and 2 of this chapter.

²⁶⁴ Memorandum From the Chief of the Western Hemisphere Division, Central Intelligence Agency (King) to the Deputy Director for Plans of the Central Intelligence Agency (Wisner)/1/, Document 49, Foreign Relations, Guatemala, 1952-1954, (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2003).

²⁶⁵ Dennis M. Rempe, *Past as Prologue*, p. 5.

²⁶⁶ Rempe 'Guerrillas, Bandits, and Independent Republics,' p. 306.

to Colombia for internal security reasons was to be 'sterile and covert in nature' to avoid accusations of an interventionist policy.²⁶⁷

By the summer of 1962, US activities in Colombia had expanded quite remarkably. A further assessment was carried out by the Yarrow team in 1962, which led to the Colombian Internal Defence Plan. This plan integrated military, economic, social and political efforts in Colombia and included a wide range of measures to curb violence.²⁶⁸ However, it is the military element of this plan that has received most attention in the literature for this period of Colombian history. Under Plan LASO, military action targeted bandits and guerrilla forces with a particular emphasis on destroy and capture techniques.²⁶⁹ Key elements of Plan LASO included counter-guerrilla training to Colombian security forces and the reorganisation of the Ministry of War in December 1965.

The US was not only source of foreign assistance given to Colombia in the early 1960s. British involvement in training the National Police force is a currently the missing dimension of this body of literature. Colombia's National Police during this period was highly inefficient and had strong partisan affiliations. There are numerous accounts of police brutality from the period of *La Violencia*. As part of the shake-up of the Colombian security forces the British provided training for the National Police force that drew on their recent experiences in Malaya. British training paralleled similar advice proffered to South Vietnam by another training mission.²⁷⁰ In an attempt to curb violence, the British training forces recommended the close-cooperation between the Army, Police and Civil Administration through a Joint Intelligence Committee; formation of a psychological warfare section; integration of the criminal investigation of DAS (*Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad*, Administrative Department of Security), the country's premier intelligence

²⁶⁷ Rempe, 'Guerrillas, Bandits, and Independent Republics,' p. 306.

²⁶⁸ This assessment also recognised the social problems facing the country and proposed civic action programmes in violent zones.

²⁶⁹ Rempe, 'Guerrillas, Bandits, and Independent Republics,' pp. 304-327.

²⁷⁰ Peter Busch, *All the way with JFK? Britain, the US, and the Vietnam War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

agency, with the National Police Force; formation of camps for the rehabilitation of terrorists; re-orientation of bandit statistics and more foot patrols in towns and cities.²⁷¹ Whilst US funding for such operations was three times that available to the British, this element of foreign assistance illustrates that the *Frente Nacional* went to some lengths to secure foreign assistance to address its internal security conditions. However, foreign intervention in Colombia during the 1960s and the counter-guerrilla operations that followed this foreign training, while important, are not sufficient enough to explain the establishment of dissident political movements involving a broad swathe of Colombian society and insurgent groups. Notably, the internal political dynamics have received little attention in the literature: the political impasse between the coalition parties, the social and economic conditions following *La Violencia* and the organisation and growth of social and guerrilla movements in both rural and urban Colombia amongst *campesinos*, students and the Catholic Church.

The *Frente Nacional*

The implementation of the *Frente Nacional* marked the end of one cycle of Colombian political history. The military government of Rojas Pinilla united the Liberal and Conservative parties through the shared fear of ‘third way’ – an extremist alternative to the status quo, which could have ranged from a social revolution or Falangist dictatorship. This led to the formation a long-term power-sharing pact, which was implemented through a constitutional amendment approved by a plebiscite. This system of government was implemented in such a way as to provide both with the guarantee of equal power distribution. The central features of this peculiar system were the alternation of presidencies every four years and the equal distribution of all public and legislative posts between the Liberal and Conservative parties. Consequently, this also marked the formal exclusion of any third parties from

²⁷¹ British Embassy, Bogotá and American Department, Memorandum of Conversation, London, August 1, 1963, A 1644/18, FO 371/167824, TNA.

any share of political power and the result was the marginalisation and alienation of political groups from the democratic process.

The *Frente Nacional* aimed to usher in a new era of peace and reconciliation. Headed by the Liberal Alberto Lleras Camargo and Conservative Laureano Gómez, it was hoped that a period of peace and unity would in turn lead to the social and economic development of the country. The first presidency of the *Frente Nacional* was undertaken by the Liberal leader, Alberto Lleras. President Lleras hoped that the *Frente Nacional* would reconcile the Liberal and Conservative centre ground around a great programme of economic progress and social justice as ‘the adequate solution to the Colombian problem’.²⁷² This highly regarded politician had previously held the presidency for a brief period between 1945 and 1946 following the resignation of Alfonso López Pumarejo, and was also the Secretary General of the Organisation of American States (OAS) from 1948 to 1954. Described as the ‘driving force’ behind the political pact of the *Frente Nacional* and a successful conciliator, he was seen as the natural leader for inaugurating the new bi-partisan coalition.²⁷³

In April 1959, President Lleras offered a commentary on the domestic situation in a radio and television address to the nation. During this speech, he attempted to reassure Colombians by reiterating that the two major problems of political violence and economic difficulties facing the country had been ‘largely overcome’. The President severely castigated the ‘enemies of the National Front’ who used techniques such as ‘fomenting *coups d’états*, conspiracies and resorting to arms as a political instrument’, meanwhile painting a rather optimistic economic picture with reference to the improved situation of balance of payments as well as agricultural and industrial

²⁷² American Embassy, Bogotá and Secretary of State, Memorandum of Conversation, Washington DC, January 28, 1961, 721.00/2-1661, 1543, RG 59, USNA.

²⁷³ Central Intelligence Bulletin, Daily Brief, I, The Communist Bloc, April 26, 1958.

production.²⁷⁴ Despite assurances from the President, the economic situation was in fact one of the 'greatest difficulties' Colombia faced during this period.

From 1958, growing inflation drove the peso down and Colombia's coffee prices fell by around 20 per cent. Moreover, increased spending under the previous administration of General Rojas Pinilla meant that the *Frente Nacional* inherited sizable debts from the previous regime.²⁷⁵ President Lleras' positive rhetoric was largely geared towards building confidence in the coalition among the demoralised Colombian population. High levels of violence persisting since the onset of *La Violencia*, a growing distrust of the politicised national police force and a general alienation from all government, judicial and political institutions presented a grave challenge to the President.

Against expectations, during the 1960s the development agenda of President Lleras was able to drive significant economic growth.²⁷⁶ Despite little change in the overall patterns of inequality in the country, there were advances in transportation and communications infrastructure and the development of mass media, which served to lessen the divide between the geographically divided regions of Colombia. However, the bi-partisan coalition was less successful in countering the growing phenomenon of guerrilla insurgency, which during this period was able to mobilise effectively under various umbrella organisations. The agrarian question of Colombia had reached a crossroads. Thus, while the *Frente Nacional* was presented to the public as a negotiated exit strategy out of *La Violencia*, in fact it inaugurated a new phase of violence.

Colombian politics have always been fissiparous in nature. However, during the early years of the *Frente Nacional* the coalition was particularly weak. The political pact between the Liberals and Conservatives faced considerable opposition from within their own parties. Political factions that had formed prior

²⁷⁴ American Embassy, Bogotá and Secretary of State, Memorandum of Conversation, Washington DC, May 5, 1959, 721.00/5-559, 2998, RG 59, USNA.

²⁷⁵ Central Intelligence Bulletin, The Communist Bloc.

²⁷⁶ David Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself* (Oxford: University of California Press, 1993) pp. 230-240.

to *La Violencia* continued to grow with politicians gravitating towards the far right and far left of the Liberal and Conservative parties. The increasing levels of ideological extremism created a political impasse in terms of policy-making and implementation. Moreover, the ousted former leader General Rojas Pinilla formed his own political movement, the *Alianza Nacional Popular* (National Popular Alliance, ANAPO), in opposition to the *Frente Nacional* presenting a further challenge to the fragile coalition. The difficult economic conditions across the country aggravated many sectors of Colombian society, who had suffered immensely during *La Violencia*. During the first decade of the coalition, there was a widespread mobilisation of the peasantry, youth and other groups that caused considerable problems for the political stability of the *Frente Nacional*.

In social terms, the situation was particularly bleak. *La Violencia* had caused carnage in the Colombian countryside with some 1,500,000 displaced rural *campesinos*.²⁷⁷ Whilst in official terms the civil war had ended, the early 1960s nevertheless saw a steady increase in rural violence. Between January and May 1961 alone, over 1038 persons were killed, in comparison to 892 persons for the same period in 1960.²⁷⁸ As discussed in chapter three, the conventional wisdom on civil war is to use death counts as an indication of the onset and ending of war. However, in the case of Colombia this methodology poses serious questions, as the number of deaths does not indicate the ending of any civil war period. In this context, perhaps we are better placed to see the Colombian conflict as one continuous cycle of conflict with periodic phases of increased violence.

Increased levels of violence coincided with a growing lack of confidence in the courts, police and army. The National Police in particular was an inefficient and partisan force, and distrusted by the public. So-called 'independent republics', consisting of displaced *campesinos* and 'self-defence' groups, were able to establish a degree of autonomy from the central government and

²⁷⁷ Central Intelligence Bulletin, Colombia: General Instability Threatened, May 24, 1961.

²⁷⁸ *ibid.*

in the midst of a deep seated fear of communist infiltration following the success of the Cuban Revolution, these peasant enclaves were at the centre of government and Army efforts to rid the country of guerrillas. Independent republics that were controlled by Liberal or Communist guerrilla forces, included broad swathes of Colombian territory in southern Cundinamarca and eastern Tolima: Agriari, Viotá, Tequendama, Sumapaz, El Pato, Guayabero, Suroeste del Tolima, Río Chiquito, 26 de Septiembre and perhaps the most famous, the Independent Republic of Marquetalia.²⁷⁹

The Colombian elite decided that they could no longer continue with the status quo. Government traction over the main political institutions had been at serious risk from 1946 and was judged to be slipping away. *La Violencia* had clearly illustrated the capabilities of rural masses. An abiding fear of the 'third way' launched the two main political parties into a constitutionally bound and quite peculiar political pact. However, the agrarian question was inescapable and on the forefront of the country's political agenda at the onset of the *Frente Nacional*. Generous estimates from 1961 suggest that 3.5 per cent of landowners owned 65 per cent of the arable land.²⁸⁰ Some records also suggest that that 62.5 per cent of Colombian farmers subsisted on less than 1 per cent of the arable land.²⁸¹ In the midst of this social, political and economic turmoil, the *Frente Nacional* under the leadership of the President Lleras was geared towards a very ambitious reform agenda, which aimed not only to stabilize the country but also to maintain broad elite control of the main levers of the Colombian political economy.

²⁷⁹ Report: The Violence Problem, from American Embassy to Bogotá and Secretary of State, Washington DC, May 3, 1962, 721.00/5-362, 1544, RG 59, USNA.

²⁸⁰ American Embassy, Bogotá and Secretary of State, Memorandum of conversation Washington DC, May 29, 1961, 721.00/5-2961,1543, RG 59, USNA. Also see, Frank Stafford and Marco Palacios, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) p. 309.

²⁸¹ Garry Leech, *The FARC: The Longest Insurgency* (London: Zed Books, 2011) p. 19. Data derived from Stafford and Palacios, *Colombia* p. 309.

Opposition to the *Frente Nacional*: Party Splits and ANAPO

The *Frente Nacional* faced a twofold problem of legitimacy. Firstly, the bi-partisan coalition was formed by the very political elites who were seen as the agitators of *La Violencia*. Therefore, from the outset, the *Frente Nacional* was embroiled in a battle of legitimacy against those who were excluded from the political alliance. The first test the coalition faced was the trial of the former military leader General Rojas Pinilla which was used by the *Frente Nacional* as a means of absolving the Liberal and Conservative parties of any responsibility for the horrors of *La Violencia*. In October 1958, to the displeasure of both of the political parties, Rojas Pinilla returned from exile and was brought before the Colombian Senate and was tried for a number of exaggerated misdeeds in office including accusations of corruption. The rather theatrical trial found Rojas guilty on two accounts, violation of the Constitution and conduct unbecoming a president. The sentence deprived of Rojas of his political rights, including his right to vote, hold office and engage in partisan activities, and although this was later overturned by the Colombian Supreme Court, the trial had grave consequences for the coalition. The fallen dictator proceeded to become a living symbol of those Colombians who were politically excluded from the bi-partisan pact and was a force to be reckoned with. Until his death in 1974, Rojas did all he could to make life difficult for those people who overthrew him. He organised a political movement, *Alianza Nacional Popular* (ANAPO) of a strongly populist flavour, which was able to capture the support of those who grew disillusioned with the *Frente Nacional* throughout the 1960s.²⁸²

Secondly, the coalition faced opposition from factions within the Liberal and Conservative parties who actively distrusted each other. President Lleras warned the nation of the dangers ahead in a series of speeches in which he attempted to halt the deterioration of the newly created political consensus. Whilst there was no fighting involved, the President stressed that the

²⁸² Bushnell, *Making of Modern Colombia*, p. 228.

possibility of this was 'latent and near'.²⁸³ Liberals on the left wing of the party, in particular the former followers of Gaitán, wanted to retain control of the government, given that the last congressional electoral results in 1958 showed that the party had more popular support. Moreover, their dislike of their coalition partners, the Conservative party, was still deeply embedded. The fear here was that the Conservatives would perpetuate themselves once they gained power.²⁸⁴ As the co-founder of coalition, President Lleras could not concede to the demands of the left wing, as to do so would deny his own handiwork; therefore he issued a threat to resign office if the alternation provision did not work as a strategy to pacify the opposing Liberals.

The coalition was precarious. Divisions within the Conservative party particularly endangered the *Frente Nacional*. The Conservatives were deeply divided between supporters of the former presidents of the party, Laureano Gómez and Mariano Ospina Pérez. This split was formalised in the congressional elections in March 1960 where abstentions reached 50 per cent and had paralysing effect on the operation of the coalition. Conservative divisions that were primarily battles for party predominance quickly transmitted themselves to the national political arena. Whilst the issues of the basic economic and social problems that faced the country were certainly not new, these matters were now driving the political agenda. Political and economic leaders increasingly addressed these issues in terms of immediate action or proposed ameliorative legislation.²⁸⁵ Bitter feuding and divergent opinions on how to deal with issues such as agrarian reform, tax reform, education, transportation, labour and demonstrations against the rising cost of living therefore propelled internal party divisions into the national sphere. The general air of pessimism led many to the question of whether the coalition system commanded sufficient authority to avoid extremist upheaval, despite its constitutional status.

²⁸³ American Embassy, Bogotá and Secretary of State, Memorandum of conversation, Washington DC, June 6, 1960, 721.00/6-660, 1542, RG 59, USNA.

²⁸⁴ American Embassy, Bogotá and Secretary of State, Memorandum of conversation. Washington DC, March 19, 1959, 721.00/3-1959, 2998, RG 59, USNA.

²⁸⁵ American Embassy, Bogotá and Secretary of State, Memorandum of conversation, Washington DC, October 20, 1960, 721.00/10-1960, 1542, RG 59, USNA.

Opposition to the coalition also manifested itself in traditional elite circles. They worried that such a public display of political unity between the traditional parties was not desirable as it could lead to the mobilisation of the masses against both ruling parties. On April 10, 1959, a luncheon party of distinguished Colombians took place including a Conservative ex-president and a prominent Liberal who also served in a previous government as Minister of Foreign Affairs. This meeting of Colombia's gerontocracy came to the conclusion that the *Frente Nacional* coalition as a symbol of unity between the traditional parties could ferment a revolution in the absence of a 'vertical cleavage' in Colombian society. In the absence of real political competition amongst the mainstream parties, they concluded, rather cynically, that the division of the masses at the lower end according to political affiliation was necessary.²⁸⁶

The ANAPO was able to make significant progress through the divisions in the Conservative party. Formed in 1961 by the former military leader Rojas Pinilla, the ANAPO (like the ruling coalition) was bi-partisan with both Liberal and Conservative wings. Taking advantage of the factionalism in the coalition, Rojas Pinilla was able to benefit from the divisions within the Conservative party by uniting his old collaborators from the party and the supporters of Ospina Pérez, who were also opposed to the alternation system. The ANAPO's colours of red, white and blue were particularly significant as former and latter colours were the respective colours of the Liberal and Conservative parties. For ANAPO, this was representative of the peaceful, bi-partisan make-up of the movement, which Rojas Pinilla used to urge his supporters to 'rise above the old party hatreds'.²⁸⁷

Rojas Pinilla adopted a both a nationalistic and vaguely leftist political stance. Mixing popular nationalism with a degree of socialism, he proposed an expanded programme of public works and infrastructure. His nationalist ideals

²⁸⁶ British Embassy, Bogotá and American, Department, Memorandum of conversation, London, July 8, 1959, AL 1015/13, FO 371/139524, TNA.

²⁸⁷ Bushnell, *Making of Modern Colombia*, p. 229.

emphasised the traditional values of family, religion and community, as one would have expected from the former military leader. However, it was Rojas Pinilla's condemnation of the traditional political parties and the disparity of wealth in Colombia that struck a chord with the urban masses, particularly the lower and lower middle classes. The fundamental political base of support for Rojas Pinilla was from non-unionised workers, many of who were victims to the Colombia's chronic problem of unemployment and the poorest class of peasants who had not benefitted from the government's agrarian reform.²⁸⁸ For the former military leader, the *Frente Nacional* was an alliance between the oligarchs who were fighting to defend their position of power at the expense of the Colombian people, a tone that is reminiscent of Gaitán. The prominence of socio-economic issues on the political agenda, such as the rising cost of living, tremendous inequalities and inflation enabled the ANAPO's populist agenda gain momentum as Gaitán did during the 1940s. The ANAPO was therefore able to effectively channel popular discontent with the socio-economic situation as well as provide an umbrella organisation for those Liberals and Conservatives who remained loyal to Rojas Pinilla and opposed to the *Frente Nacional*.

On election days, ANAPO candidates represented their respective political parties, either Liberal or Conservative, like other mainstream factions of the traditional parties. Rojas Pinilla entered the electoral arena with ANAPO in 1962 and despite a modest start of 104,829 votes by 1964 the movement had tripled its support drawing 309,678 votes. Two years later in the congressional elections, ANAPO received 523,000 votes and in the presidential election of 1966, under the candidacy of the Liberal José Jaramillo Giraldo, the movement received 742,133 of the votes.²⁸⁹ ANAPO peaked during the elections of April 19 1970 in which Rojas Pinilla presented himself as a presidential candidate. He ran under the Conservative party label for the

²⁸⁸ CIA records, American University Field Staff Reports, 'Rojismo: the Resurgence of Colombian Populism,' *Latin America*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (April, 1970).

²⁸⁹ Gonzalo Sánchez, 'The Violence: An Interpretative Synthesis' in Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda and Gonzalo Sánchez, (eds.) *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in a Historical Perspective* (Wilmington, D.E: Scholarly Resources, 1992) p. 114.

presidential term from 1970 to 1974, which under the *Frente Nacional* alternation agreement was reserved for a Conservative candidate. A notably close election result led to the case of being brought before the Electoral Court, which to the displeasure of many ANAPO supporters ruled in favour of his rival, Pastrana Borrero, on 15 July 1970.

The Agrarian Question and Evolution of Violence

For ordinary Colombians, violence continued to be a part of daily life under the *Frente Nacional*. The ruling coalition had only just begun to realise the true extent of the underlying social problems in Colombia and its role in the continuation of violence in some areas. Despite the identification of the direct link between the underlying agrarian problem and *La Violencia* in 1953, it was almost three years into the first administration of the *Frente Nacional* before political leaders suggested that political agitation at the local level over land distribution was the main causal factor in the continued outbreaks of violence.²⁹⁰ There was a gradual acceptance in both public and political spheres that a sustainable social equilibrium was not possible without addressing the agrarian issue. However, despite the growing consciousness of the true dimensions of the conflict, there were few indications that the *Frente Nacional* could implement redistributive measures to deal with the violence. In rural areas and small towns, peace was a distant promise and so the remnants of the previous phase of violence, *La Violencia*, contributed to the evolution of various armed bands.

Agrarian issues remained at the core of the renewed phase of violence. Following the abortive attempts at agrarian reform during the first administration of Alfonso López Pumarejo, under the banner of *la Revolución*

²⁹⁰ American Embassy, Bogotá and Secretary of State, Memorandum of Conversation, Washington DC, January 28, 1961, 721.00/1-2761,1543, RG 59, USNA.

en Marcha, there were few credible efforts at addressing the issue.²⁹¹ However, social questions haunted government officials and the widespread turmoil during *La Violencia* served to keep the agrarian question on the political agenda, connecting conflict over land with other issues of state deprivation and poor educational provision. Social reform was increasingly viewed as a palliative measure to appease the needs of the masses, in effect a preventative measure against social disorder. Official acknowledgement of the issue of land redistribution in rural areas led to the implementation of a developmental programme under President Lleras. A series of social and economic programmes were designed to rehabilitate the areas that had suffered the worst effects of *La Violencia*. In 1968, constitutional change provided the executive branch of government with extended powers, such as the ability to declare a 'state of national economic and social emergency'. This would allow the president to bypass Congress and approve social reforms in times of need, but it was not widely used.

Demographic problems also kept social reform at the top of the political agenda. Colombia now boasted a comparatively high birth rate of 2.8 per cent. The rapidly growing population presented stark challenges to the provision of public services, especially in area of education. The deteriorating social and economic situation in the rural areas of the country was hard to ignore. Around 17.5 per cent of the population in urban areas were matriculating, whilst amongst the rural population only seven per cent were attending school in the early 1960s; the discrepancy was markedly wider in isolated areas. This was important given that approximately 44 per cent of the total population of Colombia was at the time under the age of 14.²⁹²

²⁹¹ Alvaro Tirado Mejía, *La Revolución en Marcha y la Reforma Constitucional de 1936* (Bogotá: Universidad Externado de Colombia, 1985).

²⁹² American Embassy, Bogotá and Secretary of State, Memorandum of Conversation, Washington DC, May 29, 1961, 721.00/5-2961,1543, RG 59, USNA. The data was extracted by officials from the 'most comprehensive study of economic and social conditions' by the Misión, Economía y Humanismo under the leadership of the Jesuit priest, Louis Joseph Le Bret, entitled, *Estudio sobre las Condiciones del Desarrollo de Colombia*. No print copy of the report was available at the time of travel to Colombia.

There was a growing awareness of the extremes of income distribution. Some 4.6 per cent of the population subject to income tax enjoyed 40 per cent of the income. Population growth was driving an urban housing shortage and there was a deficit of 247,449 homes in the cities, which was increasing at an annual rate of around 23,000. Whilst the production of basic food staples used by the lower classes – yucca, panela, potatoes, corn, onions and rice had increased in absolute terms since the end of the 1940s, it declined in terms of the production on a per capita basis, as did the production of cattle and meat products. The agrarian question was the most difficult; estimates showed that 3.5 per cent of landowners owned 65 per cent of the arable land.²⁹³ Despite the huge disparities, very few in Bogotá had the political stomach for measures that might entail significant redistribution.

These figures illuminate the scale of the social and economic challenges faced by Colombia post-*La Violencia*. Indeed, they underpinned the problems associated with rampant violence and political insecurities during the early phases of the *Frente Nacional*. It is not so much that the situation had worsened dramatically in social and economic terms during the early 1960s, but more that these problems had moved into the political sphere following the horrors of *La Violencia*. During the 1960s, social issues came to dominate the Colombian political agenda and became the point of departure for political campaigns throughout the country. The illiterate, malnourished, homeless, medically unattended and the unemployed could no longer be ignored as they had been during past decades. However, the fissiparous political system lacked the capacity and drive to adequately address these problems. Indeed, Colombian politics in the 1960s could be aptly described as a peculiar combination of colonial paternalism, nineteenth century *laissez faire* combined with superficial and abstract commitments to greater social justice.

An attempt at social reform under President Lleras was underway. In 1961, the *Instituto Colombiano de Reforma Agraria* (INCORA) was authorised to expropriate privately owned estates and redistribute to those who had little or

²⁹³ American Embassy, Bogotá and Secretary of State, Memorandum of Conversation, Washington DC, May 29, 1961, 721.00/5-2961,1543, RG 59, USNA.

no land. Whilst this move by the coalition government may seem radical, the legislative barriers, protected court cases and opposition from the *Sociedad de Agricultores de Colombia* (Colombian Society of Agriculturalists, SAC) made expropriation difficult and politically impossible. In fact, the main emphasis of this initiative was to diffuse possible sources of rural unrest without disrupting the status quo in rural areas or impeding the production of agricultural goods.²⁹⁴ The comments of President Lleras on social reform are particularly important in explaining the official governmental position on the issue. In the inaugural edition of the Liberal weekly *Política*, the President stated that whilst the government is committed to social reform, the 'government cannot promote a revolution nor follow a policy not supported by the two traditional parties'.²⁹⁵ The interests of the political parties in rural areas could not therefore be subordinated to meet the wider societal needs. Accordingly, under the INCORA initiative *campesinos* were placed on land that was reclaimed for agricultural purposes, such as plantations for cotton, rice, sugar and coffee production. The INCORA initiative therefore served to protect those families who suffered from the repeated subdivision of land among family members and to give landless *campesinos* land without disturbing the existing system of production in rural areas.²⁹⁶

In the late 1960s, the presidency of Carlos Lleras Restrepo deliberately accelerated the pace of agrarian reform. This was signalled by the creation of *Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos* (ANUC), a nationwide organisation of peasant farmers. ANUC branches were organised throughout the country and by 1970, over 75 per cent of Colombia's one million

²⁹⁴ The formation of INCORA and its accomplishments have been at the centre of a scholarly debate amongst area specialists: Albert O. Hirschman, *Journeys toward Progress* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1963); Álvaro Tirado Mejía, *Introducción a la Historia Económica de Colombia*, (Bogotá, Universidad Nacional, 1971); Darío M. Fajardo, *Haciendas, Campesinas y Políticas Agrarias en Colombia, 1920-1980* (Bogotá: Editorial La Oveja Negra, 1983); Herbet Felstehausen, 'Agrarian Reform: Colombia,' in Peter Dorner, (ed.) *Land Reform in Latin America: Issues and Cases* (Madison, Wisconsin: Land Economics, 1971) pp. 167-183; Salomón Kalmanovitz, *Desarrollo de la Agricultura en Colombia* (Bogotá: Editorial La Carreta, 1978).

²⁹⁵ American Embassy, Bogotá and Secretary of State, Memorandum of Conversation, Washington DC, February 16, 1961, 721.00/2-1661, 1543, RG 59, USNA.

²⁹⁶ Bushnell, *Making of Modern Colombia*, p. 232.

campesinos were listed as members. Following the administration's renewed commitment to social reform, ANUC were empowered to deal with local issues and to implement meaningful land redistribution. However, this measure was met with considerable resistance from government officials and the resulting rise in public expectations had serious implications for rural violence. Land invasions became commonplace and official support for land distribution waned. The ANUC was promptly taken up by the left and used it as a mechanism to progress the revolutionary agenda. Ironically, this attempt to promote agrarian reform eventually led to harsh state repression during the 1970s and the renewal of violence coincided with the decline of the *Frente Nacional*.

Political competition under the fragile legitimacy of the *Frente Nacional* led to internal struggles for power in rural areas. A remarkable disconnect between urban politicians and their counterparts in distant rural provinces meant that the implications of rural actions were not always understood by those in Bogotá. Government officials eventually wrote to the leaders of the various political factions within the Liberal and Conservative parties requesting their cooperation in combating the violence.²⁹⁷ They explained that one of the unintended reasons for the renewal of violence was 'partisan political agitation which has many manifestations and translates itself principally into the internal struggles of various groups for predominance in positions of authority and repression in the villages of the affected zones'. At times they envisaged a worrying return to the worst phase of violence, *La Violencia*, which was characterised by the patronage and protection of the perpetrators of violence by political organisations.²⁹⁸

In fact the more remote areas of Colombia suffered continued violence throughout the 1960s. This reminds us that the epochs of the country's evolution of violence reflect predominantly urban sensibilities. The end of *La*

²⁹⁷ The divisions within the traditional parties included the *Movimiento Revolucionario Liberal* (MRL) as part of the Liberal party as well as the Ospinistas and Laureanistas from the Conservative party.

²⁹⁸ American Embassy, Bogotá and Secretary of State, Memorandum of Conversation, Washington DC, January 28, 1961, 721.00/1-2761, 1543, RG 59, USNA.

Violencia did not mean peace or the end of unrest. In 1961, a state of siege was declared in five departments of Colombia. This consisted of Caldas, Cauca, Huila, Tolima and Valle del Cauca together with heavy outbreaks of violence in the departments of Antioquia, Santander and Meta. The primary highways in the country from the cities of Cali to Medellín and from Cali to Bogotá ran through the worst affected areas, stunting transportation. During January 1961 alone, 114 violent rural deaths were reported, consisting of mainly peasants and some policemen and bandits, marking a significant increase since the end of *La Violencia*.²⁹⁹ Whilst eyewitness accounts of crimes or killings have long been difficult to obtain due to motivations of self-preservation or fear of reprisals on the part of witnesses, this wave of violence undoubtedly saw an increase in politically motivated killings. With some murders, reports showed an implicit political motive related to Liberal-Conservative competition. Mutilated, decapitated, beheaded bodies served as political warnings to those still alive in small towns and villages. Urban government officials appeared bewildered as to who perpetrated such crimes – criminals, bandits, leftist guerrillas or partisan civilian political factions, reflecting the lack of knowledge and intelligence of activities outside of the country's main cities.

The rural department of Valle experienced the worst of the violence in this renewed phase of trouble. Under a state of siege, Valle saw the majority of the nationwide death count. On January 21 1961, the worst single massacre in the year occurred in the mountainous rural area near the town of Ansermanuevo. According to official documents, a guerrilla band, dressed in official military clothing marched fourteen *campesinos* from their homes. The fourteen captives were questioned with regards to their political affiliation and two who stated that they were Conservatives were released. The remaining twelve, presumed to be Liberal supporters, were shot dead.³⁰⁰ This example of mass murders in one department of Colombia is exemplary of the renewal of violence in the name of political affiliation, which had defined the earlier

²⁹⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰⁰ American Embassy, Bogotá and Secretary of State, Memorandum of Conversation. Washington DC, January 28, 1961, 721.00/2-1661, 1543, RG 59, USNA.

phase of the conflict, *La Violencia*. Whilst this example is illustrative of violence against Liberal supporters, the endemic level of violence was not directed at or carried out by any one particular political group.

Urban politicians did not foresee how their actions would impact violence in rural areas. As one political leader explained, 'two opposing politicians can make bitter speeches against each other's party in the Congress and when it is all over they will congratulate each other. But, heard over the radio in the rural countryside, where bitterness is deep and historic, it will move opposing elements to violence'.³⁰¹ In 1960, President Lleras gave an inflammatory speech in the troubled department of Cauca in which he 'invited the country to crusade against the Colombian left'.³⁰² Local leaders from the left wing faction of the Liberal party, the *Movimiento Revolucionario Liberal* (MRL), later reported that their supporters had also been victim to the ensuing violence. The MRL explained that the source of the political agitation was centred on the fight for the presidency that was greatly complicated by the system of alternation of power.

The neighbouring department of Caldas together with Valle constituted the area of intense rural violence. Guerrillas and bandits were able to trawl the mountainous terrain at will, passing through the common frontier between the two departments. Whilst the majority of the violent killings occurred in the rural regions, the victims of such attacks varied. In Caldas, the Quindio River area saw the killing of a six-year-old child, the burning of three homes as well as a school during the same period. In Antioquia, a department of endemic violence, reports claimed a guerrilla band decapitated eleven *campesinos* in the mining town of Segovia of both of Liberal and Conservative affiliation and stole their belongings.³⁰³ Whilst partisan politics can explain some cases of

³⁰¹ American Embassy, Bogotá and Secretary of State, Memorandum of Conversation. Washington DC, January 28, 1961, 721.00/1-2761, 1543, RG 59, USNA.

³⁰² American Embassy, Bogotá and Secretary of State, Memorandum of Conversation, Washington DC, January 28, 1961, 721.00/2-1661, 1543, RG 59, USNA.

³⁰³ *ibid.*

violence, guerrilla activity, extrajudicial killings by local authorities, criminal activity and banditry were also commonplace.

In late January 1960, the Governors of Valle, Caldas and Santander toured the areas afflicted with violence. The detailed reports generated by these tours give an insight into the reaction of Colombian officials and the changing nature of their understanding of rural violence during this period. On January 20, 1960, following an eight day tour of the department of Valle, the Governor of Valle, Alonso Aragon Quintero, acknowledged both political and economic factors as causal elements in the increase of violence. In particular, ‘the divergences among groups, the anarchy of the parties, the struggle for directive positions and bureaucratic jobs, rekindled hate and sectarian intransigence in many people’.³⁰⁴ The lack of police forces to adequately patrol the rugged terrain in the mountainous regions was also highlighted as an obstacle to achieving local security. For many of those who had recently acquired land during the *La Violencia* years, there was a fear that a return to normality would lead to the return of the rightful owners to claim back their property and land. In short, the peculiar political factionalism amongst urban politicians during the era of *Frente Nacional* served to exacerbate more fundamental tensions related to land in remote rural areas.

Theories of civil conflict have largely failed to provide explanatory frameworks for the persistence of violent conflict in the global South. The focus on the “new” and “greedy” elements of violence have obscured the historical tensions that plague developing countries, with little reference to the role of states and governments in the perpetuation of violence. For decades, the Colombian political elite ignored the country’s social ills. Few in Bogotá made real attempts for change. Whilst *La Violencia* brought carnage to the countryside, the legacy of this phase of violence brought the rural and agrarian question at the forefront of the Colombian political agenda. The reform initiative of the 1960s under the *Frente Nacional* was largely a failure. Politicians who recognised the country’s social and economic problems were confined to the margins of the main political parties under extremist wings. This political

³⁰⁴ *ibid.*

impasse was further compounded by the fear of communist infiltration, which often allowed domestic agitation for social justice to be misrepresented as external subversion.

Revolutionary Movements: The Cuban Factor

The Cuban Revolution, which made noisy promises to export insurgency, fuelled the fear of communist infiltration amongst the Colombian political elite. The declaration of a crusade against communism by the *Frente Nacional* is particularly indicative of the deep anxiety on the part of government officials in Bogotá. The boisterous claims by the Cuban Revolution that they were promoting insurgency campaigns across Latin America and inside Colombia were exaggerated. Ironically, it was paranoia that led to the heightening of counter-insurgency campaigns in rural areas and government-sponsored violence against peasant enclaves (particularly those who were already victims of violence during *La Violencia*) that led to the emergence of organised armed groups in rural areas.³⁰⁵

The Colombian government had received repeated reports Cuban arms and propaganda was stimulating the violence in rural Colombia. However, despite some evidence of pro-Castro propaganda activity, by February 1961, reports of arms of Cuban origin having entered Colombia had still not been confirmed.³⁰⁶ Moreover, an investigation carried out by the Colombian civil and military officials in co-operation with the American consulate in Bogotá found that the shipments of arms into northwest Colombia came from Panama with the 'open or tacit consent' of Panamanian officials. All arms were found to be of U.S or western origin and did not come from Cuba or the Soviet bloc. The emergence of armed groups during the 1960s in Colombia must therefore be re-examined to take account of local perspectives rather than interpreted

³⁰⁵ Jorge I. Domínguez, *To Make a World Safe for Revolution: Cuba's Foreign Policy* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989) pp. 12-36.

³⁰⁶ American Embassy, Bogotá and Secretary of State, Memorandum of Conversation, Washington DC, February 17, 1961, 721.00/2-1761, 1543, RG 59, USNA.

as a spillover effect of the Cuban revolution or Cold War rivalry.³⁰⁷ At the same time both Colombian officials and local American diplomats were very much the intellectual prisoners of their anti-communist fears.³⁰⁸

In terms of ideas, the success of the Cuban revolution undoubtedly provided greater ideological credibility to the Colombian left. However, rather than stimulating violence in rural Colombia, the Cuban revolution incited the left wing of the Liberal party, who collectively organised under the later president López Michelsen forming the MRL. As open apologists for the Fidel Castro regime, the second anniversary of Fidel Castro's succession to power was attended by MRL officials, including Jaime Velasquez Toro, an MRL Congressman from the province of Antioquia as well as Jaime Isaza Cadavid, President of the Party Directorate.³⁰⁹ In particular, the MRL were able to take advantage of the bitterness between the Liberal and Conservative parties to advance their positions in terms of a wider support base. Velasquez Toro achieved this by making frequent touring visits of rural Colombia in areas of endemic violence, such as the mining town of Segovia, in Antioquia.

The case of violence in Segovia illustrates how the MRL and leftist political factions were able to mobilise local support. Importantly, it also typifies the impasse between the state, local officials and armed bandits. The lack of resources available to local law enforcement was a key impediment in containing violence. In February 1961 local officials detailed a 'typical anti-bandit chase' and outlined the ensuing struggle between the state, local officials and armed bandits. On Monday, the Mayor of Segovia phoned the Governor stating that a survivor of a bandit massacre reached the town after an all-night walk to bring news of the killing of eleven people. The mayor planned to take six of the ten police officers that were assigned to his municipal area and travel by car and mule to the scene of the crime. The

³⁰⁷ *ibid.*

³⁰⁸ Stephen G. Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999) pp. 177-179.

³⁰⁹ American Embassy, Bogotá and Secretary of State, Memorandum of Conversation, Washington DC, February 17, 1961, 721.00/2-1761,1543, RG 59, USNA.

mayor and police had no radio facilities to communicate whilst at the scene and the mayor's request for troops was denied as all troops were assigned to other violent areas. Moreover, reports of massacres from non-official sources are treated as not based on facts.

Late on Monday afternoon, the mayor and six policemen arrived at the scene of crime. Eleven decapitated bodies, including five small children were found. The mayor and policemen made the decision to spend the night in the vicinity unable to start a pursuit of the bandits as the group who committed the crime 'most probably outnumber the six policemen available'. Troops finally arrived in Segovia late Tuesday. On Wednesday, the mayor took the troops to the scene of the crime. They carried out interviews of the local peasants, all of who denied hearing or seeing anything unusual. The platoon commander continued his investigation in search of a bandit hide-out in the nearby mountainous area. Leaving, but with no access radio or communicative device, he advised that he would return to Segovia in a one week. The following Wednesday, the commander and his platoon did not arrive in Segovia as scheduled. The military commandant for the region speculated that the platoon could quite possibly have been massacred by bandits, or deserted and joined the bandits, or captured the bandits and is en route back to Segovia. Or perhaps, he added rather facetiously, the platoon commander 'is having a nice vacation in the hills'.³¹⁰

The departmental officials of Antioquia and the neighbouring Pacific coast department of Choco faced increasing levels of violence in the early 1960s. This largely represented an overflow from the neighbouring 'state-of-siege' department of Caldas, leading to a general upward shift in violence toward the northwest of the country. Despite the assurances of the Colombian government that measures were being taken to curb the violence, the number of killings in the three months prior to February 1961 ran higher than any other comparable period in the past three years.³¹¹ Although the departmental officials of Antioquia and Choco had two battalions of Colombian troops and a

³¹⁰ *ibid.*

³¹¹ *ibid.*

smaller number of national police at their disposal, this was inadequate to deal with the overflow of violence of from other areas. Accordingly, those who had substantial property interests to protect amidst violence resorted to maintaining their own private army in the form of paramilitaries. The growth of local paramilitaries reflected another problem. Neither the Colombian Army nor the national police force was adequately equipped to undertake small-scale guerrilla campaigns to confront the perpetrators of the violence. The diverse terrain of these departments includes huge swathes of dense jungle with an annual rainfall of 400 inches further complicating the efforts to contain violence.³¹²

Criminality rather than externally inspired communism was perhaps the biggest problem for rural Colombia during the 1960s. Criminal violence was political in many cases. It was used to both protect and reverse economic gains made in previous phases of violence; however the increase of politically motivated violence on a localised basis during this period is also of particular significance. This decade certainly marked the development of an organised revolutionary movement in Colombia. Whilst social and agrarian reform was at the forefront of the political agenda, this only served to raise expectations and it would seem that it was not enough to curb the growing levels of dissent in some regions of the country.

Havana was certainly a source of ideas and inspiration for Colombia, although not an active supplier of material assistance or externally driven insurrection. The Cuban Revolution is often cited as one of the most crucial factors leading to the surge of guerrilla movements across Latin America.³¹³ Indeed, the work of Ché Guevara and Régis Debray based on the revolutionary struggle for the control of political power through armed insurrection did impact Latin American states in the 1960s. In *General Principles of Guerrilla Warfare*, Ché outlined the three fundamental contributions that the Cuban Revolution made to revolutionary movements in Latin America:

³¹² *ibid.*

³¹³ Leech, *The FARC*; Gott, *Guerrilla Movements in Latin America*.

1) *Popular forces can win a war against an army; 2) it is not always necessary to wait until all conditions of revolution exist; the insurrectionary enclave can create them; 3) in underdeveloped America the field of armed struggle must be fundamentally in the countryside. Of these three contributions, the first two pit themselves against the quietest attitude of revolutionaries or pseudorevolutionaries who hide, and hide their inactivity, behind the pretext that nothing can be done against a professional army. They also contradict those others who want to wait until all the objective and subjective necessary conditions automatically appear, without doing anything to accelerate the process.*³¹⁴

Ché's call for armed struggle made a profound and lasting impact in Colombia and its Latin American neighbours. To some extent both Castro and Ché's work served merely as a transmission belt for Mao and his agrarian mode of communism. Across Asia, Africa and Latin America, followers of Moscow-orientated communist parties had been told to sit and patiently await industrialisation, with its all-important industrial proletariat. The ideas of Mao and Ho Chi Minh, simplified by Castro and Ché, offered a younger generation of leftist youth the prospect of "revolution now", rather generations in the future after the pro-longed arrival of a European-style urban proletariat.

Spokesmen for Ché's proposed political structure emerged across the continent in the early 1960s: Peru, Héctor Bejar (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, ELN) and Luis de la Puente (*Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria*, MIR); Guatemala, Luis Trejo (*Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes*, FAR); Argentina, Jorge Ricardo Masseti (*Ejército Guerrillero del Pueblo*, EGP); Nicaragua, Carlos Fonseca Amador, Silvio Mayorga, Noel Guerrero and Tomás Borge (*Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*) Carlos Marighella (*Acción de Liberación Nacional*).³¹⁵ In Colombia, similar political-military enclaves appeared in the early 1960s: the *Movimiento Obrero Estudiantil Campesino* (Worker Student Peasant Movement, MOEC); the *Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional* (Army for National Liberation, ELN);

³¹⁴ Ché Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare* (London: Souvenir Press, 2003) pp. 7-8.

³¹⁵ Gott, *Guerrilla Movements in Latin America*.

Partido Comunista Marxista-Leninista (Marxist Leninist Communist Party, PCML). This would later extend to include the most persistent, successful and well-known insurgency groups in the world, the FARC.

The element of external influence on the Colombian movement during this period now appears somewhat exaggerated. Civil strife and the dire economic and social conditions compounded by an intense decade of violence during *La Violencia* mobilised thousands in the Colombian countryside. The revival of the popular struggle under Rojas Pinilla is an internal dimension that is largely ignored. For Colombians and their Latin American counterparts, the overthrow of the dictator of Venezuela, Pérez Jiménez, and the Cuban leader, Fulgencio Batista were important symbolic changes. However, the external influence of the Cuban Revolution must not be overstated. It served to give some political legitimacy to the left-wing of the Liberal party (MRL) and kindled the enthusiasm for social change. Indeed, Colombia's history of insurgency would have been markedly different had not been for the internal conditions that led to the emergence and persistence of what is today the world's longest insurgent struggle. Unlike any other Latin American country, by the end of the 1960s Colombia was home to three guerrilla groups, all belonging to different strands of communism.

Revolutionary Movements: Internal Factors

The *Partido Comunista Colombiana* – Colombian Communist Party or PCC had long been influential in rural areas of Colombia. Unlike other communist parties in Latin America, perhaps as a direct consequence of the rural violence during *La Violencia*, the PCC had developed significant links in troubled rural areas such as in the department of Tolima and the southwestern area of Cundinamarca.³¹⁶ By the mid-1960s, the PCC was estimated to have 13,000 members.³¹⁷ The role of the PCC in organising the

³¹⁶ Leech, *The FARC*, p. 10.

³¹⁷ Roger W. Benjamin and John H. Kautsky, 'Communism and Economic Development,' *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (1968) p. 122.

peasant enclaves or independent republics is particularly significant; a number of key figures went on to become influential figures in armed insurgent groups, such as Manuel Marulanda Vélez of the FARC, who was later the Commander-in-Chief of the insurgent group. However, the role of the PCC was not only limited to giving ideological legitimation to the peasants in their struggle. FARC's *Historical Outline*, published by the insurgent group, illustrates the organisational and structural support provided through the PCC:

*(The PCC) 'encouraged the peasant communities to share the land among the residents and created mechanisms for collective work and assistance to the individual exploitation of parcels of land and applied the movement's justice by collective decision of assemblies of the populace. These became areas with a new mentality and social and political proposals different from those offered by the regime.'*³¹⁸

It is questionable to what degree these groups were successful in their collective social, political and economic projects. However, the existence of such autonomous groups and their links to the PCC, an established political party that pre-dated the Cuban Revolution with strong links to the labour unions and confederations alone presented a threat to the *Frente Nacional*. Of particular significance is the fragmentation of the Communist party and its monopoly on revolutionary rhetoric. This split led to an extreme heterogeneity and dispersion of the armed movements and had a lasting impact on the future of the Colombian left. In 1956, a resolution was passed at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which called for all its affiliates around the world to seek a peaceful road to revolution. As a consequence of the resolution, the official stance of the PCC was a public denunciation of an armed struggle in Colombia. In 1958, at the onset of the *Frente Nacional*, the PCC called for a:

'peaceful revolutionary struggle through the progressive democratization of the country, the strengthening and unity of the workers' movements and

³¹⁸ Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP), *FARC-EP: Historical Outline* (Toronto: International Commission, 1999) p. 15.

the worker-peasant alliance, and the development of the democratic Frente Nacional.³¹⁹

The PCC's adoption on a non-violent, peaceful revolution had a lasting impact on the leftist movements in Colombia. Firstly, the PCC splintered into over a dozen smaller groups and was largely divided by those who followed the party's official stance and opponents who endorsed a violent means to social and political change. Secondly, the political, economic and social conditions of Colombia during this period and renunciation of an armed insurrection by the PCC marked the emergence of a broad range of radical political efforts. For radical urban groups and rural peasant movements, the adoption of the Soviet resolution did not serve their goals. One of the most important semi-revolutionary movements in Bogotá was MOEC, which was founded in July 1960 by a group of radical students. The group included Eduardo Aristizábal, Max Santos, Robinson Jiménez and Antonio Larotta. MOEC, as one of its leaders saw the group, 'initiated a new stage in the Colombian revolution, a stage which is characterized by the repudiation of the old reformist, pacifist, and electoral political line and by the shift to an organized offensive by the masses'.³²⁰ This movement sprang from an event to demonstrate the rise in bus fares in Colombia's capital in 1959, however, quickly emerged to represent a wider struggle. In the early months of 1959, there were a number of urban strikes and protests that took place across various sectors that mobilised students and workers in the capital, including the *Unión Nacional de Empleados Bancarios de Colombia* (Union of the National Bank Workers, UNEB) and workers of Icollantas.³²¹ The MOEC were therefore able to mobilise in a climate of protest during the early months of 1959.

³¹⁹ Gilberto Viera, 'Informe al VIII Congreso del Partido Comunista,' 1959, quoted in Eduardo Pizarro, 'Revolutionary guerrilla groups in Colombia,' in Charles Berquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, Gonzalo Sánchez, (eds.) *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective*, (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc. 1992) p. 173.

³²⁰ Juan Tairona, 1959, quoted in Eduardo Pizarro, 'Revolutionary Guerrilla Groups in Colombia,' in Charles Berquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, Gonzalo Sánchez, (eds.) *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective*, (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc. 1992) p. 176.

³²¹ For a detailed analysis of the rise of the Colombian 'new left' and the policies of the Lleras administration see: Jose Abelardo Diaz Jaramillo, *El Movimiento Obrero*

It should be noted that MOEC was not a significant movement compared to other urban Latin American movements at the time. Bogotá during this period, and arguably today, is relatively Conservative in comparison to other Latin American capital cities. It would be inconceivable for the 'new left' movements of the early 1960s to organise a wide scale leftist movement in Bogotá. However, MOEC does represent the opposition to the 'pacifist' PCC stand against armed revolutionary struggle and the growth of urban dissent. Other movements also emerged in Colombia that included students and intellectuals. The *Frente Unido de Acción Revolucionaria* (The United Front of Revolutionary Action, FUAR) was led by Gloria Gaitán, the daughter of the slain Liberal politician, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, whose death sparked the Bogotazo. The MRL as the left wing of the Liberal party was also able to gain from this air of political change, securing 36 per cent of the Liberal vote in 1962.³²²

The formation of three separate and vibrant internal guerrilla movements during the 1960s was most troubling for the Frente Nacional. The ELN was started by a group of students led by Fabio Vásquez Castaño, a militant in the *Juventud del Movimiento Revolucionario Liberal* (Youth of the Revolutionary Liberal, JMRL).³²³ Notably, Vásquez was neither a peasant nor a previous member of the PCC. The ELN was part of a 'new revolutionary Colombian left' that rejected the PCC. Whilst the situation of the peasantry was a key concern of the ELN, unlike the FARC, the ELN was not representative of the peasant land issue. The group was more aligned to the Latin American model of guerrilla movements, and similar to the revolutionary MOEC, led by a group of 'disaffected middle class youths'.³²⁴ Vásquez was part of a group of Colombian students who went to Cuba on a scholarship in 1962 at the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis and on-request received military training. The

Estudiantil Campesino 7 de Enero y los Orígenes de la Nueva Izquierda en Colombia 1959-1969 (Unpublished Masters Thesis, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Colombia, 2010)

³²² Gott, *Guerrilla Movements in Latin America*, p. 184.

³²³ The JMRL was the militant youth faction of the Liberal MRL.

³²⁴ Bushnell, *Making of Modern Colombia*, p. 244.

group included Víctor Medina Morón, former Secretary of Santander's Communist Party and Heriberto Espitia who together with Vásquez founded the *Brigada Pro Liberación Nacional de Colombia* José Antonio Galán in November 1962.³²⁵ Although the Brigade soon dissolved, the group had established their goal for a revolutionary movement in their home country.

Upon their return to Colombia, Vásquez and his cadres settled in the northeastern department of Santander, around the sparsely populated area of the middle Magdalena Valley. This region was specifically chosen by the founders of the Brigade for a number of reasons. Firstly, the Colombian revolution could not have the kick-start in the capital Bogotá due to the fact that despite labour unrest and deepening social strife there was simply not enough support in the conservative city. Secondly, the area was well known to the one of the original founders of the Brigade, Víctor Medina. Thirdly, the department was home to the Colombia's largest oil refinery in Barrancabermeja, with a well-organised labour force. Finally, the department of Santander was already a politicised region of Colombia. The region had been dogged by violence during the civil war period of La Violencia and home to Liberal guerrilla forces. The most notable of which is Rafael Rangel, the former Liberal mayor of Barrancabermeja and guerrilla, who famously accepted a government amnesty under General Rojas Pinilla's in 1953.³²⁶ During these early developments of the Brigade, the region of Santander continued to suffer from violence. Santander, along with other departments was declared a state-of-siege and in the early 1960s, there had been a marked increase in political agitation.³²⁷

The decision of these cadres to set their movement in an already political fragile and violent department illustrates the ambitious nature of their revolutionary project. Forrest Hylton argues that apart from strategic

³²⁵ Jorge P. Osterling, *Democracy in Colombia: Clientelist Politics and Guerrilla Warfare* (Oxford: Transaction Publishers, 1989) p. 308.

³²⁶ Alejo Vargas Velásquez, 'Colombia: Guerra y desmovilización como constantes históricas,' *Semana*, November 30 2003.

³²⁷ American Embassy, Bogotá and Secretary of State, Memorandum of conversation, Washington DC, January 28, 1961, 721.00/1-2761,1543, RG 59, USNA.

differences, 'the ELN was no less rooted in the history of popular liberalism, communism, and peasant-proletarian struggle than the FARC'.³²⁸ However, the ELN decisions to kick-start their revolutionary struggle in the department of Santander is representative of the broader split within the Colombian left. The ELN was representative of those students and intellectuals who rejected the pacifist stance and parliamentary ambitions of the PCC.

Careful preliminary investigations had been carried out by Vásquez. In an interview with a Mexican editor in 1967, Vásquez explains how the group of students were able to gather the support of local peasants to set up their revolutionary guerrilla group, the ELN. The group 'toured the area bringing together those with most determination'.³²⁹ A guerrilla nucleus of eighteen peasants was selected creating the ELN on July 4, 1964. The first public appearance of the ELN was at Simacota, near San Vicente in the southern region of Santander on January 7, 1965. According to *El Tiempo*, the heavily armed group, loaded with M-2 pistols, Madisen machine guns, 45 calibre point rifles and revolvers, entered the town dressed in a khaki-green uniform with 'ELN' labelled arm bands.³³⁰ Whilst it is undeniable that the cadres were armed, it is likely that the sensationalist nature of news report had overstated the sophistication of the weaponry. The ELN did however carefully execute their plan; telephone and electricity cables were severed and the group held the population of the small town for two hours, stealing from municipal buildings, the agrarian agency, local businesses and a private home.³³¹ According to Vásquez, the 'essential point of taking Simacota was to show the people a revolutionary line: armed struggle as the only effective way of taking power'.³³²

³²⁸ Forrest Hylton, *Evil Hour in Colombia* (London: Verso Books, 2006) p. 57.

³²⁹ Interview between Fabio Vásquez Castaño and Matio Menéndez Rodríguez, excerpts appears in Gott, *Guerrilla Movements in Latin America*, pp. 195-202.

³³⁰ *El Tiempo*, January 8, 1965.

³³¹ *El Tiempo*, January 8, 1965: news reports vary in their estimations of the size of the group between 60-200 'bandits'. This gross exaggeration indicates that news reports from the time can be misleading. However, subsequent reports in *El Tiempo* provide evidence of stealing from various sources, including \$53,000 (Colombian pesos) from the Agrarian agency.

³³² Interview between Fabio Vásquez Castaño and Matio Menéndez Rodríguez, excerpts appears in Gott, *Guerrilla Movements in Latin America*, pp. 195-202

The distribution of the ELN manifesto and programme certainly left a message with the people of Simacota and the local authorities. Signed by Vásquez and Medina the documents outlined the motivations of the ELN: seize power through the masses, agrarian revolution, economic and industrial development, housing and urban reform plan, creation of a people's credit system, public health plan, road planning, educational reform, rights for the indigenous population, religious freedom, and an independent foreign policy.³³³ This broad, and rather ambitious agenda indicates that it was not only the agrarian issue that was driving revolutionary actions in Colombia during the 1960s. Social and economic issues, such as health, education, housing, industry and employment were all recognised as burgeoning problems for the country and high on the political and revolutionary agendas.

One of the most well known recruits of the ELN during its beginnings was the revolutionary Catholic priest, Father Camilo Torres. Despite only serving five weeks in the ELN before his death during an armed confrontation with the Colombian army, Torres is widely regarded as a martyr of the revolutionary cause, along with Gaitán and Ché. Born to an upper-middle family and educated in Bogotá and Europe, Torres became the chaplain of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia and was one of the founding members of the university's faculty of sociology; his peers included the well-respected Colombian sociologist and analyst of the conflict, Orlando Fals Borda. During his tenure at the university, Torres travelled extensively throughout Colombia as a Catholic representative on the governing board of the agrarian law agency INCORA. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the agency faced severe limitations in diffusing the social tensions associated with land distribution. This experience sharpened Torres' political conscious and left him with a deep-seated resentment of the government's policy in the rural areas. For Torres, INCORA represented the continuation of a top-down societal structure in which the political elite dictated the needs of the

³³³ The Manifesto of Simacota and ELN programme are available through Uppsala University at http://www.kus.uu.se/pdf/publications/Colombia/Programa_simacota.pdf.

peasantry.³³⁴ Remarkably, by the end of the 1960s INCORA officials issued statements that ‘there was no problem of unequal distribution of land ownership in Colombia’.³³⁵

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an alternative account of the Colombian conflict in the 1960s rooted in the internal dynamics of a unique social and political system that has perpetuated a Sargasso Sea of violent conflict. It has sought to illustrate Cold War dynamics from the perspective of Latin America, in a regional centric account of violence through emphasising on the socio-economic and political legacy of *La Violencia* into the 1960s. Whilst Cold War dynamics certainly provided rural movements with international ideological support, external support in terms of training and weaponry is grossly exaggerated. Detractors and supporters of US foreign policy and civil conflict theorists alike have placed emphasis on external support for driving conflict in the global South. Arguably, all these schools have ignored a crucial element of the Colombian conflict – the legacy of *La Violencia* in establishing guerrilla movements, resistance groups and criminal bands.

For the political elite in Bogotá during the 1960s, their fears of communist infiltration ignited suspicion. However, little consideration was given to the internal social, political and economic conditions that drove the mobilisation of thousands into organised resistance groups. The *Frente Nacional* was weak and fragmented. During the 1960s the Colombian government operated under a political impasse in which real reform to alleviate the country’s social ills were impossible, despite open acknowledgement of the rural and agrarian problem. By the end of the 1960s, Colombia was in a unique situation amongst its Latin American counterparts – it boasted three active guerrilla

³³⁴ Germán Guzmán Campos, *Camilo Torres: Presencia y Destino* (Bogotá: Servicios Especiales de Prensa, 1967).

³³⁵ Nola Reinhardt, *Our Daily Bread: the Peasant Question and Family Farming in the Colombian Andes* (London: University of California Press, 1988) p. 153. Also see: Mejía, *Introducción a la Historia Económica*.

groups and thousands of mobilised citizens across the spectrum of society including rural *campesinos*, students, revolutionary Roman Catholic clergymen, and trade unionists and members of the middle class. In order to counter mass mobilisation, the *Frente Nacional* embarked on a programme of counter-reform and repressive measures during the 1970s that led to widespread rural support for insurgent groups.

Chapter Six

Counter-Reform and the *Campesino* Movement, 1970-1979

The 1970s was an era of social unrest and rightist counter-reform in Colombia. During the previous decade, the legacy of *La Violencia* had brought social reform and the agrarian question to the forefront of the political agenda. Progressive members of the *Frente Nacional* coalition gravitated towards the ANAPO movement and leftist factions of the main parties; insurgent groups issued their manifestos calling for 'an agrarian revolution', and politicised members of the Catholic clergy openly criticised the half-hearted attempts of the *Frente Nacional* to confront the country's social ills. However, the 1970s saw a marked shift towards a path of counter-reform supported by industrialists, agricultural business groups and large landowners. The dominant theme throughout the 1970s was of 'economic growth not social justice'.³³⁶ This significant change in political rhetoric can be explained by two factors: the surprising success of General Rojas Pinilla's ANAPO movement in the election of 1970 and the growth of the *campesino* movement under the ANUC.

Once again, the Liberal and Conservative parties found themselves united by the perceived threat of radical social and economic transformation offered by the 'third way'. The historical differences between the two traditional parties on *laissez-faire* economic policies and the Church-state relationship became less significant and instead their focus shifted toward their common concern of defending the political dominance of the traditional parties and the economic status quo.³³⁷ In the midst of losing support amongst the urban masses to the ANAPO movement, the Liberals and Conservatives pushed to

³³⁶ Colombia: Politics Unchained, CIA Memorandum, Office of National Estimates, November 3, 1972.

³³⁷ CIA records, American University Field Staff Reports, 'Rojismo: the Resurgence of Colombian Populism,' *Latin America*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (April, 1970) p. 22.

retain their electoral base within the country's upper classes by defending the interests of the economic elite.

The counter-reformist policies of the *Frente Nacional* cast a long shadow. Agrarian questions had certainly not been resolved - but they had been now asked - and this had a lasting impact on the relationship between the peasantry and the Colombian state, together with the evolving trajectory of agrarian violence. Firstly, the 1970s saw the radicalisation of the peasantry under the ANUC. Land invasions sponsored by the ANUC spread across the departments of Boyacá, Huila and Tolima in October 1971. Between 1971 and 1975 around 2000 haciendas were invaded.³³⁸ This increasingly open confrontation between the peasantry and the political elite became one of the most prominent axes of the Colombian conflict. Secondly, the failure of the ANUC to thwart the counter-reformist policies contributed to the later success of armed guerrilla groups. Whilst the drugs trade is often cited by theorists of civil conflict and US foreign policy specialists as the key factor leading to the growth of Colombia's armed groups, arguably, it was the demise of the ANUC by the end of the 1970s that led to widespread support for insurgents in rural areas. The Colombian state's abandonment of agrarian reform during the 1970s therefore directly correlates with an increase of armed conflict.³³⁹

Remarkably, this important decade of Colombian history is largely ignored in recent accounts of the conflict. The origin of the conflict is often associated with US interventionism, the formal organisation of insurgent groups in the early 1960s, or else the 'cocaine boom' of the 1980s.³⁴⁰ The reason for this is

³³⁸ Alejandro Reyes Posada, *Guerreros y Campesinos: El Despojo de la Tierra en Colombia*, (Bogotá: Editorial Norma, 2009) p. 29.

³³⁹ Orthodox accounts that focus on drugs as the driver include: Francisco E. Thoumi, *Political Economy and Illegal Drugs in Colombia: Studies on the Impact of the Illegal Drug Trade* (New York: Lynne Rienner, 1994); Rafael Pardo, 'Colombia's Two-Front War,' *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.79, No.1 (2000) pp. 64-74; Bruce M. Bagley, 'Colombia and the War on Drugs,' *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 67, No.1 (1988) pp. 70-92.

³⁴⁰ The literature on the Colombian peasant movement is scarce, however for one of the most informative and useful texts in this area see: León Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement in Colombia: Struggles of the National Peasant Association, 1967-1981* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Also see: Bruce Michael Bagley, *The State and the Peasantry in Contemporary Colombia* (Meadville, PA: Allegheny College, Latin American Issues, 1988); Jonathan Hartlyn,

twofold. Firstly, the literature is dominated by American national security scholars and so periods of overt US involvement and military assistance in Colombia have received the most scholarly attention. Accordingly, much ink has been expended on the counterinsurgency operations in the independent republics in the mid-1960s initiated by JFK and or on measures implemented in the War on Drugs under various US initiatives post 1980.³⁴¹ Similarly, human rights abuses during periods of US support have historically received more widespread global attention from writers, commentators and journalists as part of a meta-level debate about American core values versus national security imperatives. Secondly, the 1970s constitutes a period of peasant history in which the Colombian peasantry emerged under the AUNC as the 'agent and interpreter of the peasantry as a class'.³⁴² As the internal antagonisms of the Colombian conflict have been generally side-lined, with the drugs trade forming as one of the main focal points of violent conflict in the country, the history of the peasantry features little in literature where US actions or criminality and drugs are seen as the most fundamental driving factors for violence.

It would be grossly naïve to suggest the drugs trade has not impacted the Colombian conflict. Indeed, the cultivation and production of illegal narcotics since the late 1970s has undoubtedly changed the face of the Colombian conflict. Illegal narcotics and drug related violence are one of the most pervasive problems facing Colombia and its Latin American counterparts. The trade has brought armed actors to the forefront of the conflict. Insurgents, paramilitaries, cartels and organised criminal gangs have amassed huge swathes of arable land. However, the cultivation of coca must be explored in the context of the agrarian question. Coca, like other produce is cultivated and requires land acquisition. Importantly, the drugs trade is not the only trade associated with violence in Colombia. During the 1980s, the mining of oil,

The Politics of Coalition Rule in Colombia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

³⁴¹ Plan LASO, 1962; The Andean Initiative, 1989; Plan Colombia, 1999 are the three aid packages between the US and Colombia in which counter-insurgency and counter-narcotics support has been provided.

³⁴² Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question*, p. 3.

coal, gold and emeralds also became embroiled in the complex interplay between state and non-state actors, in which various groups sought to expand their territory through violent means.³⁴³

The counter-reform period during the 1970s is important because it represents the formal abandonment of rural areas by the Colombian government. Social protest as a result of the governmental abandonment was labelled as 'subversive activity'. The inability of the Colombian state to arbitrate agrarian conflict, adjudicate the mining industry in rural areas and alleviate the deteriorating socio-economic conditions of the country resulted in violence emerging as the alternative mechanism through which conflicts between groups were settled. The wider cultural impact of dysfunctional agrarian policies during the 1970s can be observed in the evolution of violence in the following decades in which insurgents, cartels, paramilitary groups, criminal gangs and armed political factions became embroiled in an increasingly violent conflict. The effective abandonment of the agrarian question and rural grievances enabled the emergence of new armed actors and radicalised the peasantry, many of whom by the end of the 1970s had opted to cooperate with rural guerrilla organisations. This concept of deliberate governmental retreat from what was the core question of land reform for much of Colombia's population and state sponsored terror challenges the view espoused by numerous scholars and commentators of the Colombian conflict, which argues that the drugs trade has been the fundamental driver of violence in Colombia.³⁴⁴

³⁴³ Posada, *Guerreros y Campesinos*.

³⁴⁴ Paul Collier, 'Rebellion as Quasi-Criminal Activity,' *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 44, No. 6 (2002) pp. 838-852; Paul Collier, 'Causas Económicas de las Guerras Civiles y sus Implicaciones para el Diseño de Políticas,' *El Malpensante*, Vol. 30, May-June (2001); Mats Berdal and David Malone, (eds.) *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000); Alexandra Guàqueta, 'The Colombian Conflict: Political and Economic Dimensions' in Karen Ballentine and Jake Sherman (eds.) *The Political Economy of Armed Conflict: Beyond Greed and Grievance* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003) pp. 73-106; Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999); Angel Rabasa and Peter Chalk, *The Colombian Labyrinth: The Synergy of Drugs and Insurgency and its Implications for Regional Security* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2001).

ANAPO and the 1970 Election

Government in Colombia is in the domain of the aristocracy. Illustrious names such as Lleras, López, Ospina and Gómez appear frequently in the roll of Colombian leaders from the two traditional political parties. The greatest electoral challenge to the *Frente Nacional* and the dominance of the Liberal and Conservative parties in the 1970s was Rojas Pinilla's ANAPO movement. Rojas Pinilla's near victory in the 1970 election, in which the former military leader was just 63,000 votes shy of an all-out victory, sent shockwaves through the Colombian political elite.³⁴⁵ The ANAPO movement was an ominous force that reflected the manifestation of popular discontent with the *Frente Nacional* in the urban centres of the country. Rojas Pinilla's campaign slogan '*todos los pobres con Rojas*' – all the poor with Rojas – certainly struck a chord with the urban masses that were previously aligned with either the Liberal or Conservative parties.³⁴⁶ Widespread unrest across the country during the early 1970s included labour strikes, land invasions by peasants, rural violence, urban terrorism and university disturbances. The narrow electoral result and widespread unrest reflected the dissatisfaction of the Colombian populace with the *Frente Nacional* coalition where 'populism' emerged as the main form of expression through the ballot box.

The presidential election of 1970 was one of the most fiercely contested in republic's history. The elections were expected to deliver a straightforward victory for the official Conservative candidate, in line with the *Frente Nacional* alternation agreement, however it quickly transformed into a four-man race for the presidential office. In the midst of widespread unrest, a state of siege and curfew was imposed. The ensuing events almost consigned the *Frente Nacional* to death and saw the emergence of the *Movimiento 19 de Abril* (M-19), a guerrilla group that went on to carry out some of the most high profile attacks against the Colombian state. The election of 1970 presented a

³⁴⁵ Colombia: Politics Unchained, CIA Memorandum, Office of National Estimates, 3 November 1972, p. 6.

³⁴⁶ CIA records, American University Field Staff Reports, 'Rojismo: the Resurgence of Colombian Populism,' *Latin America*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (April, 1970) p. 21

dilemma for the *Frente Nacional* as no Conservative candidate received an outright majority. The Conservative party put forward Misael Pastrana Borrero as an official candidate, however, two other Conservatives, Belisario Betancur and Evaristo Sourdis as well as Rojas Pinilla came forward to contest the presidency and run as candidates.

How was an ousted former military dictator and architect of a *coup d'état* nevertheless able to challenge the *Frente Nacional* coalition? By Latin American standards, Rojas Pinilla's ANAPO was a 'populist' movement. The ANAPO's success in 1970 was largely due to the growing rural and urban dissatisfaction with the *Frente Nacional* and divisions within the Conservative party. Rojas Pinilla provided a unifying symbol for the opposition of the *Frente Nacional* and importantly was able to gather support from both left and right wing political factions. His movement appealed to Conservatives who had always opposed the *Frente Nacional* and in order to gather support from this group, Rojas Pinilla emphasised the Christian nature of the ANAPO and social conservatism by questioning the use of birth control to counter the demographic problem in the country.³⁴⁷ Rojas Pinilla also had the support of retired military officers who had served under his regime and other military figures who wanted to follow the Latin American model of a strong military that plays a major role in government. Women formed another core group of support for Rojas Pinilla through his daughter, Senator María Eugenia Rojas de Moreno, who was his principal advisor and spokesperson. She became a symbol of female emancipation as political posters of María Eugenia and her two children were distributed in urban centres with repeated reminders of her father's work in extending suffrage to women whilst in office.³⁴⁸ However, most important to Rojas Pinilla's success was the continued and growing support from the urban lower and lower middle classes.

Socio-economic issues were central to the complications of the elections of 1970. Pastrana promised Colombians a complete overhaul of agrarian policy in which he would address the economic imbalance in towns and less-

³⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 22

³⁴⁸ *ibid.*

developed rural areas. Betancur, the former Minister of Labour, stressed the need to address the economic and social structures in the country and Sourdis who was openly opposed to the *Frente Nacional* alternation system argued for decentralisation. Rojas Pinilla ran under the slogan 'president of the poor' and used his populist and nationalist appeal to garner support. He was also known for commitment to prestige national development projects, including schools, hospital and airports. All four candidates strongly urged Colombians to cast their vote, arguing that the abstentions that were advocated by various armed guerrilla groups could prove to be fatal for the Colombian political system.

Election day dawned on April 19, 1970. An initial electoral count gave an early lead to Rojas Pinilla, over the official *Frente Nacional* candidate Pastrana. However, as ANAPO loyalists took to the streets to celebrate a premature victory, the government announced a state of siege and interrupted the announcement of the election results. Rojas Pinilla levelled accusations of fraud against the *Frente Nacional* and threatened the government with a general strike and urban guerrilla warfare. Reporting of the results resumed the following day and Pastrana moved ahead and went on to win with an incredibly narrow victory of 1.6 per cent. The final count gave Rojas Pinilla 39 per cent of the vote against Pastrana's 40.6 per cent and as there were no rules in place for a runoff; Pastrana was able to win the election and become Colombia's next president.³⁴⁹ The delay in reporting the electoral results lent credence to Rojas Pinilla's claim of official fraud, however, the election results were in reality quite predictable – Rojas Pinilla enjoyed strong support in the cities, whereas in smaller towns and rural areas the traditional parties retained their power.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁹ David Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself* (Oxford: University of California Press, 1993) p. 229-230. For an depth analysis of the election see: Judith Talbot Campos and John F. McCamant, *Cleavage Shift in Colombia: Analysis of the 1970 Elections* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1972)

³⁵⁰ Very little literature exists on the 1970 election. For ANAPO electoral gains see: Robert H. Dix, *Colombia: The Political Dimensions of Change* (London: Yale University Press, 1967) pp. 281-285. For a wider discussion of elections in Colombia which include some information on 1970 see: Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín, '¿Se ha

The outpouring of support of ANAPO in the 1970 election is largely symbolic of the shifting political sentiments of the electorate. Whilst the ANAPO never went on to win any major elections, the movement posed a visible threat to the *Frente Nacional* coalition. The near-suicide of the coalition in the election of 1970 and the ability of the ANAPO to provide an umbrella for the disparate opposition groups certainly put the coalition under considerable pressure. In particular, Liberal and Conservative politicians were concerned about ANAPO's popular support base and the increasing radicalisation of the peasantry and students. Although there is no concrete evidence to suggest the implicit involvement of the Pastrana administration in the lack of press coverage given to the ANAPO, the movement was deeply affected by the lack of publicity.

The country's most popular and widely distributed newspapers are concentrated in the hands of influential and wealthy families and are aligned with one of the two main political parties.³⁵¹ In the year leading to the 1974 presidential election there was an 'almost total absence of reporting on ANAPO, especially by the traditional party newspapers'.³⁵² In October 1973, the Newspaper Association invited all presidential candidates for the upcoming election for dinner. Alfonso López Michelsen and Álvaro Gómez Hurtado duly attended, however the ANAPO candidate María Eugenia Rojas declined and issued a letter stating 'she saw no point in attending a meeting of people who were determined not to report how the masses felt about the situation of the country, or what ANAPO was trying to do to remedy matters'.³⁵³ Although the ANAPO had no lasting impact on Colombian politics, the movement was most successful in the legislative branch of government

Abierto el Sistema Político Colombiano? Una Evaluación de los Procesos de Cambio (1970-1998),' *América Latina Hoy: Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, Vol. 27 (2001) pp. 189-215; Lars Schoultz, 'Urbanization and Changing Voting Patterns: Colombia, 1946-1970,' *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 87, No. 1 (1972) pp. 22-45. For populism in Colombia see: Robert H. Dix, 'The Varieties of Populism: The Case of Colombia,' *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (1978) pp. 334-351.

³⁵¹ Country Profile: Colombia, Library of Congress – Federal Research Division, February 2007, p. 25.

³⁵² Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 12 November 1973, ALL 1/2, FCO7/2479, TNA.

³⁵³ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 11 October 1973, ALL 1/2, FCO7/2479, TNA.

where the group was able to oppose all official policy measures in detail during Pastrana's administration.³⁵⁴

The Pastrana Administration

During the volatile events of 1970 and 1971, it was widely believed that the Pastrana government would only last 'a matter of months'.³⁵⁵ Despite the popularity of the ANAPO, the movement was not strong enough to break the *Frente Nacional* coalition. However, social unrest under the Pastrana government was a serious cause for concern. Unrest in Colombia during 1971 included a series of strikes; the most important was the illegal general strike on 8 March called by the *Union de Trabajadores Colombianos* (Union of Colombian Workers, UTC) and the *Confederación Sindicalist de Trabajadores de Colombia* (Colombian Confederation of Workers, CSTC) with ANAPO backing. Student disturbances led to fatal altercations between protestors and police and a number of university dismissals and resignations across the country's universities. There were two waves of land invasions by landless peasants in February and October 1971 as well as growing rural and urban violence and guerrilla activity.³⁵⁶

The Armed Forces of Colombia made it clear that they were ready to intervene in the upheaval of 1970 if law and order deteriorated 'more than temporarily'.³⁵⁷ However, the reluctance of the Army to step into a political role reveals much about the business of government in Colombia and its unique political culture amongst its Latin American counterparts. The strong tradition of military non-intervention in Colombia reflects a historic understanding between the ruling classes and army officers about civil-military relations; the

³⁵⁴ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 1 January 1973, ALL 1/1, FCO7/2270.

³⁵⁵ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 27 August 1971, ALL 1/1, FCO 7/2001, TNA.

³⁵⁶ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 13 January 1972, ALL 1/5, FCO7/2271.

³⁵⁷ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 27 August 1971, ALL 1/1, FCO 7/2001, TNA.

military fulfils its role of combatting the problem of guerrillas, whilst the government deals with day-to-day political activity.

The Michelsen Administration

Election periods in Colombia have been historically marked by social unrest. The election of 1974 was no different. In 1974, for the first time in sixteen years, Colombians could elect a Liberal or Conservative president as well as voting for a separate party programmes. There was considerable opposition to the idea of a return to a truly democratic system, since the traditional parties had desired the continuation of the 'gentlemen's agreement' until the 1978 presidential election. However, the wider call for a return to open democracy was too strong to resist. As expected Alfonso López Michelsen, the Liberal candidate won the election, with Gómez, the Conservative candidate coming in second, and María Eugenia's ANAPO taking third place. More people voted than ever before in Colombia and many of those who defected to the ANAPO in the election of 1970 had returned to place their vote for the Liberal party attracted by a mixed platform of social justice combined with rapid economic development. Some five million out of the population of twenty-three million were expected to vote. However, many of those eligible to vote needed identity cards, of which less than ten million of the population actually had.³⁵⁸

By the end of 1974, only eight months into the López administration, the Colombian electorate were expressing its increasing dissatisfaction with the government's political and economic performance. These grievances were not new. A rapid increase in the basic cost of living was at the core of the widespread unrest that led to violent demonstrations in cities across Colombia, including Cali, Pasto, Popayan, Palmira and the south of Bogotá.³⁵⁹ Inflation in the last months of 1974 varied from 3.75 to 2.5 per cent with wage

³⁵⁸ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 6 December 1974, ALL 1/12, FCO7/2657, TNA.

³⁵⁹ *ibid.*

increases remaining stagnant. Simmering discontent was visible not only amongst the poor, but also among farmers, who voiced concerns about the poor market for agricultural products as well as investors, particularly in Medellín, the centre of the textile industry.³⁶⁰ As with any other period of social unrest in Colombia “subversives” and “left-wing elements” were alleged to have helped exploit and co-ordinate the disturbances. However, the dire economic situation and the impact on the masses of Colombian workers and peasants were undeniable.

The government declared an economic emergency. This was designed to give the administration additional powers to curb the financial downturn. However, a Supreme Court judgement declared some of the economic measures they had decreed to be unconstitutional. In particular, the Courts rejected proposed new measures for filing income tax returns. This was problematic in that it not only undermined the legitimacy of the new administration but it also marked a return to the old tax collection system, which allowed tax evasion to continue on a large scale.³⁶¹ Increases in tax collection and a step-change in efficiency were essential to fulfil the promises set out by the López administration for improved education and social welfare. Although the general consensus within the government was that the López administration was keeping to its promises of retrenchment and reform, there was still considerable opposition within Congress on both the left and the right. For the left, the proposed reforms were simply not radical enough, which was typified by the jibe, ‘*en que se parece el gobierno a un violín en que sostiene con la izquierda y se ejecuta con la derecha*’ – the government is like a violin, which supports the left but runs with the right.³⁶² For a leading member of the business community the government made promises it could not keep. In his opinion, the government seemed to believe that ‘all employers in industry could afford painlessly to double the wages they pay.’ He added,

³⁶⁰ *ibid.*

³⁶¹ *ibid.*

³⁶² Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 18 October 1974, ALL 1/12, FCO7/2657, TNA.

'investors expect to get their capital back in five years; the situation demands acceptance of a lower rate of profit'.³⁶³

Whilst significant economic growth continued under López, social unrest nevertheless plagued the country. Violent crime mounted steadily, strikes, student demonstrations, occupation of the Universidad Nacional by the Army and the resignation of its Rector, unemployment, increases in the cost of living, ministerial resignations the re-imposition of a state of siege and the widespread unpopularity of the López administration all lent a bleak outlook of the future of the country by 1976. Wider international economic conditions in the wake of the 1974 oil shock also took their toll.

The presidential election of 1978 saw the arrival of Julio Cesar Turbay. Known as an 'astute politician', he had a long history in the Liberal party.³⁶⁴ However, there remained a deep-seated mistrust of the politician, even amongst groups within his own political party because of his affiliation with unsavoury elements, such as drug smugglers looking for political protection. Upon his electoral victory, Turbay inherited a broad range of ills including 'worsening social and economic problems, governmental corruption, student unrest, kidnappings, rampant crime as well as guerrilla activities'.³⁶⁵ Inflation presented a further challenge to the new leader; whilst coffee export earnings, which accounted for 65 per cent of the Colombia's foreign revenues, reached record highs, inflation reduced the average wage earner's buying power to a record low.³⁶⁶

³⁶³ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 18 October 1974, ALL 1/12, FCO7/2657, TNA.

³⁶⁴ Latin America: Regional and Political Analysis, CIA Memorandum, 19 May 1977

³⁶⁵ Latin America: Regional and Political Analysis, CIA Memorandum, 19 May 1977, p. 19.

³⁶⁶ *ibid.*

The ANUC and the Agrarian Question

The rise and fall of the ANUC is notably absent from contemporary accounts of the Colombian conflict. This comes as no surprise; little attention is given to peasant movement in scholarly enquiries. Despite the condition of the rural peasants operating as the fundamental driver for much of the instability in Colombia and despite the fact that this sector of the population has endured the majority of human rights violations in the country, there are few serious analytical studies of the peasantry. The lack of scholarly attention in this area in part reflects the high illiteracy rates amongst the rural population; very few of them are able to write or contribute to the literature of their struggle and theirs is a 'lost voice' amongst Colombia's diverse political constituencies. Many of those who were initially vocal figures in the peasant struggle either later took up arms with one of the country's guerrilla groups or died during confrontations with the Armed Forces. Peasants also face unique difficulties regarding the organisation and representation of their interests.³⁶⁷ Their struggle is often occluded by being framed as a regional or particularly local issue, whereas in reality in a country like Colombia, the rural class are at the core of an agricultural economy.

Colombia's political elite was certainly not oblivious to the rural problem. In 1967 President Lleras Restrepo had created the ANUC in a bid to gain political support from the Colombian peasantry. The situation of the peasantry and the agrarian issue was highlighted as a national problem. This was particularly significant as it brought the issue of agrarian reform to the forefront of the nation's political agenda and, momentarily at least, actively involved core engines of the state in the resolution of the problem. Arguably, the rise of the ANUC as a largely autonomous peasant organisation was a historical opportunity for the country. However, this opportunity passed and the subsequent demise of ANUC led to a revolutionised and fractioned peasantry, many of whom by the end of the 1970s opted to take up arms.

³⁶⁷ León Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement in Colombia: Struggles of the National Peasant Association, 1967-1981* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. i.

In the early 1970s around half the total population of Colombia lived in the rural areas of the country. The majority of these *campesinos* earned a poor income from the land, in conditions 'leaving much to be desired'.³⁶⁸ Many of those who lived in towns also survived on menial incomes, however in general they enjoyed better standards of living; town dwellers had better prospects in terms of employment, education and health services. One of the many problems facing the government in the 1970s was the unmanageable influx of people from poverty-stricken rural areas to towns.

Agriculture provided 30 per cent of the GNP and 70 per cent of Colombia's export earnings. The internal social and economic importance of the agricultural sector demanded that the living situation of the peasantry should be addressed. A broad consensus had been reached by the Colombian government that this should be driven by increased output in the hope that this would result in improved wages for the peasantry, however there was little agreement about how to achieve this. The two factors that drove the lack of success in achieving agrarian reform were party politics and class warfare, which had created considerable obstacles. The internal security situation, growth of the guerrilla threat and party divisions created a political impasse. The Colombian government did however sponsor programmes that were intended to improve the social services available to the peasantry. These schemes were focussed in improving education, health, roads, communication, access to electricity and clean water supplies in rural areas. Despite the implementation of such programmes there were strict limits on finance and co-ordination between the ministries through which the schemes were administered and local bodies. Moreover, the topography of the country hindered the overall success of the scheme as many rural parts of the country saw little or no improvement in their living conditions through governmental programmes.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁸ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 18 November 1971, ALL 7/3, FCO7/2008, TNA.

³⁶⁹ *ibid.*

The aim of agrarian reform was to improving the living conditions of the peasantry. However, and most importantly, agrarian reform was seen by the lower classes as a means to resolving the nexus of social, political and economic problems in rural areas by reforming land ownership. The salience of reforming land tenure as a means to eradicating poverty and improving the security conditions of the country was based on the widely-held belief that the existence that the distribution of land in Colombia structurally depressed the earnings of the peasantry and widened the already appalling gap between the rich and the poor. What many saw as the very 'serious and genuine problem of the landless, unemployed and under-employed' needed a solution rather than palliative measures and social work.³⁷⁰

Internal Security: Land Invasions

The dramatic land invasions of the 1970s posed a serious threat to Colombia's internal security. The ANUC lent their moral support to invasions, which predictably were in rural areas. On November 14, 1971 some 500 people 'invaded' a large farm near Palmira in the department of Valle. The land invasion led to a serious clash with the police who evicted the 'invaders' and arrested 44 of them to be tried by a military tribunal. The following day a total of 39 farms were reportedly invaded in the departments of Magdalena, Caldas and Huila. The ex-leader of the Socialist Party, Antonio García explained the rural land invasions in terms of a widespread feeling of betrayal on the part of the peasants. The peasants, according to García, 'have a deep-seated hunger for land, and were told during last year's presidential election campaign that this hunger was to be satisfied through land distribution schemes organised by INCORA. This has not happened, and so they have decided to take the law into their own hands'.³⁷¹ Land invasions not only caused local conflicts between invaders and landowners, but also increased

³⁷⁰ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 18 November 1971, ALL 7/3, FCO7/2008, TNA.

³⁷¹ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 10 December 1971, ALL 1/1, FCO 7/2001, TNA.

tensions between the Liberal and Conservative parties; Conservatives accused Liberal Governors and Mayors of being 'soft on invasions, or even encouraging them'.³⁷²

By far the most dramatic land invasion took place at the end of November 1971. An estimated number of 3,000 families moved onto 120 hectares of land in the urban district of Ibagué, capital of the Tolima department. Troops were called to evict the invaders and were eventually successful. In the aftermath, the Conservative press attacked the Liberal Governor of Tolima for 'permissiveness'.³⁷³ The Ibagué invasion led to government promises that housing would be provided for the evicted invaders. However, given the chronic shortage of housing in Colombia, urban land invasion were set to increase. In 1974, a further wave of land invasions got under way leading to fatal confrontations. In Arjona, in the department of Cesar a skirmish between the police and invaders left two policemen and two peasants dead. Land invasions swept the country across the departments of Cauca, Antioquia, La Guajira and Córdoba. The department of Sucre was the worst affected where an estimated 30 to 40 land invasions took place in the period of a 'few days'.³⁷⁴

Unemployment and Labour

The imposition of a state of 'economic emergency' was seen as a response to dire economic reality in the early 1970s.³⁷⁵ Despite record levels of coffee exports and a growth rate of six per cent in real terms during the 1970s, inflation levels drove the average purchasing power of Colombians to a record low.³⁷⁶ Made tangible by rapidly rising food costs, this conundrum added to

³⁷² *ibid.*

³⁷³ *ibid.*

³⁷⁴ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 15 March, ALL 1/12, FCO7/2657, TNA.

³⁷⁵ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 10 November 1971, ALL 1/1, FCO 7/2001, TNA.

³⁷⁶ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 10 December 1971, ALL 1/1, FCO 7/2001, TNA.

the wealth of social ills faced by the country during this period. The Colombian government during this period estimated its unemployment rate to be around 8.4%; however estimation from the International Labour Organisation stated that 'up to 25% would be more realistic'.³⁷⁷

In a developing country such as Colombia, a healthy growth in GNP does not necessarily result in a reduction in unemployment. The ILO in 1971 reported that the best policy for Colombia, with its wealth of land resources would be to explore the possibility of job creation in the agricultural sector. This recommendation was made for three reasons: it would reduce undernourishment, ease the upward pressure on food prices and result in the decline of poverty leading to stable conditions for the manufacturing market.³⁷⁸ Of particular significance was the recommendation to shift towards a more equitable income distribution in Colombia and to implement land reform.

The reluctance of the Colombian government to follow this advice is not surprising. Colombian officials took a neo-liberal approach and saw 'income growth as the main solution' to the country's economic woes.³⁷⁹ The burgeoning levels of population growth brought some 200,000 additional young Colombians into the work force every year.³⁸⁰ Yet, despite international advice to take measures to counter a future unemployment crisis, there was no 'indication of a policy aimed at employment' other than through the medium of GNP. Why did the Colombian political elite in Bogotá not following the recommendations of the ILO, despite recognising the seriousness of the country's situation? Tax and land reforms were not only politically difficult to implement but also problematic from an administrative view. Moreover, the ILO was seen as an avowedly left-wing organisation and some viewed it with suspicion.

³⁷⁷ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 15 December 1971, ALL 5/1, FCO7/2005, TNA.

³⁷⁸ *ibid.*

³⁷⁹ *ibid.*

³⁸⁰ Dennis M. Hanratty and Sandra W. Meditz, (eds.) *Colombia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1988).

A general strike took hold of Colombia on March 8, 1971. Importantly, this strike saw the cooperation between the UTC of 400,000 to 450,000 workers and the CSTC of 120,000 to 150,000 workers.³⁸¹ The joining of forces in strike action forged alliances between these unions was of particular significance in forming a political opposition to the growing problem of unemployment. Chronic unemployment in urban areas was around 9-16 per cent, and was estimated to be as high as 25 per cent in the country as a whole.³⁸² In a booklet, entitled 'Unemployment in Colombia' produced by the UTC, the union launched an attack on the ILO report by accusing the mission of being 'faint-hearted and piecemeal in its recommendations' and 'failing to underline the need for a total redistribution of resources as a necessary predetermining factor in the flight to overcome unemployment'.³⁸³ Most interestingly, Belisario Betancur and Senator María Eugenia Rojas were reported to have been involved in the compiling of the report, showing growing opposition within the government to Pastrana's counter-reformist policies.

The role of workers' unions was called into question in the 1970s. The average Colombian worker had little bargaining power; Colombia's labour laws severely curbed workers' freedom. Government employees and those working in public services were forbidden to strike by law. Public services employees were widely defined and included workers in public utilities, transport, health, municipal workers, oil workers and those in banking. The declaration of a state of siege was a constant and reoccurring element of Colombian life that made any modest challenge to the anti-striking laws difficult. Moreover, unions faced a weak financial position curbing their bargaining power. The total income for the UTC in 1968 was \$1,200,000 US dollars of which 16 per cent came from the government. The financial dependence of unions on the government further eroded the militancy of the major unions.³⁸⁴ The alliances between the unions emphasised the political

³⁸¹ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 21 April 1971, ALL 5/3, FCO7/2007, TNA.

³⁸² *ibid.*

³⁸³ *ibid.*

³⁸⁴ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 21 April 1971, ALL 5/3, FCO7/2007, TNA.

colour of the March 8 strikes. The labour laws incidentally underlined the illegality of the strike.

Nevertheless, strikes were widespread across all sectors of the Colombian economy. The case of the bus drivers' strike illustrates the tensions between the government and service providers. Buses were the most important form of transport in Colombia in the 1970s. Most bus companies were privately owned, with some municipal buses in larger cities, such as Bogotá, Medellín and Cali. For many years, the Colombian government was able to keep internal petroleum products at a very low rate by operating a special rate of exchange. However, when the Pastrana administration abolished the petroleum rate of exchange in 1971, the cost of petrol increased sharply by local standards. The government agreed to provide bus service operators with a subsidy in order to keep bus fares at their previous rates. Bus drivers in the private sector were paid a small percentage of their take, rather than wages leading to incredibly long working hours and an 'appalling accident and injury rate'. The bus drivers' union had long argued for a limited working day and weekly wage that included some sort of piecework bonus, however these requests were met with considerable resistance from company owners. The bus company owners from their end claimed that 'rigid fare control, a static rate of subsidy, and increasing costs are squeezing profits'.³⁸⁵ In short, the owners called on the government to raise fares or subsidies.

The Pastrana administration was reluctant to change its stance on the issue. Inflation was running at a rate of just under 30 per cent, per annum. Moreover, the upcoming Presidential elections were only seven months away. At midnight, October 1 1973, the bus drivers implemented an illegal strike. Joined by primary school teachers who were also striking, the authorities in Bogotá responded by calling in the Armed Forces to restore order. Estimates of arrests varied from 800-1200 people with 50-60 policemen and soldiers injured.³⁸⁶ Whilst the bus drivers' strike may not seem significant, it reveals

³⁸⁵ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 12 November 1973, ALL 1/2, FCO7/2479, TNA.

³⁸⁶ *ibid.*

the tensions between the government and workers' and how this situation could and did escalate very quickly into a strike that halted travel throughout the country's capital city for 48 hours. Moreover, it reflects the heavy-handed response of the Colombian state to social unrest.

The Colombian economy during Pastrana's administration was precariously dependent upon export earnings. Agricultural production was a particular cause for concern due to 'exceptionally bad weather over the past twelve months or more'. Official figures estimated of crop losses during 1970 at 1,000 million pesos and in 1971 a further 1,400 million pesos.³⁸⁷ Damage also extended to buildings, roads, railways, power and telephone lines which coupled with the falling coffee prices led to reduced income at home.

Official statistics offered an optimistic picture of the Colombian economy. During 1973, the Colombian GNP grew by 7.5 to 8 per cent in real terms, marking the best growth rate in many years. Industrial production also increased by approximately 9.5 per cent. In agricultural terms the volumes of rice, potatoes and barley all increased.³⁸⁸ However, despite these advances, 'there were still severe shortages in some cereal based and other basic foodstuffs'.³⁸⁹ Coffee prices also saw an increase and export diversification was achieved through 'substantial increases' in petroleum production. According to official statistics, there was a decline in unemployment from '11.6 per cent in 1970 to 6.3 per cent by the end of 1973' and 210,000 extra jobs created in 1973 alone.³⁹⁰ President Pastrana boasted that international agencies 'had calculated that it would take fifteen years to achieve this result'. But these official figures were clearly at loggerheads with the reality of social conditions, strife and strikes that the country experienced during the same period, calling into question the reliability of such official statistics.

³⁸⁷ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 5 September 1971, ALL 5/2, FCO7/2006, TNA.

³⁸⁸ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 14 January 1974, ALL 1/3, FCO7/2658, TNA.

³⁸⁹ *ibid.*

³⁹⁰ *ibid.*

The Drugs Trade

For many unemployed Colombians during the 1970s the drugs trade simply provided jobs for an expanding population. This was certainly the case in the late 1970s and is a problem that persists today. The drugs trade is often cited as one of the main driving forces in the continuation of the Colombian conflict. Countless policy reports, scholarly work and popular media accounts have reiterated the 'narco-guerrilla' nexus and the associated threats posed by this for global security. The question of how to combat the drugs trade has been at the forefront of the US foreign policy since Richard Nixon declared the "War on Drugs" in 1971.³⁹¹ Although this initial declaration that drugs constituted a direct threat to US national security was largely with reference to the growing problem of addiction and criminal activity within the United States, successive US administrations have used the "War on Drugs" to justify a militarised foreign policy agenda in Latin America. Meanwhile, the issue of drug cultivation in Colombia is rarely viewed through the lens of the social conditions of the country during the 1970s.

The correlation between the increase of drug cultivation and violence in Colombia has been well documented. However, the complex relationships between drugs trafficking, political violence, and the many actors involved in the social conflict in Colombia are often over-looked in the course of the discussion. In policy debates in Washington and Bogotá, the 'narco-guerrilla' term has been employed to suggest that the guerrillas are major drug traffickers and that counterinsurgency and counter-narcotics operations are one and the same. However, in reality the role of the guerrillas in illicit drug production and drug trafficking has evolved over time and remains primarily focused on taxation of illicit crops. In other words, the two are related but they are not the same thing.³⁹² The problem of unemployment, growing levels of urbanisation coupled with a dire socio-economic situation for the majority of

³⁹¹ Richard Nixon, XXXVII President of the United States: 1969-1974, 203 - Special Message to the Congress on Drug Abuse Prevention and Control, June 17, 1971.

³⁹² James J. Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change in Colombia: The Origin and Direction of the FARC-EP* (London: Pluto Press, 2010).

Colombians and a growing dissatisfaction with the political system created a situation in which the drugs trade was able to emerge as a primary means of income for many of the poor.

During the 1970s the Colombian political system attempted to grapple with the growing cultivation of drugs in the country. For example, in May 1977, the Ministry of Defence announced special protective services for Colombian judges. This measure was to counter attacks in which several magistrates were killed in relation to cases involving the trafficking of narcotics. The murder of a judge in city of Cali was well documented in the Colombian press. According to reports, the judge was killed after failed bribery attempts to reverse a ruling against a convicted drugs trafficker.³⁹³ During the 1970s, numerous drug traffickers were arrested and brought to trial, however members of the judiciary were subjected to physical intimidation and cash bribes from trafficking rings. Despite Colombia's reputation for being the cocaine capital of the world since the 1970s, the majority of coca cultivation was in Peru and Bolivia. During this period, Colombia was the primary processing and transmitting location for cocaine, however it surpassed Mexico for marijuana production.³⁹⁴ Guerrilla groups such as FARC were not at the core of these early narcotics operations during the 1970s and instead, the main organisers were criminals.

Crime and Kidnapping

As the preceding two chapters have illustrated, crime is not a new phenomenon in Colombia. Criminal activity has as expected risen with social unrest and increasing levels of violence. By 1974, Bogotá was dubbed the 'one of the most dangerous cities in the world'. According to the country's popular daily newspaper *El Tiempo*, in Bogotá alone there were 526 assassinations in 1972 and 493 in 1973.³⁹⁵ The newly appointed head of the

³⁹³ Latin America: Regional and Political Analysis, CIA Memorandum, 24 May 1977.

³⁹⁴ Latin America: Regional and Political Analysis, CIA Memorandum, 9 June 1977.

³⁹⁵ *El Tiempo*, 25 August 1974.

civilian intelligence agency, DAS, General José Joaquín Matallana, described Bogotá as being in 'a state of emergency'.³⁹⁶ In the wake of increased criminality, the Minister of Government, Cornelio Reyes announced a major offensive against the 'crime phenomenon throughout Colombia that has manifested itself on and off for many years against a background of national indifference'.³⁹⁷ Whilst the Colombian authorities became increasingly alarmed by the situation of crime and the local press reported of the 'new wave of violence and lawlessness', it was indeed an old and engrained problem in the country. One of the most fundamental problems faced by the country in terms of urban crime was the social condition in growing cities and towns as a result of millions displaced during *La Violencia*.

The 1970s saw a marked increase in urban acts of terrorism. In August 1974, even the Minister of Defence, Abraham Varón Valencia, was subjected to personal attack. Varón's official country home and his official Bogotá residence were both machine-gunned by unknown gunmen. In October, a military bus bringing servicemen back from an excursion came under sustained gunfire outside Bogotá, meanwhile forty-five members of the Colombian Red Cross were held up by three armed men and robbed. A car bomb 'of very substantial size' was detonated close to the Industrial Exhibition grounds in the capital.³⁹⁸ Police records show that an anonymous caller telephoned the F-2 headquarters³⁹⁹ shortly before the explosion and stated that 'a car had been parked in a suspicious manner in a (named) street near the Industrial Exhibition grounds and that the interior was covered in patches of blood'.⁴⁰⁰ A mobile patrol was sent to the car. According to the only eyewitness, one of the patrolmen opening the front door of the Volkswagen and got into the driver's seat. When the ignition was turned on, the car blew

³⁹⁶ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 11 October 1974, ALL 1/4, FCO7/2659, TNA.

³⁹⁷ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 6 September 1974, ALL 1/4, FCO7/2659, TNA.

³⁹⁸ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 11 October 1974, ALL 1/4, FCO7/2659, TNA.

³⁹⁹ The F-2 is the Colombian equivalent of a Security Branch.

⁴⁰⁰ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 11 October 1974, ALL 1/4, FCO7/2659, TNA.

up killing three patrolmen and causing 'considerable damage in the immediate vicinity'.⁴⁰¹ Although this specific act of urban terrorism and many others at the time were thought to have been the work of the ELN guerrillas, there was no specific evidence to suggest this.

Urban kidnapping during the 1970s posed a serious security threat, with Colombia quickly becoming known internationally as the 'kidnapping capital of the world'. However, prior to this acclaim, Colombia had long been the 'kidnapping capital of Latin America'. Despite the increase in kidnapping rates, 'widespread extortion along these lines' had long been a fact of life in Colombia.⁴⁰² There were a number of high profile kidnappings of politicians and members of wealthy families, however there were also a number of kidnappings that were not reported or unremarked due to 'the prompt payment of ransom'.⁴⁰³ During the four years of the López administration there were 324 reported kidnapping in Colombia with ransom payments totalling \$158 million US dollars. During the same period, the various insurgent groups organised bold urban operations and the country's illegal drug trade expanded into a \$1 billion US dollar industry.⁴⁰⁴ Kidnapping of foreign workers in particular proved very lucrative. In October 1973, two Americans working for *La Frontina* Gold Mines were kidnapped by the ELN and released on March 7, 1974. The mining company paid ransom of 2.5 million pesos⁴⁰⁵ for the safe release of the hostages.⁴⁰⁶

Kidnapping tactics were used by all three of Colombia's guerrilla groups in the early 1970s. Contemporary urban guerrilla doctrine certainly advocated kidnapping as a source of revenue. In January 1973, over the space of ten

⁴⁰¹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰² Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 15 January 1973, ALL 1/3, FCO7/2480, TNA.

⁴⁰³ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 22 May 1973, ALL 1/3, FCO7/2480, TNA.

⁴⁰⁴ Human Rights Review, Central Intelligence Agency, National Foreign Assessment Centre, 1-14 September 1978.

⁴⁰⁵ 2.5 million Colombian pesos would amount to around £43,456 British Sterling Pounds in 1974.

⁴⁰⁶ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 21 March 1974, ALL 1/4, FCO7/2659, TNA.

days, there were three kidnappings that were attributed to guerrilla groups. On January 5, Armando Mora de la Hoz with his son and son-in-law were kidnapped from a *finca* in Córdoba. Two days later Carlos Angel Villa and his son were kidnapped from a *finca* in Antioquia and on the same day, José Ignacio Rada Gonzales was kidnapped from a *finca* in Tolima.⁴⁰⁷ It is clear from these cases that relatively wealthy, landowning elites were targets by guerrilla groups. It was however, difficult to ascertain which one of the guerrilla was responsible for the kidnappings. The Córdoba incident, according to press reports was most certainly the work of the *Ejército Popular de Liberación* (Popular Liberation Army, EPL). This view is further reinforced by the close proximity between this incident and a further kidnapping in Antioquia. The police in Bogotá also favoured the EPL as the perpetrators as the incidents took place in their area of activity. However, the families of the kidnapped stated that the assailants identified themselves as ELN members.⁴⁰⁸ This case highlights one of the difficulties that confronted the authorities. Whilst guerrilla groups may not have been the perpetrators, they would also be just as happy to take the credit, enjoying the increased publicity. Unreliable evidence hampered the ability of the authorities to deal with kidnapping cases, which is perhaps one of the greatest factors in the prevalence of kidnapping in the country.

In December 1975, the Office of the Presidency published official figures for nationwide kidnapping for the last half of 1974 and the first half of 1975. The department of Cundinamarca topped the list with the highest rate of kidnappings: 31 kidnappings over the twelve-month period. Whilst many kidnappings went unreported and other data collected by press offices suggest much higher levels, importantly the government statistics suggested that the kidnapping rate had indeed tripled.⁴⁰⁹ Moreover, ransom demands also increased sharply from 30,300,000 pesos in the last half of 1974 to 101,540,000 from January to July 1975. Ransoms paid to kidnappers also

⁴⁰⁷ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 15 January 1973, ALL 1/3, FCO7/2480, TNA.

⁴⁰⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁹ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 10 October 1975, ALL 1/2, FCO7/2886, TNA.

doubled during the respective periods from 11,814,00 pesos to 22,218,00 pesos.⁴¹⁰ The most significant information from this data is the lack of activity from guerrillas in kidnapping and the indication that criminal gangs were largely the perpetrators of this type of criminal activity. Of the 23 positive identifications of kidnapping victims, only four were directly attributed to the FARC and one to the ELN.⁴¹¹

At 7.45 on the morning of September 8 1975, Major General Rincón Quinones was shot dead in his official car on the way to work. The perpetrators of the killing were unknown with the only evidence available to the police constituted by a stolen Renault, which drew along the General's car and 'pumped eight bullets into Rincón'. The stolen car was later found abandoned. Immediate press reaction linked the killing to guerrilla groups, in particular the ELN.⁴¹² However, much of this was based on speculation mainly centred on the General's career in the army and anti-guerrilla operations, however no concrete evidence surfaced to suggest who killed the general and for what reason.

In the mid-1970s, kidnapping fused with unrest that focused on university radicals to give Colombian violence an urban as well as rural flavour for the first time. On June 12 1975, the López administration declared the country under state of siege. In the midst of student demonstrations, social unrest, high levels of kidnappings in cities the President in a televised broadcast 'took pains to deny that it would be used for political ends'.⁴¹³ Initially the state of siege was declared in the departments of Atlántico, Valle and Antioquia following renewed student unrest. The Universidad Nacional in Bogotá was 'ground to a complete standstill' with students and professors demanding a new university rector to be elected, rather be elected by the government.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹¹ *ibid.*

⁴¹² Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 9 September 1975, ALL 1/2, FCO7/2886, TNA.

⁴¹³ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 7 July 1975, ALL 1/2, FCO7/2886, TNA.

⁴¹⁴ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 17 June 1975, ALL 1/2, FCO7/2886, TNA.

Student unrest

Kidnapping, student unrest and the increase of urban as well as rural guerrilla activity were all part of a general trend across Latin America in the early 1970s. In part, this owed something to a wider climate of ideas inspired by Carlos Marighella, the Brazilian revolutionary. Renowned as the 'father of urban guerrilla warfare', he rejected the Maoist efforts of Castro and Ché to import ideas of rural struggle. Instead, Marighella attuned his ideas to the growing urbanization of the continent and argued that the city would be the revolutionary battleground in Latin America. Marighella emphasised the role of crime and kidnapping as a tool of escalation, goading the government into over-reaction. He also emphasised the importance of two other urban resources: the media and universities. Marighella died in a hail of gunfire in 1969, having failed to promote an urban revolution in Brazil, but his ideas proved highly influential amongst the radical intelligentsia and students across Latin America and also in Europe.⁴¹⁵

Following the strongly contested Colombian election in 1970, universities across the country saw widespread unrest leading to the resignation of the Minister of Education. Some university lecturers lent their support to the student movement and became increasingly left wing in their own teaching. At the Universidad de los Andes and Javeriana, several professors were dismissed. Student links with guerrilla movements across the country reportedly reached as far as the Central University in Caracas, Venezuela.⁴¹⁶ Student unrest in Colombia during this period has been explained in terms of deliberate revolutionary infiltration into the universities. Indeed, student activism and support for guerrilla movements such as the ELN and M-19 is undeniable. Communist youth movements such as, the *Juventudes Comunistas* (the Communist Youth, JUCO) and the youth wing of the MRL movement had an active role to play in mobilising young Colombians.

⁴¹⁵ John W. Williams, 'Carlos Marighella: The Father of Urban Guerrilla Warfare,' *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (1989) pp. 1-20.

⁴¹⁶ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Information Research, London, 20 July 1970, PRG 2/335/5, FCO95/849, TNA.

However, local and domestic grievances rather than external “subversion” were at the core of the student movement with educational reform playing a large role in mobilising staff and students in universities.

Universities across Colombia were a breeding ground for protest. A major factor in the unrest was the neglect that Colombian education received from successive governments’ since the 1950s. Observers noted that both the Liberal and Conservative parties ‘lost real contact with the students and, to a large extent, with their teaching staff’.⁴¹⁷ There was growing discontent with the increase of tuition fees and the ‘anti-democratic’ nature of the university education system. An increasing number of students felt that university teaching was ‘too dogmatic’. Students complained of ‘no participation whatsoever by professors and students in institutional decisions’, a sentiment that was shared by students at universities across the country.⁴¹⁸ There was a growing fear amongst Church circles of the increasing links between revolutionary and liberation theologies. In 1971, the Catholic Pontificia Universidad Javeriana reacted to the protests by closing the Department of Sociology and Social Work. The Colombian government was ‘well-aware of the gravity of the university situation, and of the danger of allowing it to smoulder on’.⁴¹⁹ Alarmed by the unprecedented mobilisation of students, the government issued a decree. This granted the secretary of education the power to close any and all institutions of secondary and higher education where strikes or activities that generally disturbed the “public order” occurred.⁴²⁰ Clashes between the demonstrators and army further escalated the protests. The army takeover of El Valle University, Cali reportedly led to death of 50 people.⁴²¹ Protests against the killing of the students quickly spread to other cities and generated increasing militancy. In Medellín,

⁴¹⁷ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 6 May 1971, ALL 1/1, FCO 7/2001, TNA.

⁴¹⁸ Santiago Castro-Gómez, ‘Colombia: “The Cataluña Movement”, 1968: *Memories and Legacies of a Global Revolt*,’ *German Historical Institute Bulletin*, Bulletin Supplement 6 (2009) p. 48.

⁴¹⁹ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 6 May 1971, ALL 1/1, FCO 7/2001, TNA.

⁴²⁰ Castro-Gómez, ‘Colombia: “The Cataluña Movement”,’ p. 49.

⁴²¹ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 4 March 1971, ALL 1/1, FCO 7/2001, TNA.

students succeeded in holding a policeman hostage. Violent clashes between the authorities and students there lasted for hours leading to the imposition of a curfew.⁴²²

Student disturbances were not a new phenomenon to Colombia's urban centres. However, the student unrest of the 1970s was more widespread than ever before and was an important force in challenging the *Frente Nacional* coalition. Public universities including the Universidad Nacional, Bogotá; Universidad de Antioquia; Universidad del Valle, Cali; Universidad Industrial de Santander, Bucaramanga and even students at the elite private universities of Bogotá – Universidad de Los Andes, Externado and the Javeriana joined in countrywide protests.⁴²³ A total of fifteen universities were closed by the government as a response to the levels of unrest, some for two months. Prior to the re-opening of the universities, President Pastrana issued a warning on August 15 1971 in which he emphasised that 'disorders would not be tolerated'.⁴²⁴ The repressive action by university authorities, the government and police ensured that the Colombian student movement was short-lived. However, the movement not only reflected the growing discontent of young people in Colombia with issues related to education but also the social conditions of the country. Students provided support to the wider strikes and protests and provided a voice for the workers' and peasants' who during this period had their own struggles to contend with.

Guerrilla Activity

The M-19 was appeared in the early 1970s. The group quickly gained the attention of the authorities through its favoured tactic of public terrorism. Named after the day of the allegedly fraudulent election of 1970, the M-19

⁴²² Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 6 May 1971, ALL 1/1, FCO 7/2001, TNA.

⁴²³ Castro-Gómez, 'Colombia: "The Cataluña Movement",' pp. 47-50.

⁴²⁴ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 20 August 1971, ALL 1/1, FCO 7/2001, TNA.

made their entrance onto the Colombian political scene in January 1974.⁴²⁵ A number of M-19 guerrillas broke into the Quinta de Bolívar, a famous landmark and previous residence of the *Libertador*, Simon Bolívar, and stole a sword and epaulettes once owned by the national icon. Following the theft, a number of press offices received anonymous calls threatening the M-19 'will strike again'.⁴²⁶

By January 1979 the M-19, became known as the 'most volatile of Colombia's numerous guerrilla groups'. Unbeknown to the authorities - and practically under their noses - the group successfully tunneled under a street in Bogotá and entered a military armoury. The M-19 quickly left with an estimated 5,000 weapons, which included mortars, rocket launchers, machine guns and ammunition.⁴²⁷ In 1975, the M-19 machine-gunned a high-ranking army general and in 1976 carried out the murder of a prominent Colombian labour leader.⁴²⁸ These very public and high profile actions by the M-19 caused considerable embarrassment for the military and posed serious questions for the Turbay administration, since they publicly called into question the government's ability to maintain basic order.

The M-19's actions were deliberately public in nature. Following the arms robbery, the M-19 issued a statement claiming responsibility for the theft and made demands for agrarian reform, salary increases for workers, an end to the state of siege and abrogation of the security statute – a measure introduced by Turbay to impose severer sentences for civil unrest which also placed crimes against state security under military jurisdiction. M-19 grew in strength and by the late 1970s, Colombian officials were increasingly concerned by the number of bomb attacks, kidnapping and assassinations perpetrated by the country's insurgents, general social unrest involving

⁴²⁵ Mauricio Florez-Morrisa, 'Joining Guerrilla Groups in Colombia: Individual Motivations and Processes for Entering a Violent Organization,' *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 30, No. 7 (2007) pp. 615-634.

⁴²⁶ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 28 January 1974, ALL 1/4, FCO7/2659, TNA.

⁴²⁷ *Latin America Review*, Central Intelligence Agency Memorandum, 11 January, 1979, p. 5.

⁴²⁸ *ibid.*

dissident students and striking workers. Coupled with the economic problem of inflation, these problems were highlighted by the military and civilian leaders of the country and represented a 'potential threat to stability' that has not existed a decade before.⁴²⁹

The FARC also made reappearances in the early 1970s. The sudden recrudescence of FARC activity in the departments of Tolima, Huila and Caquetá with a 'substantial operation' during September 1971 took the Colombian authorities by surprise.⁴³⁰ Colonel Cascante, the head of the Military Intelligence branch of the Army Command, reported that the authorities had 'some sort of warning that the FARC might become active in the area but the Army detachments were not prepared'.⁴³¹ On September 1971 in the town of Nieva in the Magdalena Valley area, a security force patrol engaged a group of FARC guerrillas. The altercation left the security forces worse off with three police agents and six policemen killed.⁴³² Western Boyacá, the area in the low-lying medio-Magdalena region eastern Boyacá in the Llanos country also saw guerrilla activity. The crucial point for both the armed forces and guerrillas, namely the ELN was Puerto Berrio. As the bridge across the Magdalena River, it forms the only road link between the two departments of Antioquia and Santander. Bombs attacks on major oil pipelines were carried out by the FARC and were part of their early strategy to gain attention of the government and express their opposition to their liberal economic ideology which did not favour the peasantry.⁴³³

High-profile targets were a key component of guerrilla offensives. In October 1971, there was an unsuccessful assassination attempt of a prominent Colombian general followed by an explosion of a number of time bombs and

⁴²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴³⁰ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Information Research, London, 15 December 1971, PRG 2/335/6B746, FCO95/1156, TNA.

⁴³¹ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 15 December 1971, ALL 1/1, FCO 7/2001, TNA.

⁴³² Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 1 October 1971, ALL 1/5, FCO7/2003.

⁴³³ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 19 November 1971, ALL 1/1, FCO 7/2001, TNA.

oil pipelines at various places across the country.⁴³⁴ More than twenty bullets were fired at General Valencia's car, two of which injured him. Reports showed that any of the guerrilla groups, the ELN, FARC or EPL could have been responsible for the attack; however there was also fierce speculation on the Liberal left that right-wing forces may have wanted to provoke a military coup.⁴³⁵ External influence from Cuba, China and the Soviet Union were thought to be the greatest driving factors for increased guerrilla activity in Colombia. However in his book, *Guerrilla por Dentro*,⁴³⁶ the slain ELN guerrilla Jaime Arenas reveals that while the founders of the ELN had been trained in Cuba in the early 1960s, Cuban material aid was only provided to the guerrillas between 1965 and 1967 on an irregular basis with much of it failing to reach its destination.⁴³⁷

An interview with Gilberto Vieira White, Secretary General of the PCC appeared in *El Popular*, the Uruguayan Communist party newspaper on December 23, 1970. Vieira stated that the PCC continued to support guerrilla activities and 'the continuation of guerrilla warfare in a necessity in Colombia to defeat the violence which the government inflicts on the peasant regions'.⁴³⁸ Importantly, Vieira also expressed his support for the ANAPO for its 'anti-oligarchic' rhetoric. Although the Colombian opposition was fissiparous and largely divided, Vieira's support for the guerrillas and ANAPO and the students' support for the peasant and workers' strike reflect the opposition faced by the *Frente Nacional*.

Dramatic ambushes and kidnapping against political targets characterised guerrilla activity during the early 1970s. Typically, to take just the last week of January 1973, the ELN staged a successful attack on a helicopter that had

⁴³⁴ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 15 October 1971, ALL 1/5, FCO7/2003.

⁴³⁵ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 8 October 1971, ALL 1/5, FCO7/2003.

⁴³⁶ Jaime Arenas, *La Guerrilla por Dentro: Análisis del E.L.N. Colombiano*, (Bogotá: Ediciones Tercer Mundo, 1975).

⁴³⁷ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 15 October 1971, ALL 1/5, FCO7/2003.

⁴³⁸ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 19 January 1971, ALL 1/1, FCO 7/2001, TNA.

just been loaded with gold worth 550,000 Colombian pesos from a mine in northern Antioquia. After killing a security guard, the guerrillas made away with the money.⁴³⁹ On the same day the ELN ambushed a police patrol in northwestern Boyacá, killing four police. Some twelve hours later, another guerrilla group, possibly the FARC, took over the village of San Pedro de Uraba, to the north of Turbo. The takeover followed similar patterns to other attacks: the guerrillas attacked the police office killing four policemen, and then searched the village for arms, drugs and public money.⁴⁴⁰ Around 150,000 Colombian pesos were stolen from the *Caja Agraria* (Agrarian Bank).⁴⁴¹ On January 26, an attempt was made by five youths, whose affiliation was unknown, to kidnap the prominent sugar baron, Álvaro Caicedo in the centre of Cali. The failed kidnap left Caicedo with two bullet wounds. In response to these attacks the government announced measure to tighten security. Despite increasing activity and attacks by guerrilla groups officials still felt that they hardly presented a strategic threat to the government.⁴⁴²

In late September 1973, the ELN suffered a serious blow. Following months of preparation, an Army offensive of 5,000 troops under Operation Anorí was launched against the guerrilla group in the Middle Magdalena and North Eastern Antioquia areas, leading to the death of twenty-one guerrillas. The attack coincided with a full-page advertisement by the Antioquian security forces for a one million-peso reward for the ELN leader, Fabio Vasquez Castaño.⁴⁴³ In October, the ELN suffered another attack in which the brothers Antonio and Manuel Vasquez Castaño were killed during the armed confrontation in Antioquia. Similarly the EPL suffered significant losses. By October 1973, it was estimated by Colonel Riveros, Commander of the 4th

⁴³⁹ 550,000 Colombian pesos would amount to £11,000 in 1973.

⁴⁴⁰ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 30 January 1973, ALL 1/3, FCO7/2480, TNA.

⁴⁴¹ 150,000 Colombian pesos would amount to £3,000 in 1973.

⁴⁴² Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 30 January 1973, ALL 1/3, FCO7/2480, TNA.

⁴⁴³ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 28 September 1973, ALL 1/2, FCO7/2479, TNA.

Brigade, that the EPL numbered 'no more than eighteen'.⁴⁴⁴ However, local support for the ELN in rural regions was strong. Accord to the Colonel, in areas 'long neglected by the government because of their poverty and difficulty of access, the ELN provided rough justice, education with a strong propaganda content and some drugs and medical care. The ELN has filled a government vacuum in these areas.'⁴⁴⁵

The ELN also had an effective urban network in Medellín, the capital of Antioquia and the second largest city in Colombia. Whilst the city was not used for urban terrorist activities, at least in the early 1970s, it was essential for communication and intelligence. In the first half of 1973, the ELN had kidnapped five rich Antioquians from two families for ransom and took over small towns, captured arms and ammunition. Whereas the ELN during these early Army operations lost a third of their forces, the FARC made significant headway in 'carefully planned actions mounted every six months or so'.⁴⁴⁶ Despite the fear of Colombian officials that Russian, Chinese or Cuban influence may have provided the guerrillas with external assistance, there was 'little hard evidence' that any group – FARC, ELN, or EPL – were receiving arms, ammunition, money, drugs, technical assistance or training from outside.⁴⁴⁷ FARC activity during the 1970s was focussed around rural activity. Typically, in the early hours of the morning on June 10, 1974 around 140 FARC guerrillas occupied the town of Algeciras, around 50 kilometres south of Neiva, the capital of the Huila department. During the occupation there was a shoot-out between the local police and guerrillas and an estimated 500,000 million pesos of goods were taken. The theft of goods and money was a

⁴⁴⁴ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 5 October 1973, ALL 1/3, FCO7/2480, TNA.

⁴⁴⁵ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 19 June 1973, ALL 1/3, FCO7/2480, TNA.

⁴⁴⁶ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 25 October 1973, ALL 1/3, FCO7/2480, TNA.

⁴⁴⁷ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 19 June 1973, ALL 1/3, FCO7/2480, TNA.

common tactic used by guerrillas as 'restocking exercises for food, clothes and medicines'.⁴⁴⁸

Conclusion

The activities of Colombian insurgent groups have been largely annexed by the wider debate of communist infiltration and criminality. This account of guerrilla activity during the 1970s has illustrated the political nature of criminal activity. High profile targets, military personnel and local elites were targets for insurgent groups, although due to the nature of these actions, it was and still is difficult to ascertain the culprits of kidnappings. One of key features of unrest in Colombia during the 1970s is the increasing urban nature of unrest. This is largely due to the growing dissatisfaction of urban dwellers, many of which were recent migrants to the country's towns and cities from violence ridden rural areas in the aftermath of *La Violencia*. During the 1970s, the ANAPO movement and the ANUC emerged as the voices of the poor, however failed to live up to their promises to deliver social and agrarian reform for the masses.

As Colombia emerged from the constraints of the *Frente Nacional* coalition, little had changed in terms of the political system. The traditional political parties remained closed as extremist factions on the left grew. A booming population and high levels of unemployment, despite warnings from the international community, were ignored. The issue of social and agrarian reform to alleviate the country's social ills remained unaddressed. It is in this context in which we see a marked increase rural and urban insurgency. Although the drug trade has been singled out as the driver of violence, the role of the government in perpetuating conflict has not been addressed. As Colombia entered the 1980s, the level of state sponsored terrorism increased markedly in a bid to rid the country of 'subversive activity'.

⁴⁴⁸ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 14 June, ALL 1/4, FCO7/2659, TNA.

Chapter Seven

Negotiating Peace, 1980-1989

The preceding chapters have outlined, violence in Colombia is a historical phenomenon that comes in many forms and these can be broadly separated into four categories: paramilitary violence used by landed elites against rural land invasions, guerrilla warfare, crime, and acts of violence committed by criminal gangs. This was certainly the case during the crisis of *La Violencia* and continues to plague the country to the present day. During the *Frente Nacional* years, Colombia saw the mobilisation of rural *campesinos*, students, trade unionists and insurgents. Despite the rhetoric of ‘social change’ and ‘agrarian reform’, by the end of the 1970s, little had changed in terms of policy outcomes. This is largely illustrative of the paradoxical nature of the relationship between the Colombian state and its people. The 1980s reveal this paradox in its full glory. This decade saw the initiation of a long process of negotiations between the guerrilla organisations and the Colombian government and the beginning of an overtly sustained attack against attacks on various elements of Colombian society, including human rights activists, journalists, union leaders and *campesinos*. The political genocide of the left in Colombia was the result of the ideological collusion between the state and paramilitary forces that were bound by their common goal of countering the guerrilla forces as part of a subterranean struggle that had little to do with narcotics. Although insurgent groups, namely the FARC are associated with the drugs trade, paramilitary involvement in this area is far more prominent.

The rise in drug cultivation and increase in violence in Colombia post 1980s are often cited as correlating trends. Both the “new wars” and the “greed vs. grievance” theories suggest that the drugs trade and the criminal activity associated with it drove the high levels of violence and increased levels of

paramilitarism in Colombia.⁴⁴⁹ However these theories have neglected the decades of violence that preceded the drugs trade, and in particular the role of the state in perpetuating violence. The idea that “greed” has fuelled conflict particularly disregards the demographic problem facing Colombia in the post-*La Violencia* era. Indeed, correlation of increasing levels of drug production and violence does not mean causation. According to a department-level study carried out by Holmes, Gutiérrez de Piñeres and Curtin, ‘coca cultivation is not a major in explaining differences in leftist guerrilla violence levels in Colombia’. In geographical terms, ‘there appears to be minimal physical overlap of coca cultivation and guerrilla violence’.⁴⁵⁰ It is important to test this causality given that violence in Colombia – as we have seen - has deep historical roots.

By the 1980s, a political impasse had developed between the government and insurgent groups. The lack of legal employment and the downfall of the ANUC under the counter-reformist policies during the previous decade, in which over 100 local level advocates from the ANUC were killed, provided rural support for insurgent groups.⁴⁵¹ The ‘limited nature of the peasant achievements reflected the immense power of the Colombian landowning class’, which with the help of the state ‘curbed the belligerency of the peasantry’.⁴⁵² However, the repressive measures in urban and rural areas

⁴⁴⁹ Paul Collier, ‘Rebellion as Quasi-Criminal Activity,’ *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 44, No. 6 (2002) pp. 838-852; Paul Collier, ‘Causas Económicas de las Guerras Civiles y sus Implicaciones para el Diseño de Políticas,’ *El Malpensante*, Vol. 30, May-June (2001); Mats Berdal and David Malone, (eds.) *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000); Alexandra Guàqueta, ‘The Colombian Conflict: Political and Economic Dimensions’ in Karen Ballentine and Jake Sherman, (eds.) *The Political Economy of Armed Conflict: Beyond Greed and Grievance* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003) pp. 73-106; Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999).

⁴⁵⁰ Jennifer S. Holmes, Sheila Amin Gutiérrez de Piñeres and Kevin M. Curtin, ‘Drugs, Violence, and Development in Colombia: A Departmental-Level Analysis,’ *Latin American Politics and Society*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (2006) p. 182.

⁴⁵¹ León Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement in Colombia: Struggles of the National Peasant Association, 1967-1981* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 202

⁴⁵² *ibid.*, p. 203.

against the *campesinos*, trade unionists and students led to the increasing radicalisation of armed groups.

Security Advances

In January 1980, the Colombian government claimed spectacular security advances. On January 19, a presidential press announcement claimed that the 'subversive movements in Colombia have been severely battered by the military authorities and no longer pose a threat to the security of the state'. The Colombian Army Intelligence Services detained 1373 persons, of whom 221 remained in state prisons. Four 'people's prisons' created by guerrilla groups, namely the M-19 to hold hostages had been uncovered.⁴⁵³ More than 1600 military operations were undertaken by the Security Forces leading to the recovery of vast stocks of weapons and ammunition, as well as Army and Police equipment.⁴⁵⁴ On January 22 1981, further anti-guerrilla operations against the FARC and M-19 were launched. This involved 4000 Colombian soldiers in the department of Caquetá.⁴⁵⁵ The relatively low estimates for the number of insurgents encountered did not always correspond with their significantly stronger statistics for kills, capture and trials. Whilst the Colombian government's wish to not disclose accurate numbers of insurgents is not surprising, what was remarkable was the way in which insurgent losses reported from the operations between 1979 and 1982 were quickly replaced with new fighters.

⁴⁵³ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 31 January 1980, ALL 014/1, FCO7/3775, TNA.

⁴⁵⁴ *ibid.*: Official details on operations carried out by the Security Forces are as follows. M-19: operations carried out, 1032; persons captured, 685, persons released by judges, 128; persons released in course of investigations, 445; detention orders, 103. FARC: operations carried out, 278; persons captured, 329, persons released by judges, 87; persons released in course of investigations, 161; detention orders, 65. EPL: operations carried out, 112; persons captured, 329, persons released by judges, 19; persons released in course of investigations, 53; detention orders, 29. ELN: operations carried out, 112; persons captured, 101, persons released by judges, 19; persons released in course of investigations, 32; detention orders, 16. Discrepancies in total: 25 persons.

⁴⁵⁵ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 29 January 1982, ALL 014/1, FCO7/4309, TNA.

The Minister of Defence, General Camacho Leyva was keen to underline the security advances to the political leaders in Bogotá. In a speech to the House of Representatives, which was later published as a booklet for dissemination as the 'Security Statute', he outlined the increased punishments to be handed down for 'subversive activities'. Most interestingly, General Camacho pointed out that subversive groups which had 'been in rebellion for more than 25 years were criminal rather than political'.⁴⁵⁶ In his 'rapid sketch' of 'subversive groups', he defined the M-19 as 'an urban group, specialising in kidnapping and holding victims in People's Prisons.' Members of the group, he insisted, had also 'indulged in a large number of depraved activities' such as 'homosexuality, prostitution, fraud and attacks on banks'.⁴⁵⁷ The Defence Minister's efforts to frame insurgents in both urban and rural Colombia as depraved criminals illustrates the profound lack of mutual understanding between political elites in Bogotá and the majority of the Colombian population. Indeed, the latter over decades of government abandonment, policies and military action had become increasingly alienated from Bogotá, which was a direct result of government policies.

Despite these much vaunted security advances, the Colombian Armed Forces were far from winning the war. Deficiencies in training, equipment, command and control significantly hampered the Colombian security forces. The armed forces suffered all the classic travails of counter-insurgency and often found themselves falling into ambushes. Moreover, guerrilla groups were quickly able to recuperate. It is difficult to ascertain exactly how the guerrilla groups were able to revive so quickly despite sustained operations by the Armed Forces. However, it is clear that thousands of rural dwellers were at the very least sympathetic to the cause of insurgent groups and a good number of them were willing to take up arms.

⁴⁵⁶ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 11 January 1980, ALL 014/1, FCO7/3775, TNA.

⁴⁵⁷ *ibid.*

The Diversification of Insurgency

The M-19 represented what might be described as the intellectual militants of the Colombian armed conflict. The group traced its origins to the allegedly fraudulent elections of 1970. For the Colombian government and international observers the M-19 was a 'curious mix of ANAPO members, which combined elements of both left and right wing ideology' and claimed to offer a 'popular alternative to the Liberal and Conservative oligarchy'.⁴⁵⁸ Consisting of well educated, middle-class urbanites, the M-19 did not see themselves as 'populists'. In an interview with the Colombian magazine *Cromos* in mid-April 1980, the leaders of the M-19 stated 'we are not populists, but revolutionary and nationalistic guerrilla fighters'. The 'vague' political stand of the M-19 was clearly the main weakness of the group, since it lacked a strong ideological brand. However according to the group's leadership at the time it was 'not necessary to be on the right or the left to face up to the problem of dependency; what you have to be is patriotic'.⁴⁵⁹

For the Colombian government, the M-19's lack of clear ideology was by far the weakest element of the organisation. Whilst the M-19 called for the overthrow of Colombia's traditional political elite, no viable alternative was offered. Despite these weaknesses, by the early 1980s and following internal intelligence reviews, the M-19 was still regarded by the government as 'the largest, best-trained and widest urban terrorist organisation', presenting 'a serious threat to urban law and order'.⁴⁶⁰ The M-19 was geared toward carrying out 'spectacular' and symbolic attacks. In 1974 the group claimed responsibility for the theft of Simón Bolívar's sword. In 1976, following a brief lull in activities, the M-19 reappeared and orchestrated the kidnapping of the leader of the *Confederación de Trabajadores de Colombia* (Colombian Labour Confederation, CTC), José Raquel Mercado, whom the group accused of

⁴⁵⁸ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 24 March 1980, ALL 051/2, FCO7/3778.

⁴⁵⁹ *Revista Cromos*, April 1980.

⁴⁶⁰ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 24 March 1980, ALL 051/2, FCO7/3778.

being 'devoted to imperialism' and a 'traitor of the working class'.⁴⁶¹ On April 1976 his corpse was found in a public park. In 1978, the M-19 carried out a lightning raid on the Nicaraguan Embassy and briefly kidnapped the Somocista Ambassador, marking a clear signal to the Colombian authorities of the M-19's solidarity with the Sandinistas. In January 1979, the M-19 carried out a tunnelling operation into a Colombian Army barracks and made away with around 6,000 small arms and 14,000 rounds of ammunition. Given the relatively small size of the M-19, which the Colombian authorities estimated to be 400 at the most, the success of their operations was startling.⁴⁶² The flamboyant and very public nature of the attacks in urban areas alarmed the government and garnered widespread publicity for the group.

The purpose of this chapter is not to provide a chronology of the M-19's successes and failures in their attempt to achieve political change in Colombia. However, it is important to highlight the increasing militancy of the M-19, beginning with their initial symbolic action of making away with the sword of Simón Bolívar. Whilst in official terms, government officials repeatedly highlighted the criminal nature of the M-19 and the threat posed by their actions in terms of international terrorism, there appears to be a misunderstanding of the political project of the M-19. For Colombian officials, the lack of political coherency from the M-19 as to what their alternative to the political status quo meant that they were seen as a criminal, rather than a militant political organisation.

In fact their lack of coherency owed much to the heterogeneous make-up of the group. The founders of the M-19 consisted of around 20 well-educated, middle-class urbanites that came from a range of political organisations. These included insurgents who had served with the FARC, members of Colombia's Congress; radical members of the Liberal party and previous

⁴⁶¹ Patricia Lara Salive, *Siembra Vientos y Recogerás Tempestades* (Barcelona: Fontamara, 1982) pp. 179-180.

⁴⁶² Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 24 March 1980, ALL 051/2, FCO7/3778.

supporters of the MRL; followers of the slain priest, Father Camilo Torres, former members of the ANAPO movement and other politically minded individuals. M-19 sympathisers have published a broad swathe of literature that engages with the political problems of Colombia and provides a comprehensive chronology of the evolution of the M-19. But it has to be conceded that, while critical in tone, there is little conceptual coherence.⁴⁶³

It was the M-19's next move that attracted widespread international attention. On 27 February 1980, the M-19 seized control of the Dominican Embassy in Bogotá during a reception to celebrate Dominican Independence Day. As a result, many hostages were caught in the net, including the ambassadors of Austria, Brazil, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Egypt, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Israel, Mexico, Switzerland, the United States, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Together with other diplomats from Bolivia, Jamaica, Paraguay and Peru, they were held for 61 days. The Colombian authorities had supposedly received reports some ten days earlier that an attack of the Dominican Embassy would take place.⁴⁶⁴ The reaction of the US Ambassador's bodyguards once they realised that an attack was taking place was to open fire and this action resulted in the death of an M-19 member and a bodyguard, with several other people wounded. The exchange of fire ended with an M-19 member holding the US Ambassador out of a window shouting for a cease-fire. The M-19 issued their demands; the release of 311 political prisoners of various organisations in police custody or prison as well as the payment of \$50 million US dollars. Armed with automatic weapons and grenades, the Colombian government took the threat to blow up the Embassy seriously.

The hostage takers eventually flew to Cuba with their captives and were cheered by Colombians when they arrived at the airport. Although no

⁴⁶³ Key texts that include interviews with the leaders of the M-19 include: Arturo Álape, *La Paz, La Violencia: Testigos de Excepción: Hechos y Testimonios Sobre 40 Años de Violencia y Paz que Vuelven a Ser Hoy Palpitante Actualidad* (Bogotá: Planeta, 1993, 3rd Edition); Olga Behar, *Las Guerras de la Paz* (Bogotá: Planeta, 1986); Salive, *Siembra Vientos*.

⁴⁶⁴ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 24 March 1980, ALL 051/2, FCO7/3778.

prisoners were released, they secured a payment of \$2.5 million US dollars. The leader of the M-19 at the time of the siege of the Embassy of the Dominican Republic was Carlos Toledo Plata, a former surgeon and former ANAPO member in the House of Representatives. According to the Colombian Defence Ministry in 1979 the group included a number of well-educated professionals and academics.⁴⁶⁵ Secrecy of the highest level was maintained within M-19, with different cells having no knowledge of one another.⁴⁶⁶

The M-19 was able to use this offensive to their advantage. One of the 'novel features' of the occupation of the Embassy was that the M-19 permitted their hostages to speak to their respective Embassies, families and government at least once a day by telephone as well as allowing telephone interviews with some foreign media outlets. This maximised the publicity of the occupation and also gave them leverage in negotiations by the withholding of information. In a surprise turn of events the M-19 also gave in the government's demand that all female hostages be released as a condition for the start of dialogue. This is particularly important as females were also part of the M-19's operation, therefore the presence of the female hostages would not have presented a great difficulty. Moreover, the acceptance of Red Cross supplies, the compassionate release of the Austrian Ambassador (whose wife was ill) and the M-19's willingness to allow medical practitioners to make frequent visits to attend to hostages gave a human face to the guerrillas. These 'reasonable' practices of the M-19 suggest that the urban insurgent group wanted to gain public support for their cause and come across as 'reasonably-minded protestors'.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁵ The Colombian Guerrilla Group: M-19, Research Department Note 10/80, American Section Research Department, 12 March 1980, ALL 051/2, FCO7/3778.

⁴⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁶⁷ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 24 March 1980, ALL 051/2, FCO7/3778.

For the Colombian government, the siege of the embassy raised the spectre of 'international terrorism'.⁴⁶⁸ An official statement from the Colombian government through the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Diego Uribe-Vargas, stated that 'the government has realised that the violent occupation of the embassy was a reflection of the new types of war being waged in different regions by terrorist groups against legal regimes'.⁴⁶⁹ The M-19 realised the limitations of their attack on the embassy and by March 19 1980 had reduced their demand of the release of 311 prisoners to 20. The M-19's list of 'political prisoners' was not well received by the government and judiciary. According to Uribe-Vargas, the 'political prisoners' in question were not 'misguided and harmless idealists, but common criminals, who in the course of their criminal activities, have never stopped at any moral barrier'.⁴⁷⁰

Whilst the M-19 was not successful in achieving their demands, President Turbay recognised that the M-19 had achieved their main objective: gaining widespread publicity for their cause. Importantly, the M-19 had also 'taken the leadership of the country's guerrilla movements' as some of the 'important prisoners' whose release was demanded belonged to other groups.⁴⁷¹ The siege raised serious questions about the claim's of security advancements by the Colombian government. The Colombian Army had boasted successes against the FARC as well as the M-19. Between August 1979 and February 1980, the Army claimed to have killed 36 FARC guerrillas and captured a further 136.⁴⁷² In October 1979, the Minister of Defence, General Camacho Leyva claimed that 95 per cent of the arms stolen by the M-19 in the military raid in January 1979 had been recovered. The trial of 219 alleged members of the M-19 than began in November 1979 seemed to substantiate the General's

⁴⁶⁸ Statement made by Colombian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Diego Uribe-Vargas explaining the position of the Colombian government following the seizure of the Embassy of the Dominican Republic. Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 20 March 1980, ALL 051/2, FCO7/3778.

⁴⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁴⁷¹ Telegram from British Embassy, Bogotá to Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London, 20 March 1980, 19234CZ, Telegram number 72, FCO7/3778; also see: Interview with President Turbay, *Washington Post*, 19 March 1980.

⁴⁷² Latin America Regional Reports, Andean Group, RA-80-04, 16 May 1980.

remarks. The accused included a former member of the Military Court, Carlos Villamil Franco, who according to the Colombian army was 'M-19's second-in-command'.⁴⁷³ A total of 53 of the 219 were tried in absentia including the M-19 leader, Carlos Toledo Plata. However, according to the Toledo Plata in an interview with the Spanish daily *El País* in December 1979, 'only half of those on trial' were members of the M-19.⁴⁷⁴ Whilst it is difficult to determine for certain whether Toledo Plata was correct in his estimations, the subsequent siege of the embassy did present some serious questions about the Colombian government's ability to counter the increasing threat from the various armed guerrilla groups. The raid on the armoury was a blessing in disguise for the Colombian government as it served as the perfect pretext for launching an offensive on the guerrillas. The subsequent siege however demonstrated the limited capabilities of the government to counter its internal security problems and the escalation of violence, which was largely a result of failure of the government to address the agrarian question and urban poverty from *La Violencia*.

The intellectually minded M-19 represented a challenge to the government and discredited the traditional political establishment. The group was able to garner significant publicity for its cause and importantly to demonstrate the humanistic element of the organisation through its open communication and symbolic gestures. What differentiated the M-19 from the other groups that were engaged in a war against the Colombian state? Firstly, it was a mix of both Marxist, nationalist and populist political thought. A communiqué issued following the arms raid in January 1979 listed the various political demands of the M-19 that included agrarian reform, increase in the minimum wage excess of the increase in the cost of living, freezing of basic food prices, restrictions on monopolies, respect for basic human rights and the lifting of the state of siege, which the country had endured throughout the *Frente Nacional* years and beyond. Whilst the demand for agrarian reform correlated with the demands of the other guerrilla groups such as the FARC and ELN, the M-19's

⁴⁷³ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 29 February 1980, ALL 051/2, FCO7/3778.

⁴⁷⁴ *ibid.*

demands specifically made reference to the growing cost of living and internal socio-economic situation, which in urban areas was a burgeoning problem due to the increase of migration within Colombia from rural to urban areas. The M-19 saw itself as an umbrella organisation for the various guerrilla organisations and called for unity and the establishment of 'revolutionary army of workers, peasants and the exploited masses'.⁴⁷⁵

The continued factionalism of the left in Colombia created a political impasse. The M-19 recognised this as a weakness and an obstacle to achieving political change in Colombia. However, it was not only ideological differences that drove persistent factionalism; the various movements also suffered from significant disagreements over military strategy. Carlos Toledo Plata, the founder of the M-19, stated that the main difference between the M-19 and other leftist movements in the country, such as the FARC and the Communist Party, was that the latter believed that the nature of the armed struggle against the Colombian state should begin in rural areas in the tradition of Mao and emulators such as Ché.⁴⁷⁶

The reaction of the international press to the siege of the Embassy of the Dominican Republic was largely predictable. *The Sunday Times* in their assessment of the events reported the M-19 as 'common criminals'.⁴⁷⁷ This rather crude and incorrect statement is reflective of the lack of understanding of revolutionary movements in Latin America, which at the time were not limited to Colombia. Interestingly, whilst the impact of the FARC was recognised in 'influencing the structure of land ownership and local politics in some areas' of Colombia, in 1980 the Andean Group concluded that 'the FARC provides no real threat to the security of the Colombian state'.⁴⁷⁸ The M-19's fundamentally political nature is underlined by its eventual transition to democratic politics in the 1990s.

⁴⁷⁵ The Colombian Guerrilla Group: M-19, Research Department Note 10/80, American Section Research Department, 12 March 1980, ALL 051/2, FCO7/3778, TNA.

⁴⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷⁷ *The Sunday Times*, 9 March 1980.

⁴⁷⁸ Latin America Regional Reports, Andean Group, RA-80-04, 16 May 1980.

In the short term, the termination of the M-19 siege seemed like a major political triumph for President Turbay. The outcome was peaceful and his negotiation strategy was a success. The M-19 initial demands of \$50 million US dollars, the release of 311 prisoners and safe conduct out of Colombia were staunchly opposed by the Colombian government. The M-19 finally settled for safe conduct to Cuba and an agreement that the OAS Human Rights Commission would monitor the remaining stages of the M-19 trials and ensure that the accused were defended in line with the law. Although the M-19 reportedly received \$2.5 million US dollars from 'private sources' in return for the release of some hostages, the Colombian government succeeded in holding their staunch position and not conceding to the main demands of the M-19.⁴⁷⁹

Messages of congratulations flooded the Presidential Office in Bogotá from leaders of countries from around the world. However, the fact remained that despite intelligence reports, which warned that an attack on the embassy was likely, the Colombian government had failed to respond. Moreover, the Dominican Ambassador's request for protection for his reception had been ignored. It was not only the actions of the Colombian government that brought the siege to a peaceful end. Without intervention from the International Committee of the Red Cross, the OAS Interamerican Human Rights Commission and several private Colombian citizens with experience in negotiating with guerrillas such as the M-19 and the FARC, a peaceful solution could not have been possible. Whilst President Turbay took the credit for arranging the cooperation of these groups and citizens, diplomats judged that he 'waited much longer than seemed necessary' to bring the parties together.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁹ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 2 May 1980, ALL 051/2, FCO7/3779, TNA.

⁴⁸⁰ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 5 May 1980, ALL 051/2, FCO7/3779.

In the long term the publicity gained by the M-19 was a serious blow to the government. By lowering their demands and allowed medical care to reach the ill hostages and releasing all female hostages, the M-19 show-cased a humanistic side to their military-political project. It was ultimately the M-19 who received the credit for the bloodless outcome of the siege. Whilst President Turbay avoided appeasing to the demand for the release of prisoners, his unwillingness to insist on genuine investigations into allegations of wrongful arrest and torture of civilians by the security forces was not only foolish but gave the M-19 further credibility. The issue of human rights abuses in Colombia had begun to receive serious international attention from Amnesty International, the International Court of Justice, the Organisation of American States and the Catholic Church, as well as from NGOs within Colombia. One of the most prominent internal figures bringing attention to this issue was the ex-President Carlos Lleras.⁴⁸¹ President Turbay offered to extend a form of amnesty, recognising 'the quality and intelligence of the leaders and inviting them to pursue their aims by means of normal political opposition and the ballot box' but this was not well received by leaders of the M-19.⁴⁸² Seven of their leaders remained in jail and preparations were already underway for further operations.

The peaceful resolution of the Embassy siege also opened up a space of public debate about resolution between M-19 and politicians from different parties. During the next few years, the Betancur government and M-19 both embarked on what has been called a 'War for Peace', which resulted in the government signing peace agreements with the M-19 and EPL. Yet these agreements were merely a truce, a tactical device in a deadly struggle for political and military legitimacy on the parts both of the government and the guerrilla movement.

Guerrilla activity persisted into the summer of 1982 despite an amnesty by the government. Following a number of bomb attacks on police stations in the city of Cali in July and August 1982 and a robbery of a *Caja Agraria* (Agrarian

⁴⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁴⁸² *ibid.*

Bank) in Cauca where one million pesos were stolen in Cauca, the political spokesman of the M-19 announced the suspension of operations on September 19. Although some of the leaders of the group were hoping to take the government's offer of an amnesty, this sentiment was not shared throughout the ranks of the M-19. Jamie Bateman, one of the founders and leading commanders of the M-19, felt that 'the armed struggle with the Army must continue, and that, whilst the M-19 will lay down its arms to achieve peace, it will not surrender them'.⁴⁸³

The *campesinos* in areas of guerrilla activity suffered tremendously. In the departments of Caquetá and Putumayo they were often caught between the cross fire between guerrillas and the Army. A typical situation for a peasant farmer in these departments would consist of giving in to guerrilla demands for supplies, the threat of kidnapping or murder if they did not meet the demands and subsequent persecution from the Army for 'helping the guerrillas'. According to reports by peasants, they would be held by the army for interrogation 'for several weeks' where they would be subjected to 'ill-treatment and torture'.⁴⁸⁴ The departments of Caquetá and Putumayo were total military movement zones with an 1800 to 0600 hours curfew, and most importantly with no movement on the rivers. This had a serious impact on economic activity, as it was very difficult for farmers to move their produce to Florencia, the principle market in the area to sell goods.

Human Rights

Colombia's human rights record received little attention compared to its Latin American counterparts during the Cold War era. Whilst much of Latin America was ruled by the authoritarian and brutal military dictatorships during the 1970s and 1980s, Colombia remained a democratic 'anomaly'. However, the

⁴⁸³ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 14 October 1982, ALL 051/1, FCO7/4330, TNA.

⁴⁸⁴ Report of Guerrilla Activity in Caquetá and Putumayo, Specific Date Unknown, 1982, ALL 051/1, FCO7/4330, TNA.

country's democratic status obscured the murky reality of a *de facto* authoritarian security state in which political killings were commonplace and resulted in the deaths of thousands. In December 1986, the British government pushed for answers on the death of a political refugee who resided in London, Heber Marin Cotrini. The 29 year old had dedicated his life to human rights work and was active in the *Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos*, a committee that worked with political prisoners. On the day Marin was due to return to England, he was found dead, showing signs of torture.⁴⁸⁵ Following the death of Marin and a subsequent investigation which was pushed for by the British Embassy, members of the Marin family and lawyer representing them were victims of harassment by the police.⁴⁸⁶ Within the first six months of 1986, Amnesty International had reported the killing of more than 600 Colombians, including left-wing activists, trade unionists, teachers, community workers and homosexuals.⁴⁸⁷

In May 1984, Colombia was once again under a state of siege. This was in response to the murder of the Minister of Justice, Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, which was widely reported to be the work of drug traffickers who had offered two million Colombian pesos for the killing of Bonilla.⁴⁸⁸ Whilst the country was under a state of siege, the military was able to make full use of their extended powers. Throughout the year of 1985, Amnesty International was inundated with reports of abductions by the military. One of these cases included the detention of Angel Hernandez Tamayo, a community leader in one of the poor neighbourhoods of Medellín. According to reports, Hernandez was taken into custody Army's Forth Brigade along with his wife and two children on November 20 1985. Although the wife and children were shortly released, Hernandez remained in custody by the military under the charge of the illegal

⁴⁸⁵ Human Rights: 1986, Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 11 December 1986, ALL 240/1, Freedom of Information Act Request.

⁴⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁸⁷ Human Rights: 1986, Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 3 December 1986, ALL 240/1, Freedom of Information Act Request.

⁴⁸⁸ 'Asesinado el Ministro de Justicia Rodrigo Lara Bonilla,' *El Espectador*, 23 May 2012.

possession of firearms. However, information provided to Amnesty International suggested the Hernandez's role as the director of a local newspaper, *La Voz del Barrio* (the Neighbourhood Voice), which was critical of government policies and the military presence in Medellín was behind his detention.⁴⁸⁹ On April 14 1985, Guillermo Quiroz, a well-known leader of the peasant movement, ANUC was found murdered on a road from Cartagena and Barranquilla. Five men who identified themselves members of the military intelligence arrested Quiroz at his home in San Jacinto, Bolívar, however the arrest was not formally acknowledged by authorities and reported to human rights organisations as 'disappeared'. Quiroz had previously received death threats from several landowners and two days prior to his abduction, the local ANUC headquarters were searched by uniformed army patrol that asked for the whereabouts of the rural leader.

Alongside this, Colombia saw a new political phenomenon in the form of regionalism and separatism. In April 1982, indigenous communities of archipelago of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina launched an international campaign to draw attention to the 'anti-human treatment' of the natives. Since 1947, the Colombian government had promoted the extensive migration of Spanish speaking, Catholic mainlanders. Local residents claimed that they had been dispossessed of their land through *juicio de pertenencia*, a costly mechanism in which indigenous communities would have to renew their documents to prove ownership of land. The Colombian government constructed housing on land that could not be claimed by the local population. Army and police brutality towards the native residents of the archipelago was documented in the report disseminated to the international community, including the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. These included arrest and subsequent deaths from torture, numerous sexual violations, work place discrimination and the enforcement of Spanish as the official language.⁴⁹⁰ All

⁴⁸⁹ Human Rights: 1985, Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 17 December 1985, ALL 240/1, Freedom of Information Act Request.

⁴⁹⁰ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 24 May 1982, ALL 240/1, FCO7/4356, TNA.

these developments, while quite separate in origin, undermined Colombia's political cohesiveness.

The state of siege was intended to bring about a reduction of violence, however conversely it served to increase tensions between the Colombian populace and the state. The widespread arrests, detention, torture, disappearances and murders of progressive members of society at the hands of the military, police, paramilitaries during the 1980s marked one of the institutionally repressive periods of Colombia. The Colombian authorities provided little answers to the questions of the whereabouts of detainees by family members. Under the state of siege, civilians could be held 'for up to six months without being charged'. The Armed Forces acknowledged that they had been 'inundated with the flood of cases' which has been passed to the military courts creating an 'enormous back-log'.⁴⁹¹ Many of the cases reported by international human rights organisations, such as Amnesty International noted the lack of acknowledgment by the police and military for the detention of civilians.

Alongside the multiple insurgencies and alarming rates of human rights abuses committed by the Colombian authorities, the bitter internal divisions with the Liberal and Conservative parties continued through the 1980s. The Conservatives were split between the Ospino-Pastranistas led by ex-President Misael Pastrana Borrero and the Alvaristas led by Alvaro Gómez Hurtado, the son of the ex-President Laureano Gómez.⁴⁹² By 1980, the three proposed Liberal presidential candidates were all occupying diplomatic posts around the world and party lacked a cohesive electoral plan. The traditional political parties were now highly fissiparous and were unable to 'formalise the

⁴⁹¹ Human Rights: 1985, Memorandum of Conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Immediate Consular Department, FCO London, Specific Date Unknown, November 1985, ALL 240/1, Freedom of Information Act Request.

⁴⁹² Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 28 November 1980, ALL 014/1, FCO7/3775.

aspirations' of the Colombian people, and while this was not a new problem, it exacerbated the increasing militarisation of some sectors of society.⁴⁹³

This was also reflected in the texture of Colombian intellectual culture, which was now almost completely separated from the political mainstream. The landscape of Colombian universities witnessed unprecedented changes during the 1970s. Dr Fernando Cepeda Ulloa, renowned Colombian political scientist and later diplomat, was the founder of the Political Sciences Faculty at the Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá. In his analysis of the situation facing the country's university Cepeda noted the rapid expansion of the university population in Colombia, which was approaching 300,000 students.⁴⁹⁴ Most importantly, noted how universities had polarised sharply to the left 'as radical thought had infiltrated at both teacher and student level'. According to Cepeda, 'many campuses had become virtual fortresses' with students engaging in guerrilla activities with various revolutionary groups including the Movement of the Revolutionary Left, FARC and the ELN.⁴⁹⁵

Negotiating Peace: Colombia's 'Peace President'

The 1982 elections were particularly significant for Colombia. Firstly, the victory of the Conservative candidate Belisario Betancur meant that for the first time since 1946 the Liberals had been ousted from power electorally. Secondly, the electoral turnout was the highest in the nation's history. A total of 6.8 millions votes were cast, with some 55 per cent of the electorate casting their votes. This was a relief for Colombian officials given the growing political apathy and absenteeism of elections in the previous four decades. Thirdly, the balance of Colombia's electorate had transformed from rural to urban. Despite the continuance of insurgent activity, particularly by the M-19 in Bogotá and Cali, the elections were a remarkable success in terms of little disruption and

⁴⁹³ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 26 March 1980, ALL 014/1, FCO7/3775.

⁴⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁹⁵ *ibid.*

an overall optimistic picture in terms of political engagement from the electorate. Once again, this underlines Colombia's unusual problems as a functioning democracy with high growth rates and yet it is plagued by endemic violence and social fragmentation.

President Betancur announced an ambitious economic and social development plan following his inauguration. Seven departments and two *intendencias* affected by insurgent activity were to be the main beneficiaries of the plan which covered health, education, employment, training schemes, agriculture and livestock programmes, small business projects, rural electrification and road construction. The plan required the 'close participation of the Armed Forces' that were to immediately carry out four priority programmes in the zones which had suffered the most from the armed struggle.⁴⁹⁶ This \$800 million US dollar project was unsurprisingly well received by the electorate, however, the 'government gave no indication' of how it intended to finance it.⁴⁹⁷ In a country where tax avoidance was a chronic problem, it would mean the substantial diversion of relatively scarce resources from over-populated urban areas, which suffered from high unemployment rates, to under-populated rural areas.

Meanwhile, President Betancur initiated the first of Colombia's negotiations with the various guerrilla movements. In his inaugural address in August 1982, the President stated 'I extend my hand to those who have taken up arms, that they integrate themselves in the full exercise of their rights within the framework of the decisions of parliament'.⁴⁹⁸ Betancur's first step was to appoint General Fernando Landazábal, an officer who had publically recognised both the political and military dimension of the guerrilla problem, as the Defence Minister. In September 1983, a reconstituted and enlarged Peace Commission of 40 members was established, which was to be headed by ex-president Carlos Lleras. In his opening speech Lleras outlines the three

⁴⁹⁶ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 16 November 1982, ALL 051/1, FCO7/4330, TNA.

⁴⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁹⁸ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 14 October 1982, ALL 051/1, FCO7/4330, TNA.

objectives of the commission: the reintegration of guerrillas into normal life; transformation of the regions affected by problems of public order; and finally general uplift in the social and economic conditions of the country.⁴⁹⁹ However, following this initial air of optimism, the Peace Commission's role in assisting the government's action plan was put on hold, largely due to Lleras having resigned his chairmanship because of ill health. One would think that decades of chronic levels of violence, multiple insurgencies, and widespread socio-economic problems would have pushed the government to follow through with the Peace Commission, however in Colombia, this is simply not the case.

The action plan for peace proposed by President Betancur was both ambitious and politically difficult. The proposed reintegration into society for guerrillas who accepted the amnesty was an enormous task. None of the guerrilla groups unanimously agreed on accepting the terms set by Betancur. Moreover, the social and economic conditions in some parts of the country were so dire that taking up arms was a path taken by many unemployed and underemployed men and women. As a result, the peace efforts delivered a temporary truce rather than lasting peace and reflected temporary exhaustion on the part of the antagonists rather than a mutual desire for resolution.

For many Colombians during the 1980s, Betancur was known as the 'Peace President'. His efforts towards achieving a lasting solution to the armed conflict between the guerrillas and Colombian state had however failed. The wave of popular support that greeted Betancur in 1982 electoral victory had waned considerably by the end of his presidential term. The failure of the government to hold a peace accord with the M-19 following the Siege of the Palace of Justice in 1985, in which almost half of the country's Supreme Court justices were killed and growing levels of violence in urban areas, repeated claims of paramilitary-military alliances and human rights abuses tainted the image of the 'Peace President'.⁵⁰⁰ It is important to note here that relatively

⁴⁹⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰⁰ 'Landmark Conviction in Colombia's Palace of Justice Case,' US National Security Archive, George Washington University; 'State Department Cable says Colombian

little information is available on the Siege of the Palace of Justice and much of the events are shrouded in mystery with regards to the disappearances of those who were inside the Palace of Justice at the time of the siege. However, it is certainly true that there was a concerted effort on the part of the Colombian authorities to shed responsibility for the extrajudicial killings that took place.

In the midst of rampant killings by state authorities, the 1980s saw the opening of the Colombian Political system. The creation of the political wing of the FARC, *Unión Patriótica* (Patriotic Union, UP) represented an opening of the elitist Colombian political system for the first time in its history. However, Betancur was unable to control the political genocide that followed. In 1985 at the onset of the establishment of the UP, the FARC complained that their political wing were 'unable to campaign openly for the March congressional elections because of assassinations within their ranks, perpetrated by military inspired agents'. The PCC also considered itself a target of bombs and military harassment. The fears of the left were not unfounded. Within a decade of the UP existence it is estimated 3000-5000 of its members were killed.⁵⁰¹ The failure of the Colombian government to curb such disturbing levels of political violence had a lasting legacy on the future of guerrilla warfare in Colombia. Most importantly, it served to deepen the guerrilla's mistrust of the Colombian government and for many of those serving in various guerrilla ranks, the political genocide was proof that the electoral path would not serve their cause in the long term.

In the 1986 general elections, the UP only received 1.4 per cent of the vote. Whilst this may suggest little success, the votes were enough to grant five seats in the Senate, nine in the Chamber of Representatives, fourteen

Army Responsible for Palace of Justice Deaths, Disappearances,' US National Security Archive, George Washington University.

⁵⁰¹ Iván Cepeda Castro, *El Genocidio Contra la Unión Patriótica* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Facultad de Derecho, 1999). See also, Iván Cepeda Castro, 'Genocidio Político: El Caso de la Unión Patriótica en Colombia,' *Revista Cetil*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2006) pp. 101-112.

deputies, 351 councilmen and 23 municipal mayors on a local basis.⁵⁰² However, soon after the elections, elected members of the Colombian parliament were killed with reports suggesting the involvement of the police or military personnel.⁵⁰³ On 30 August 1986 the newly elected official to the Chamber of Representatives, Leonardo Posada was shot on a street in Barrancabermeja in the department of Santander.⁵⁰⁴ According to reports, Posada had just left an official meeting and was walking along the street with two companions when he was shot by assassins on a motorcycle. After the first few shots left him slightly wounded, his assailants returned and shot him again. Posada died in hospital a few days later. Posada had spent much of his political career as a city councillor for Barrancabermeja and served on the Peace Commission for the Magdalena Medio region, which had suffered heavily from violence. Many councillors who had represented the region with political opposition parties had also been previously killed, allegedly as part of extrajudicial executions.⁵⁰⁵

Killings of UP members were widespread. On 1 September 1986, Pedro Nel Jiménez Obando, a senator of the UP representing the department of Meta was shot dead by two gunmen on a motorcycle in Villavicencio, the capital of Meta, whilst waiting for his daughter to come out of school. Jiménez was convinced of the military-paramilitary alliances and was known to be gathering evidence to substantiate his claims. Previously the senator had provided the country's Attorney General with the names of police and army officers that were believed to be responsible for the abduction of María Eugenia Castaneda who 'disappeared' on 14 August 1986.⁵⁰⁶ President Betancur's peace process was unable to withstand these sort of determined and

⁵⁰² Andrei Gomez-Suarez, 'Perpetrator Blocs, Genocidal Mentalities and Geographies: The Destruction of the Unión Patriótica in Colombia and its Lessons for Genocide Studies,' *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (2007) pp. 637-660.

⁵⁰³ Human Rights: 1986, Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 11 December 1986, ALL 240/1, Freedom of Information Act Request.

⁵⁰⁴ Human Rights: 1986, Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 3 September 1986, ALL 240/1, Freedom of Information Act Request.

⁵⁰⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁰⁶ *ibid.*

murderous attacks by extremists from the right, determined to resist the broadening of Colombian politics.

It is largely accepted that guerrilla violence increased during the 1980s. However, contrary to the conventional wisdom in this area, the mid-1980s saw a dramatic reduction in organised guerrilla activity. Given the failure of the amnesty offered by the Betancur administration this outcome was the polar opposite of what one would expect. An uneasy peace broke out and on April 1 1984, the FARC announced its 'agreement in principle' to a truce from 31 May. This was intended to lead to a more comprehensive negotiated end to its military activities and permit the 'reintegration of the guerrillas into the constitutional life of the country'.⁵⁰⁷ Similar agreements followed with the M-19 whilst the ELN remained defiant. Although guerrilla activity certainly decreased, it did not cease and military training and the stockpiling of weapons continued in earnest. The guerrillas had not disarmed and significant amounts of the national territory remained under the control of the guerrillas who were later able to use this to bargain with the government.

Remarkably, during the same period there was an alarming increase in 'miscellaneous violence and especially kidnapping for ransom'.⁵⁰⁸ Given that many cases were unreported in the press and set against the background of a high degree of news management on part of the government - this is particularly significant as an indicator of trends of violence during the 1980s. In particular, this would suggest an undue prominence given to violence perpetrated by paramilitaries and criminal gangs rather than isolated criminal acts by individuals.

⁵⁰⁷ Colombia Annual Report 1985, Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 10 January 1985, ALL 014/2, Freedom of Information Act Request.

⁵⁰⁸ *ibid.*

Economic Woes and Violence

The main problems faced by President Betancur were violence linked to the country's historical economic and social ills. His exceptionally high levels of support in the poll for the presidency, the signal of an upward trend towards increased political participation from the electorate and the attempts to achieve peace by the government, certainly brought a sense of optimism. In terms of the economy, whilst Colombia's situation was far better than her Latin American counterparts, the fiscal deficit of \$295 million US dollars was a cause of concern for the Betancur administration as the most 'immediate difficulty' facing the government was a case of 'simply lack of pesos'.⁵⁰⁹ The early 1980s also saw cutbacks in the manufacturing industry, which was an expected symptom of the global recession but also due to structural weaknesses. The Colombian textile industry had priced itself out of the market and by 1982 it found itself at the mercy of 'contraband and relentless competition from the Far East'. Moreover, interest rates remained high with unemployment and sub-employment 'patently growing'.⁵¹⁰ Betancur therefore faced the formidable task of simultaneously stimulating the economy, reducing inflation and increasing the tax yield. This most certainly could have not have been achieved at once or even within one term of his presidency.

The old habit of not paying taxes was by far one of the most pervasive and damaging of Colombia's economic problems. Indeed, no Colombian administration had managed to effectively tackle this issue. Like its Latin American counterparts, Colombia relied on indirect taxes, however corruption and the ease in which fraudulent papers could be created caused the government to lose much of its income. During Betancur's administration a number of tax policies were put into place to stimulate the economy. His plan to increase the export tax rebate from 6 to 15 per cent was intended to help businesses, and whilst it was welcomed by industries its most immediate

⁵⁰⁹ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 10 November 1982, ALL 014/2, FCO7/4310, TNA.

⁵¹⁰ *ibid.*

effect was to further reduce tax receipts.⁵¹¹ His policy failed to appease the elites as when Betancur attempted bring about new taxes his relationship with Congress soured. Betancur's relationship with the legislative branch was particularly important during his administration, since he also needed Congress on side to pass legislation to bring about a peace treaty with the various guerrilla groups.

The government's pledge to inject huge sums of money for infrastructural work was a core element in its strategy to reduce the guerrilla influence. Accordingly, the country's economic situation certainly raised wider questions of the government's ability to follow through on its security pledges. For example, Betancur's promise of low cost housing was in serious jeopardy only months after this electoral victory because the Housing Corporation had 'no money to buy land or finance construction.'⁵¹² In October 1985, the Colombian foreign minister, Ramírez Ocampo made an appeal for international aid to fund the country's 'rural pacification' project. Ocampo's message was clear: 'the basic cause of Colombian rural violence was social deprivation'.⁵¹³ With the help of the UNDP, the government drew up a social plan for peace and identified the minimum essential infrastructure required in areas that suffered from violence. The estimated cost was \$730 million US dollars, \$410 of which would need to be raised externally.⁵¹⁴

Ocampo's request was not well received by the international community. According to one British official the response to Ocampo's appeal was 'several buckets of water tipped over his head'.⁵¹⁵ For many developed countries, Colombia simply did not meet the requirements for international aid. Typically, for the Austrian and Danish governments Colombia's per capita GDP specifically ruled out the option of bilateral aid. In his response, Ocampo stated that he realised that 'this was not a field to attract commercial loans',

⁵¹¹ *ibid.*

⁵¹² *ibid.*

⁵¹³ Colombia Aid: 1985, Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 9 October 1985, ALL 093/1, Freedom of Information Act Request.

⁵¹⁴ *ibid.*

⁵¹⁵ *ibid.*

and 'whatever Colombia's overall per capita income the infrastructure required in the affected areas was beyond its resources'.⁵¹⁶ This encapsulated Colombia's dilemma - the country was too strong to attract aid but too weak to attract loans and inward investment. President Betancur's attempt at achieving internal security through peace processes and infrastructural reforms were largely a failure. Colombia did not have the means to fund such projects and the state security services were ideologically aligned to paramilitary forces that unleashed violence on progressive members of Colombian society and leftist politicians.

The Military-Paramilitary Alliance

By 1982, Medellín, once the industrial powerhouse of Colombian industry, had transformed itself into one of the most dangerous cities in the country. The chairman of Medellín city council, Álvaro Restrepo Londoño proclaimed that the city was 'passing the worst crisis of its history; it is a moral crisis, an unemployment crisis and an economic crisis, which the state seems incapable of solving. There is even a reasonable doubt over who really holds power here – the local authorities, the military, the subversive groups or the mafias'.⁵¹⁷ The 'mafia' Restrepo made reference to yet another armed faction that emerged during the early 1980s: *Muerte a Secuestradores* (MAS, Death to Kidnappers). This underlined the way in which, in Colombia, violence spawned further violence.

Those associated with unions were particularly vulnerable to kidnapping and murder. In January 1982, the leader of the Tobacco Workers' Union, Luis Javier Cifuentes, was kidnapped and brutally murdered. His death was followed by the killing of four other union leaders in Medellín. According to reports, three of the union leaders were taken away by 'well-organised groups

⁵¹⁶ Colombia Aid: 1985, Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 9 October 1985, ALL 093/1, Freedom of Information Act Request.

⁵¹⁷ Latin America Weekly Report, Andean Group, WR-82-02, 29 January 1982.

of heavily-armed men, who identified themselves as members of army intelligence, B-2'. During the same period at least twelve other union officials from CSTC received death threats for their 'participation in the subversive general strike in October 1981'.⁵¹⁸ The death threats typically proclaimed that 'communists have no homeland, and so have no place in Colombia. They will die'. Union representatives pointed out that 'Medellín's problems were closely associated with the crisis of the city's traditional base, particularly in textiles'.⁵¹⁹

In the early 1980s, Medellín suffered an industrial decline. This resulted in the closure of factories and large-scale unemployment in an area that was the country's traditional industrial powerhouse. Violent crime was not new to Medellín. However, the decision of drug barons to take a hand in social and political conflicts injected a new element to an already appalling situation, the rise of paramilitarism. Paramilitaries, the use of armed civilians by political elites, local leaders and the Armed Forces, is hardly a 'new' phenomenon in Colombia. Local residents have provided authorities with intelligence, local knowledge and logistical support for decades particularly in rural areas. The growing threat from guerrilla groups and their support base in rural areas further increased the central importance of armed civilians as allies.⁵²⁰ The declaration of a state of siege in Colombia throughout its six decade long conflict has allowed the government to pass a series of decrees that have laid the legal foundations for the 'active involvement of civilians in the war'.⁵²¹

Since 1948 a state of siege has been renewed periodically making it an almost permanent feature of political life in Colombia. The state of siege is a juridical institution, which is 'put into effect to deal with irregular situations in

⁵¹⁸ *ibid.*

⁵¹⁹ *ibid.*

⁵²⁰ See Francisco Leal Buitrago, *El Oficio de la Guerra: Seguridad Nacional en Colombia* (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo Editores, 1994)

⁵²¹ Human Rights Watch Report, *Colombia's Killer Networks: The Military-Paramilitary Partnership and the United States* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1996) p. 16.

the public life of the country'.⁵²² Under state of siege, the Executive is able to implement decrees that 'abrogate rights by transferring broad judicial and political powers to the military, with no or little civilian oversight'.⁵²³ President Turbay's Decree 1923, aptly named the Security Statute, gave the police judicial powers to deal with the 'disturbance of public order' covering a broad range of social protest. For the leading Colombian historian Francisco Leal Buitrago, these conditions allowed the Armed Forces 'to expand its autonomy in matters of public order to unprecedented levels'.⁵²⁴ Decree 1290 passed in 1965 cleared the way for civilians accused of 'subversive activities' or supporting guerrilla groups to be sent to military courts where proceedings were secret and legal rights for the defendants were suspended. Courts martial for civilians continued until 1987 and were reintroduced in 1996. This is most troubling as the term 'subversive activities' came to encompass a wide range of actions by civilians. 'Government critics, trade unionists, community organisers, opposition politicians, civic leaders, and human rights activists' along with 'non-violent protestors for land, education, human rights, better wages, health care, public services' were labelled as subversives.⁵²⁵ For the Defence Minister, General Camacho Leyva social protest was the 'unarmed branch of subversion'.⁵²⁶

Most importantly, decrees declared during a state of siege have often been converted into permanent forms of legislation that have subsequently formalised paramilitarism and the use of armed civilians in Colombia. Decree 3398 in 1965 temporarily legalised the arming of civilians by the Ministry of Defence.⁵²⁷ However, in 1968 Law 48 made Decree 3398 permanent legislation authorising 'the executive to create civil patrols by decree and for the Defence Ministry to provide them with weapons restricted to the exclusive

⁵²² Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Organization of American States, *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in the Republic of Colombia*, June 1981. See part E for Rules to Constitutional Exceptions and State of Siege.

⁵²³ Human Rights Watch Report, *Colombia's Killer Networks*, p. 16.

⁵²⁴ See Francisco Leal Buitrago, *El Oficio de la Guerra: Seguridad Nacional en Colombia* (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo Editores, 1994) p. 55.

⁵²⁵ Human Rights Watch Report, *Colombia's Killer Networks*, p. 20

⁵²⁶ Elsa Blair Trujillo, *Las Fuerzas Armadas: Una Mirada Civil* (Bogotá: CINEP, 1993) p. 134. Also see: Human Rights Watch Report, *Colombia's Killer Networks*, p. 20.

⁵²⁷ Buitrago, *El Oficio de la Guerra*, p. 86-87.

use of the armed forces'. Law 48 has been frequently cited by the Armed Forces as the 'legal support for all paramilitaries' in Colombia.⁵²⁸

The 1980s was marked by increasing collusion between the state and paramilitary forces in terms of tactics. The MAS appeared on the scene on December 3, 1981. A helicopter flew over the city of Cali dropping leaflets announcing the formation of the paramilitary death squad. The MAS was formed by drug king pins in response to the kidnapping of Martha Nieves Ochoa by the M-19. This person was the sister of the infamous Ochoa brothers of the Medellín drug cartel. According to an investigative report by the *Miami Herald*, entitled 'The World's Deadliest Criminals: The Medellín Cartel', a general assembly of Colombia's drug traffickers took place in 1981 to counter the guerrilla threat.⁵²⁹ One of the first fruits of their activities was the capture of the wife of an alleged guerrilla. She was found chained up in Medellín and handed over to the authorities whilst MAS continued to hold her husband.⁵³⁰ Thereafter, MAS ordered the kidnapping and murders of M-19 members, leading to the release of Nieves and a clear victory for the drug king pins.

The MAS model, perceived as brutal but effective, was soon adopted by the military. The first unit to do so was the Bárbula Battalion in Santander's Puerto Boyacá. The town's mayor, Captain Oscar de Jesús Echandía proposed this at a meeting of 'local Liberal and Conservative party leaders, businessmen, ranchers, and representatives from the Texas Petroleum Company' in 1982.⁵³¹ In order to rid the area of 'subversives', a paramilitary organisation was created with tactical support of the military.⁵³² The name adopted for this paramilitary organisation was MAS; the same name used by the drug

⁵²⁸ Human Rights Watch Report, *Colombia's Killer Networks*, p. 17.

⁵²⁹ The World's Deadliest Criminals: The Medellín Cartel, *Miami Herald*, 8-11 February 1987. See also: Jorge P. Osterling, *Democracy in Colombia: Clientelist Politics and Guerrilla Warfare* (Oxford: Transaction Publishers, 1988).

⁵³⁰ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 22 January 1982, ALL 051/1, FCO7/4330, TNA.

⁵³¹ Human Rights Watch Report, *Colombia's Killer Networks*, p. 23.

⁵³² For an in depth analysis of the military-paramilitary alliance see: Carlos Medina Gallego and Mireya Téllez Ardila, *La Violencia Parainstitucional, Paramilitary Parapolitical en Colombia* (Bogotá: Rodriguez Quito Editores, 1994).

traffickers. Money was raised through businessmen and ranchers to gather food, clothes, arms and funds 'to pay young men to fight'.⁵³³ By 1983, MAS was conducting joint operations with the military against opponents, including progressive members of the Liberal party and political activists. These early operations marked the beginning of a deadly cycle of paramilitary violence that would cost the thousands of lives.

Many civilians who were trained under MAS later carved lucrative careers as paramilitaries. Among the civilians who received training from the military were the Castaño brothers who went on to form the largest paramilitary organisation in Colombia, the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC, United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia). Vicente, Carlos and Fidel Castaño were the sons of an Antioquian cattle rancher who was kidnapped and subsequently killed by the FARC in 1981. Vowing to take revenge for the death of their father, in the mid 1980s the Castaño brothers formed the Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá (ACCU, Peasant Self Defence Groups of Córdoba y Urabá) in the departments of Antioquia and Córdoba, where the Castaño family owned land.

By 1982 the Colombian government registered 240 groups associated with MAS. The newly inaugurated President Betancur ordered the Procuraduría, the government agency charged to investigate reports of abuses by government agencies, to open an investigation.⁵³⁴ The Procuraduría, Carlos Jiménez Gómez presented his findings on February 20 1983. Out of the 163 individuals found to have links to hit squad MAS, 59 were active duty police and military officers.⁵³⁵ Despite the damning report of the practice of the Armed Forces in Colombia, Jiménez's report did not achieve justice of any kind.⁵³⁶ His attempt to launch a larger investigation was met with resistance and the Disciplinary Tribunal ruled the case belonged to the military. This resulted in all charges to be dismissed. According to a comprehensive Human

⁵³³ Human Rights Watch Report, *Colombia's Killer Networks*, p. 23.

⁵³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 26.

⁵³⁵ *ibid.*

⁵³⁶ See Carlos Jiménez Gómez, *Una Procuraduría de Opinión Informe al Congreso y al País* (Bogotá: Editorial Printer Colombiana, 1986).

Rights Watch report on the military-paramilitary partnership in the 1980s, many of the officers highlighted in the Jiménez report went on to commit further atrocities. These include Captain Echandía, commander of the Bárbula Battalion in Puerto Boyacá; Colonel Alvaro Velandia, commander of the Patriotas de Honda Battalion in Honda, Tolima; and Colonel Ramón Emilio Gil Bermúdez, commander of the Comando Operativo No. 10 in Cimitarra, Santander.⁵³⁷ The failure of the Colombian government to address the problem of impunity in the police and Armed Forces was an age-old problem that bred a deep mistrust for the authorities. It is representative of the government's inability to arbitrate conflict between various groups and the implicit involvement of state forces in widespread and grotesque human rights abuses.

The operations of MAS and guerrilla organisations spanned Colombian society. Investigative journalists also found themselves embroiled in the conflict. In March 1982, María Jimena Duzan, a journalist for the national daily *El Espectador*, was kidnapped by the M-19 and flown to the Caquetá to interview M-19 leader Jaime Bateman. Her kidnapping and subsequent reporting resulted in the publication of several articles on her experiences in *El Espectador*. Jimena's reporting of the M-19 brought her to the attention of MAS who responded by placing a bomb at the front door of her home.⁵³⁸ In the week prior to the Congressional elections held on March 14, MAS claimed responsibility for the death of the lawyer Jorge Enrique Cipagauta, who was defending the M-19 leaders at the military trial in La Picota prison, Bogotá. He was victim to a drive-by shooting by two men on motorcycles whilst he was at the wheel of his car. Following Cipagauta's assassination, his colleague lawyer Miguel Cano Morales told Radio Caracol that MAS was 'no less than a part of the B-2 security branch of the Army who were intent on murdering trade unionists, lawyers and other professionals. Following this allegation, the Defence Minister dismissed the matter of Cipagauta's death and implied that

⁵³⁷ Human Rights Watch Report, *Colombia's Killer Networks*.

⁵³⁸ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 29 March 1982, ALL 240/1, FCO7/4356, TNA.

Cano was 'a habitual liar'.⁵³⁹ Cipagauta was not the last of the lawyers defending the M-19 in the La Picota military trial who were threatened or killed.

The Colombian Armed Forces were under pressure to address MAS from the outset of its establishment. No member of the MAS was arrested since its inception in November/December 1981. In order to dispel the widely held belief that the Armed Forces were 'either actively, or passively' involved, the Minister of Defence, General Fernando Landazábal, issued a letter with 24 documents to the Attorney General, Carlos Jiménez. These documents were said to be evidence gathered by the Armed Forces on MAS signalling the cooperation of the army with investigations.⁵⁴⁰ General Landazábal's letter was subsequently published in the Colombian press and was specifically intended to distance the Colombian Armed Forces from paramilitary groups. He not only made reference to members of MAS but also shed light on two other groups, MAOS (Death to Cattle Rustlers) and CAFIES (Punishment to Swindlers) who had also declared war on the insurgent groups.⁵⁴¹ By the end of the 1980s, the political genocide of the left and the military-paramilitary links had escalated the already spiralling levels of violence, which now involved the widespread killing of insurgents, *campesinos*, human rights activists, politicians, judges, journalists and trade unionists.

Conclusion

Violence in Colombia post-1980 has been traditionally framed in terms of the 'War on Drugs'. For US foreign policy practitioners and specialists as well as theorists of civil conflict, the Colombian conflict is emblematic of a war driven by criminality. By contrast, this chapter has outlined the increasing political and social nature of the Colombian conflict in the 1980s. The importance of the ideological collusion between the state and paramilitary forces resulted in

⁵³⁹ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 29 March 1982, ALL 240/1, FCO7/4356, TNA.

⁵⁴⁰ Memorandum of conversation between British Embassy, Bogotá and Latin America Department, London, 29 October 1982, ALL 062/2, FCO7/4333, TNA.

⁵⁴¹ *ibid.*

the killings of thousands of civilians and leftist politicians. Violence in Colombia during the 1980s was fused with political ideology. Indeed, progressive members of the Colombian government still maintained the importance of underlying social and economic problems as a key driver of internal insecurity.

President Betancur – the Peace President brought in a wave of optimism during the country's first peace process. However, the subsequent failure of the government to protect the political wing of the guerrillas led to a political genocide of the left wing and progressive members of Colombian society, which continues until today. Indeed, the extreme violence perpetrated against the left during the 1980s lingers in the memory of those sitting at the negotiation tables in Havana today during the country's most recent attempt to secure peace. It is important to note that despite the repeated failure of this approach to resolving the conflict, negotiations are still in progress and are supported as the means to peace by the political establishment.

Chapter Eight

Waging War, 1990-2002

During the 1990s the crisis facing the Colombian nation intensified. The rise of powerful paramilitaries with the help of the Armed Forces, insurgent attacks and widespread human rights abuses corroded all aspects of social life and threatened the integrity of the nation itself. Whilst the drugs trade has affected virtually every aspect of Colombian life, the problems facing the country, including the oldest and largest insurgency in the Americas and growing paramilitary forces, have deeper historical roots that stretch back over decades.⁵⁴² The lives of most Colombians following the Second World War, and especially since the assassination of the Jorge Eliécer Gaitán on April 9, 1948, have been spent under a dark cloud of social violence and whilst the historical roots to the violence in Colombia are important, this new period signalled an acceleration which entrapped an entire society in a vicious cycle of action and counter-action.

While this thesis asserts the fundamental importance of the agrarian question and economic and security grievances, nevertheless, the growing intensity of violence provoked important international repercussions. This included strained diplomatic ties between Colombia and neighbouring countries, such as Venezuela and Ecuador, the diverting of economic aid by multilateral organisations, warnings from various government as well as non-governmental organisations regarding the violations of international

⁵⁴² Garry Leech, *The FARC: The Longest Insurgency* (London: Zed Books, 2011); Eduardo Pizarro Leongómez and Ricardo Peñaranda, *LAS FARC (1949-1966): De la Autodefensa a la Combinación de Todas las Formas de Lucha* (Bogotá: Instituto de Estudios Políticos y Relaciones Internacionales, 1991); Jacobo Arenas, *Cese el Fuego: Una Historia Política de las FARC* (Bogotá: Oveja Negra, 1985); Daniel Pécaut, *Las FARC: ¿Una Guerrilla sin fin o sin fines?* (Bogotá: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2008); Alfredo Rangel, 'Las FARC-EP: Una Mirada Actual' in Malcolm Deas and María Victoria Llorente, (eds.) *Reconocer la Guerra para Construir la Paz* (Bogotá: Grupo Editorial Norma, 1999) pp. 21-51.

humanitarian laws, together with widespread ecological damage from the cultivation of illicit drugs and problematic eradication methods.⁵⁴³ Colombia increasingly gained world attention during the 1990s as one of the most dangerous countries in the world. The internationalisation of the conflict fostered a complex movement for peace. As illustrated in chapter one of this thesis the varying diagnoses of the Colombian conflict has resulted in a wide array of policy prescriptions, which range from counterinsurgency operations, counternarcotic programmes, revised international drug laws and negotiations between the state and country's armed actors.

The 1990s signalled the continuation and intensity of violence in Colombia. The academic interest in the civil war in the post-Cold War era is representative of broader shifts within academia and policy-making circles in a post-Cold War world. The emerging consensus that the complexity of intra-state conflict in the countries of the global South could no longer be explained through traditional interstate power relations led to the emergence of new explanatory paradigms. In the case of the Colombia, the democratic nature of governance has obscured the murky reality of a security state. Insurgency, organised crime and social violence are often intertwined and can be part of single situation.⁵⁴⁴

The 1990s saw the continuation of negotiations from the previous decade with some success. Peace agreements were signed with M-19 and splinter armed groups, however failed to include larger insurgent groups, such as the FARC and ELN.⁵⁴⁵ Paramilitary violence expanded under an official government programme, *Servicios Especiales de Vigilancia y Seguridad Privada* (Special Vigilante and Private Security Services, CONVIVIR), which effectively

⁵⁴³ Gonzalo Sánchez, 'Problems of Violence, Prospects for Peace' in Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda and Gonzalo Sánchez, (eds.) *Violence in Colombia 1990-2000: Waging War and Negotiating Peace* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001) p. 2.

⁵⁴⁴ Gonzalo Sánchez, 'Problems of Violence, Prospects for Peace,' p. 3

⁵⁴⁵ Splinter armed groups included: *Ejército Popular de Liberación* (EPL); *Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores* (PRT); *Corriente de Renovación Socialista* (CRS) and *Quintín Lame*.

legalised paramilitarism.⁵⁴⁶ Colombia's dysfunctional democracy is a paradox. The unending nature of negotiations in the Colombian case offers the image of bargaining with violence, however state sponsored terrorism simultaneously persists. Whilst the country is an example of successful negotiations, the conflict is also representative of a never-ending war. Indeed, partial negotiations in the country have not dealt with the overall breadth of the violence. Importantly, negotiations and advancements by the Colombian government and military have often served to reposition the principle actors in the conflict by creating new divisions and delegitimising the political forces from below.⁵⁴⁷

Insurgency in the post-Cold War Era

The increase of drug cultivation and violence based on national level statistics is widely taken to indicate a lack of ideology in driving violence. This is highly problematic since it neglects the historical processes of the Colombian conflict unaddressed and negatively impacts the chances of successful international and government conflict resolution policies.⁵⁴⁸ Ideology is still at the core of the Colombian insurgency and paramilitary violence. Indeed, as the preceding chapter illustrated, the ideological collusion between the state and paramilitary forces drove much of the human rights abuses and continues to do so until present day. The country's largest insurgent group, the FARC, acknowledges the 'ideological crisis brought by the end of the Soviet Union'.⁵⁴⁹ However, the

⁵⁴⁶ Juan Diego Restrepo E., 'Álvaro Uribe, Entre las "Convivir" y las AUC,' *Semana*, September 19, 2013; Mauricio Romero, 'Democratización, Política y Contra Reforma Paramilitar en Colombia' in Gonzalo Sánchez and Eric Lair, (eds.) *Violencias y Estrategias Colectivas en la Región Andina: Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador Perú y Venezuela* (Bogotá: Editorial Norma, 2004) pp. 335-376.

⁵⁴⁷ Alejandro Reyes Posada and Hernán Darío Correa, *Pacificar la Paz: Lo que no se ha Negociado en los Acuerdos de Paz* (Bogotá: Comisión de Superación de la Violencia, 1997) p. iii.

⁵⁴⁸ Juan E. Ugarriza, 'Ideologies and Conflict in the post-Cold War,' *International Journal of Conflict Management*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (2009) p. 83. Also see: Juan E. Ugarriza and Matthew J. Craig, 'The Relevance of Ideology to Contemporary Armed Conflicts: A Quantitative Analysis of Former Combatants in Colombia,' *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (2013) pp. 445-477.

⁵⁴⁹ Ugarriza, 'Ideologies and Conflict,' p. 94.

FARC's socialism is characterised by a 'redefinition of the role of the state and a strategic opposition to economic imperialism'.⁵⁵⁰ Central to this ideology is a pan-regionalist discourse of Bolivarianism, which is built upon the legacy of the leader of independence, Simón Bolívar. The discrediting and narrow definition of ideology in security literature is largely reflective of a lack of understanding of countries in the global South and the persistent applications of external grand narratives to explain conflicts.

The adoption of a Bolivarianism ideological model enabled the FARC to strengthen in social, political, economic and military terms. The combination of nationalist and left-wing ideals saw the abandonment of the traditional ideological goal of the establishment of a classical socialist-state model. Bolivarianism makes the FARC unique in comparison to other long-standing insurgencies around the world.⁵⁵¹ It has allowed the FARC to construct a broad agenda that encompasses a wide range of issues from political participation, agricultural development policies and social protection for the lower social classes. The ideological evolution of FARC from Marxist-Leninists to Socialists has also impacted the nature of its competition with the Colombian state.⁵⁵² For the FARC, with its highly ideological framework, the Colombian authorities are seen as a power with a non-legitimate origin defending the interests of an oligarchy against the majority of the population. Whilst in the post-Cold War era the FARC have not formally rejected this discourse, they have heightened their critique of the government's incompetence in what they view as the nation's most pressing problems - social inequality, crime, and deficient public services, whilst presenting themselves as a more credible alternative for good government for the majority of the population.⁵⁵³

⁵⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 95.

⁵⁵¹ Marianne Heiberg, Brendan O'Leary and John Tirman, (eds.) *Terror, Insurgency and the State: Ending Protracted Conflicts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

⁵⁵² Román D. Ortiz, 'Insurgent Strategies in the Post-Cold War: The Case of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia,' *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (2002) p.130

⁵⁵³ *ibid.*

During the 1990s, the FARC also increased its capacity in providing social services to the population in areas as health, education, and public order. The guerrillas have historically presented themselves as a fairer and more efficient alternative to the Colombian government and established themselves as a parallel state, providing social services. Although the manner in which these services were provided and the proposals for the construction of a new government were developed from a set of a less narrow ideological criteria, they ultimately clashed with the prevailing political culture of Colombia. What differentiates the FARC is that its search for 'good government' has been the primary focus of their political ideology.⁵⁵⁴

Ideology is a key component of the Colombian conflict. The preceding and current chapters have highlighted the increasing political nature of the conflict from 1946 through an exploration of the relationship between the Colombian state and its people – the dysfunctional democracy. Ideology has been important throughout the evolution of this current phase of cycle for the Colombian state, paramilitary forces and insurgent groups. One of the greatest challenges for ending any civil conflict is establishing a consensus over the diagnostics of the conflict. The notion of civil wars being driven by "greed" or "criminality", problematically strips conflict of ideology and is reflected of an arguably ethnocentric view of the global South, as external paradigms take precedent as explanatory frameworks. In the 1990s, a new paradigm emerged within development and US foreign policy literature - failed states.

The Failed State Paradigm and the Colombian Conflict in the 1990s

A strong Colombian state has never existed for a large majority of the country's citizens. We have already seen how the country's long tradition of private justice and a rural violence, which has involved the active assistance of the authorities in suppressing social movements, strikes, student protests

⁵⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 131.

and peasant leagues over decades. Since 1946, Colombia's governance over the previous seven decades has been largely under a state of siege, that has allowed the state to introduce repressive measures whilst simultaneously acknowledging the importance of the agrarian question and social and economic grievances. The country's dysfunctional democracy was further undermined during the 1990s, leading to some claims of Colombia's situation to warrant the label 'failed state'.⁵⁵⁵

The 'failed state' paradigm is representative of yet another external grand narrative applied to the global South. The prevalence of this notion in the post-Cold War era is based on the persistence of Cold War discourse on the nation state, that revolves around binary oppositions of failed and successful that are decided by Western states.⁵⁵⁶ In the case of Colombia, the 'failed state' paradigm, as in the case with US foreign policy literature and theories of civil conflict, tends to focus on the symptoms of state failure – the drugs trade, rather than the conditions that have led to state failure. Colombia holds the oldest, and arguably strongest, democratic tradition in the region. The country has experienced stable economic growth over decades as well as the widespread use of violence by the authorities and civilians. In the midst of state sponsored violence, the avoidance of real reform in the agrarian sector led to the increasing radicalisation of rural *campesinos*. In this context, perhaps, Colombia is best conceptualized as a 'successful failed state'.

⁵⁵⁵ Harvey F. Kline, 'Colombia: Lawlessness, Drug Trafficking and Carving Up the State in Robert I. Rotberg (ed) *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003) pp. 161-182; Phillip McLean, 'Colombia: Failed, Failing, or Just Weak?,' *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (2002) pp. 123-134; Robert I. Rotberg, 'The New Nature of Nation-State Failure,' *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (2002) pp. 83-96; Eduardo Pizarro and Ana María Bejarano, 'Colombia: A Failed State?,' *ReVista, Harvard Review of Latin America*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (2003); Fernán González, '¿Colapso Parcial o Presencia Diferenciada del Estado en Colombia?: Una Mirada desde la Historia,' *Revista Colombia Internacional*, Vol. 58, June (2003) pp. 124-158.

⁵⁵⁶ Pinar Bilgin and Adam David Morton, 'From "Rogue" to "Failed" States? The Fallacy of Short-Termism,' *Politics*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (2004) pp. 169-180.

For Colombianists and regional specialists, the shortcomings of the state are part of a historical process of violent state building.⁵⁵⁷ The terms 'partial collapse'⁵⁵⁸ and 'precarious state'⁵⁵⁹ have been applied to provide explanatory paradigms on the Colombian state during *La Violencia* and the *Frente Nacional* period. Historical analyses of the state in this literature have taken into account the differences between state presence in regions of the country and how local populations have been integrated into national life through the Liberal and Conservative parties, local power networks and social movements.⁵⁶⁰ The application of external grand narratives and the labelling of Colombia as a 'failed state' during the 1990s emphasised the impact of the drugs trade on the state. Whilst this is certainly an important element of the conflict, the term itself is nevertheless problematic. The historical and internal processes of violence are ultimately misplaced as the diagnoses of the problem is the drugs trade, rather than economic and security grievances.

The Constitution of 1991 and Reforms

Colombia entered the 1990s in the midst of a bloody electoral campaign. In the three years leading up to the election of May 1990, three presidential candidates were assassinated, including the Liberal candidate, Luis Carlos Galán, who was widely expected to win, 19 car bombs resulted in the death of 300 people, hired hitmen killed 250 policemen, insurgent groups blew the Caño Limón Coveñas oil pipeline 125 times and paramilitary violence against the Colombian left killed thousands.⁵⁶¹ In August 1990, the Colombian courts were dealing with approximately 1,200,000 criminal trials, however none of

⁵⁵⁷ Marco Palacios, *Entre la Legitimidad y la Violencia: Colombia 1875-1994* (Bogotá: Editorial Norma, 1995).

⁵⁵⁸ Paul Oquist, *Violencia, Conflicto y Política en Colombia* (Bogotá: Instituto de Estudios Colombianos, 1978) pp. 46-52.

⁵⁵⁹ Daniel Pécaut, *Populismo Imposible y Violencia: Guerra Contra la Sociedad, 1968-1988* (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta, 2001) pp. 27-34.

⁵⁶⁰ González, '¿Colapso Parcial o Presencia Diferenciada del Estado en Colombia?'

⁵⁶¹ Luis Cañón Moreno, 'Narcodialogos, Doble Juego Mortal,' *El Tiempo*, August 6, 1991.

the people related to these cases was in the custody of the Colombian authorities.⁵⁶²

In the ensuing climate of crisis, less than 25 per cent of the Colombian electorate voted to approve the creation of a Constituent Assembly. The 70 chosen delegates were empowered to draft a new constitution for the country. The Assembly produced an inclusive initiative that sought 'to strengthen the unity of the Nation, and ensure its people life, community (*convivencia*), work, justice, equality, knowledge, liberty, and peace within a democratic and participatory juridical framework that guarantees a politically, economically, and socially just order'.⁵⁶³ Paradoxically, by the end of the decade the Colombian state exercised less control over its territory.

For policy makers in Bogotá and Washington, the Constitution of 1991 represented some successes. It 'strengthened the checks and balances of the political system in an effort to endow political institutions with greater legitimacy after decades of limited participation and low representation'.⁵⁶⁴ However, within Colombia there was considerable frustration with the unfulfilled promise of peace.⁵⁶⁵ Perhaps the most important failure of the Constitution of 1991 was the continuing electoral weakness of third parties which persisted despite the reforms, and which has permitted the two traditional parties to continue to dominate the political scene, especially Congress, which was in charge of the implementation of other aspects of reform. The absence of the country's largest guerrilla group, the FARC, from the Constituent Assembly along with the absence of the paramilitaries was also particularly unhelpful given their central role in the ongoing violence. Moreover, severe restrictions were placed on the issues of major economic

⁵⁶² *ibid.*

⁵⁶³ Ana María Bejarano, 'The Constitution of 1991: an institutional evaluation seven years later' in Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda and Gonzalo Sánchez, *Violence in Colombia 1990-2000: Waging War and Negotiating Peace* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001) p. 53.

⁵⁶⁴ Mauricio Cárdenas, Roberto Junguito and Mónica Pachón, 'Political Institutions and Policy Outcomes in Colombia: The Effects of the 1991 Constitution,' *Inter-American Development Bank*, Research Network Working Paper R-508 (February 2006) p. 6.

⁵⁶⁵ Bejarano, 'The Constitution of 1991,' p. 54.

and agrarian reform and the Colombian military remained untouchable.⁵⁶⁶ In hindsight, it is hardly surprising that the Constitution of 1991 was a failure in terms of achieving 'peace pact'. The rhetoric of change from the government raised the expectations of the rural classes and ultimately failed them, as it was this group that suffer the most in terms of human rights abuses and economic and security grievances. The Constitution of 1991 was largely brought into place due to necessity rather than political drive. Indeed, the fragmentation of the Colombian political system was also evident within the Constituent Assembly. The notable absence of the main armed factions resulted in what can be better described as a 'political pact' rather than a 'peace pact'.

The Constitution did little to change the corrupt and clientelist nature of Colombian politics. Post-constituent Congresses that were elected in 1991, 1994 and 1998 and were increasingly dominated by the traditional political class that the Constituent Assembly had attempted to displace in 1991.⁵⁶⁷ The politicians, through the process of gradually recovering control in Congress were able to block the implementation of many aspects of the new Constitution. The imbalance between an overly powerful president and a weak Congress further hindered attempts to address the nation's problems in terms of policy implementation. According to Archer and Shugart, although Colombian presidents hold significant constitutional powers over legislation, they frequently appear unable to accomplish policy agendas that are nominally endorsed by their own parties due to low partisan powers and the difficulty in achieving stable majorities in Congress.⁵⁶⁸ Presidents therefore rely on *ad hoc* deals with power brokers and who demand patronage - further illustrating the manner in which powers have been crafted in such a way to serve the interests of the clientelistic rank-and-file party members.

⁵⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 53

⁵⁶⁷ Bejarano, 'The Constitution of 1991,' p. 57.

⁵⁶⁸ Ronald P. Archer and Matthew Soberg Shugart, 'The Unrealized Potential of Presidential Dominance in Colombia' in Ronald P. Archer and Matthew Soberg Shugart, (eds.) *Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p. 110.

The Colombian Constitution of 1991 represented a serious attempt at the democratisation of the political system. The election of a Constituent Assembly in the country was an unprecedented political development. The Constitution sought to widen and restructure the channels of political participation and create oversight of the state by society, which were translated into an extensive Bill of Rights. In legal terms, it was a quantum leap towards institutionalising democratic participation and strengthening the rule of law in Colombia. The political diversity of the Constituent Assembly included former members of the M-19 and activists that marked a significant shift toward a more democratic state. However, the question of agrarian reform continued to loom large. The disparities between rich and poor, economic and security grievances as well as the political genocide of the left continued throughout the 1990s. The increase in violence during the 1990s could be explained in terms of the gap between heightened expectation and the political reality of the achievements of the new Constitution, however also of particular relevance is the economic stagnation of the country, which coincided with an increasing insecurity. The 1990s therefore, despite important changes, marked a low point in the overall effectiveness of the Colombian national government.

The Agrarian Question

Lamentably, given the importance of the agrarian issue in Colombia in relation to the evolution of violence in the country, it is rarely mentioned in the scholarly work on Colombia during the 1990s. Theorists of civil conflict and US foreign policy specialists draw correlations between the increase in drug cultivation and violence, there placing emphasis on the political economy of the civil conflict. For critics of the US foreign policy, the continuation of US counterinsurgency assistance drove much of the violence.⁵⁶⁹ The hegemonic power of the US and its support for corrupt Colombian administrations in the midst of widespread human rights abuses is given special attention. This

⁵⁶⁹ Stokes, *America's Other War*.

thesis has illustrated the importance of the agrarian issue and economic and security grievances as a fundamental motor of violence since 1946. The 1990s were no different. The avoidance of serious reform and the inclusion of the main warring factions in the political processes of 1991 were deeply problematic.

It is remarkable that given the importance of land in the cultivation and production of narcotics that the agrarian issue is not given much attention. Coca, marijuana and poppy, like any other crop, must be cultivated. The increase in drug production has had an unprecedented impact on the distribution of land in Colombia. The landed elite that built their fortunes through the drugs trade and mining commodities such as emeralds, amassed huge swaths of fertile land in contested areas, including the departments of Magdalena,⁵⁷⁰ Cesar, Urabá, Putumayo, Meta, Córdoba, Bolívar and Boyacá. A World Bank report in 1994 showed that between from the reforms of the 1960 to 1990, INCORA an estimated 1.07 million hectares of land to 60,000 families. Additionally, it also created 256 reserves that covered 2.5 million hectares of land.⁵⁷¹ As discussed in chapters six and seven, whilst these reforms benefitted 37,000 rural families, the counter-reform period of the 1970s negated much of the work here to improve the lives of rural Colombians. This problem was further amplified during the 1980s onwards. According to World Bank estimates, recent landowners through the drugs trade and mining industry acquired 4.4 million hectares of land, worth a staggering \$2.4 billion US dollars.⁵⁷²

This trend of drug cultivation is important in terms of the agrarian question. It has ultimately led to the transformation of Colombia as 'net importer of its main foodstuffs and ruining its traditional cash crops' in the process. This has

⁵⁷⁰ Preceding chapters provide detailed accounts of violence in this region that has historically suffered under decades of violence.

⁵⁷¹ World Bank, *World Bank Country Study: Poverty in Colombia* (Washington DC: World Bank Publications, 1994) pp. 127-128.

⁵⁷² *ibid.*

further exacerbated the rural problem and land concentration.⁵⁷³ The Colombian government has historically avoided real agrarian reform and despite the increasing complexities of this given the increase in the cultivation of drugs, successive Colombian governments compounded the rural problem with the introduction of extractive industries, creating further divisions between the state and the rural population. The subsistence peasant economy was undermined during the 1990s through the developmental strategies of the state. Land occupied by *campesinos*, indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities were targeted throughout the 1990s; land speculators, agribusinesses, multinational corporations consisting of oil, gold and coal mining companies were all keen to advance their interests in rural Colombia, which furthered land concentration in the hands of a few.⁵⁷⁴ This raises serious questions about the role of the state in the perpetuation of violence and raises doubts about the reforms of 1991 that claimed to address the issue of minority rights. The 1991 Constitutional Reform and the subsequent National Commission on Indigenous Policy (CONPAPI), within the office of indigenous affairs (DGAJ) and the Special Commission for Black Communities did little to stop the widespread abuse of human rights amongst the most vulnerable and destitute in conflict ridden zones during the 1990s.⁵⁷⁵

Whilst drugs have been at the forefront of the debate over post-Cold War violence in Colombia, the role of licit trades are largely ignored. Indeed, the cultivation of drugs is not the only industry that has exacerbated the issue of land tenure. The mining industry, production of palm oil as well as traditional crops all became embroiled in an increasingly complex conflict that centred on the issue of land. During the 1990s, paramilitaries developed their alliance with the Armed Forces to rid the country of insurgents, costing the lives of thousands of progressive members of Colombian society from journalists, activists, lawyers and poor *campesinos*. The take over of communal lands by palm oil companies in Urabá, Chocó is illustrative of the challenges faced by

⁵⁷³ Nizah Richani, *Systems of Violence: The Political Economy of War and Peace in Colombia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002) p. 34.

⁵⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 35.

⁵⁷⁵ *World Bank Country Study: Violence in Colombia, Building Sustainable Peace and Social Capital* (Washington DC: World Bank Publications, 2000) p. 22.

the local populations in rural Colombia. In 1996, the army and paramilitaries launched an offensive, known as 'Operation Genesis'; a counterinsurgency strategy rid the area of FARC influence.⁵⁷⁶ Aerial bombardment, massacres, forced disappearances and torture led to the displacement of an estimated 17,000 civilians.⁵⁷⁷ Although the Colombian conflict is rarely conceived of in terms of fighting along ethnic lines, indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations have been subjected to the vast majority of the human rights abuses.⁵⁷⁸

Palm trees covered the land that was previously occupied by the local population. Many returned to find their land labelled with 'Private Property' signs. Army and paramilitary patrols in the area countered the efforts to resettle the land. Remarkably, by 2004 one palm oil company, Urapalma had acquired 5,654 hectares of land. In 2006, the Minister of Agriculture confirmed that 'at least 25,000 hectares of palm oil cultivation in the area of Jiguamiandó and Curvaradó river basin did not have legitimate titles for the land'.⁵⁷⁹ The complicity of government officials in the forced sale of land and the displacement of thousands through the paramilitary alliance spread to other licit industries. With the expansion of the banana business in the department of Magdalena, violence perpetrated against trade unionists accordingly increased. In the town of Ciénaga, an estimated 2,000 people subscribed to various unions in a single month, causing widespread repression. According to a report in the Colombian daily *El Tiempo* from Ciénaga, when a mother learned her son joined a trade union, she would make the sign of the cross and pray. Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to say that the angel of death

⁵⁷⁶ Frances Thomson, 'The Agrarian Question and Violence in Colombia: Conflict and Development,' *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol. 11. No. 3 (2011) p. 346-348; Ulrich Oslender, 'Violence in Development: The Logic of Forced Displacement on Colombia's Pacific Coast,' *Development in Practice*, Vol. 17, No. 6 (2007) pp. 752-764. For Colombian business perspective see: Alfredo Rangel Suárez, 'Conflicto Social y Zonas Palmeras en Colombia,' *Palmas*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (2008) pp. 45-49.

⁵⁷⁷ Thomson, 'The Agrarian Question,' p. 346.

⁵⁷⁸ For testimonies of the survivors of Operation Genesis see: Oslender, 'Violence in Development;' Norwegian Refugee Council, 'Resisting Displacement by Combatants and Developers: Humanitarian Zones in North-West Colombia,' International Displacement Monitoring Centre, November 2007.

⁵⁷⁹ Thomson, 'The Agrarian Question,' p. 347. Also see: 'El 'Dossier' de los Palmeros,' *El Espectador*, May 21, 2010.

hovered constantly over those associated with union activism during the 1990s.⁵⁸⁰

Security-related payments were also made by foreign multinationals. The 'Chiquita Brands scandal' revealed more than a decade of security-related payments to insurgents, paramilitaries, Colombian security forces, and government sponsored militias. The banana company also paid paramilitary for security services that extended to intelligence on insurgent operations and were pressured by the Colombian military to finance paramilitary and militia groups.⁵⁸¹ Former militia chiefs in the emerald business have also gone on to lift the lid on the use of paramilitary forces to carry out numerous assassinations and massacres to terrorise local populations. Colombian billionaire and owner of reported one million hectares of land, Víctor Carranza Niño, or the 'Emerald Czar', was reported to have been behind the Miraflores massacre, which the Colombian security forces 'had facilitated from beginning to end'.⁵⁸² A report of the strike, in which dozens of *campesinos* were killed, was given to the American authorities in Bogotá by an unknown source 'a little over a week before the attack'. It was speculated that 'Miraflores was on the short list' of paramilitary expansion, who were due to 'fly in because it was safer that way'. In a conversation with the US Ambassador, Myles Frechette, the Colombian Defence Minister, Gliberto Echeverri Mejía, dismissed the warning as 'apocryphal'. The Commander of the Armed Forces, General José Manuel Bonett 'also minimised the likelihood that paramilitaries would strike', as 'they would need to fly in supplies and reinforcements' to the rural area in order to carry out the attack, which 'the Armed Forces would not permit'. Nevertheless, five days later, on October 18, the paramilitaries arrived in Miraflores by air, carried out their killings and subsequently flew out.⁵⁸³

⁵⁸⁰ 'Ciénaga, Entre la Euforia y el Miedo,' *El Tiempo*, September 25, 1991.

⁵⁸¹ 'The Chiquita Papers: Banana Giant's Paramilitary Payoffs Detailed in Trove of Declassified Legal, Financial Documents,' National Security Archive.

⁵⁸² 'Lifting the Veil on Colombia's Emerald Czar: Declassified Cable Links Víctor Carranza's Alias to 1997 Miraflores Massacre,' National Security Archive.

⁵⁸³ *ibid.*

The expansion of extractive industries during the 1990s is inextricably tied to the increase in paramilitary and guerrilla violence. For proponents of the “greed” school, this is driven by the desire of economic gain on the part of the irregular armed groups.⁵⁸⁴ This significant misrepresentation of the Colombian conflict does take into account the “greed” from above. Paramilitary groups, or privatised armed groups, have a long history in Colombia. These organisations have been pivotal in protecting the property rights of the landed against the rural land movement and threats posed by insurgent groups. Paramilitaries have therefore played a central role in the large-scale land grabbing process with the tacit involvement of the state through the military-paramilitary alliance.⁵⁸⁵ In the early 1990s, paramilitaries included armed men working for drug cartels, clandestine military counterinsurgents and self-defence groups created by local elites.⁵⁸⁶ However by 1997, the diverse networks of paramilitary groups emerged under an umbrella organisation – the AUC, led by the Castaño brothers.⁵⁸⁷

Self Defence Groups and the Rise of the AUC

The expansion of the paramilitary forces in the 1990s unleashed violence in rural areas. By 2002, the AUC consisted of an estimated 15,000 combatants funded by landowners, businesses and cartels.⁵⁸⁸ During this period, the paramilitary groups gained momentum as political protagonists in their claim to be an alternative to the insurgent groups and assumed its role as a counterinsurgency organisation, which as illustrated in the previous chapter, was a direct result of the collusion between military and paramilitary forces. In

⁵⁸⁴ Collier and Hoeffler, ‘Greed and Grievance in Civil War;’ Collier, ‘Rebellion as Quasi-Criminal Activity;’ Berdal and Malone, *Greed and Grievance*.

⁵⁸⁵ Jacobo Grajales, ‘The Rifle and the Title: Paramilitary Violence, Land Grab and Land Control in Colombia,’ *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (2011) pp. 771-792.

⁵⁸⁶ Alejandro Reyes Posada, *Guerreros y Campesinos: El Despojo de la Tierra en Colombia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009)

⁵⁸⁷ Grace Livingstone, *Inside Colombia: Drugs, Democracy and War* (London: Latin American Bureau, 2003) pp. 77-78.

⁵⁸⁸ Martha E. Soto and Orlando Restrepo, ‘Carlos Castaño Afirma que Envío Instructores a las Autodefensas,’ *El Tiempo*, June 27, 2002.

military terms, the paramilitaries maintain that unlike the army – which is engaged in a conventional war against the guerrillas – their armed confrontation is an irregular war. Strikingly, both the guerrillas and paramilitaries explain their origins in almost identical terms – for the guerrillas the ‘incapacity of the state to fulfil specific economic, social and cultural obligations’ and for the paramilitaries the state’s inability to guarantee ‘public security with regards to life, property and freedom of all citizens’. The Colombian conflict is therefore a narrative of two opposing forces against an enemy – the absent state.⁵⁸⁹

The Colombian state ‘lacked the will’ to counter the paramilitary problem.⁵⁹⁰ These forces were particularly useful to the Colombian authorities in combating insurgent groups. It was largely expected that ‘informational links and instances of active coordination between military and paramilitaries’ were likely to continue despite the widespread human rights abuses and killings. The Colombian Armed Forces ‘suffered a number of demoralising defeats at the hands of guerrilla forces’. This included an Army Outpost at Las Delicias, close to the Ecuadorian border, on August 30, 1996. Dozens of Colombian forces were captured and injured and a further 54 were killed in this single attack. In the midst of the growing mobilisation of *campesinos* in rural areas, these attacks made the military-paramilitary alliance ever more useful to the Armed Forces.⁵⁹¹ The paramilitaries emerged as the Colombian state’s ally against the insurgents.⁵⁹² However, this relationship, which was something of an open secret, had to content with Colombian public opinion.

⁵⁸⁹ Sánchez, ‘Problems of Violence, Prospects for Peace,’ p. 25.

⁵⁹⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, Intelligence Report: Colombia Paramilitaries Gaining Strength, June 13, 1997, National Security Archive.

⁵⁹¹ Conditioning Security Assistance: Human Rights, End-Use Monitoring and ‘the Government’s Inability to Curb the Paramilitary Threat,’ National Security Archive.

⁵⁹² Paramilitaries as Proxies: Declassified Evidence on the Colombian Army’s Anti-Guerrilla “Allies,” National Security Archive.

In July 1997, the killing of dozens of civilians in the town of Mapirpán was spread across the pages of the Colombian daily newspapers.⁵⁹³ Paramilitary massacres against civilians in this case and others in Barrancabermeja and Puerto Alvirá raised important questions of the inability and indeed the extent of the desire of the state to curb the paramilitary threat.⁵⁹⁴ The *Masacre of Trujillo* (Massacre of Trujillo) is one of the most widely publicised of human rights violations in Colombia. Between 1988 and 1994, a series of murders were perpetrated by paramilitaries with the active complicity of the Colombian security forces that resulted in the deaths of 342 civilians in the town.⁵⁹⁵ A wall of impunity surrounded this case, which was broken down by the persistence of the *Centro de Memoria Histórica*, led by leading Colombian historian Gonzalo Sánchez. The reopening of this case reveals the depths of the murky alliance between members of the country's Armed Forces and paramilitaries. For Sánchez, the impunity in the Trujillo massacre was not 'simply a symptom of state impotence or a lack of resource'. Instead, 'it is part of the logic that surrounds and/or these crimes. It is precisely this impunity that guarantees that the crimes can continue being committed, that the perpetrators can continue committing them, and that those responsible are not punished'.⁵⁹⁶ The sheer brutality of the killings included detailed accounts of torture and the dismembering of civilians as part of a counter-subversive operation. One civilian army informant who participated in the murders stated that killings 'were carried out by cutting off the limbs and heads of the still living victims with a chain saw'. His testimony was corroborated with over a dozen other witnesses.⁵⁹⁷ The reporting of massacres carried out by paramilitary groups helped galvanise public opinion and brought intense scrutiny on the Colombian security forces. This has subsequently exercised a catalytic effect on the relationship between the Colombian state and its people.

⁵⁹³ State Department, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Intelligence Assessment, Colombia: Momentum Against Paramilitaries Lost, April 7, 1998, National Security Archive.

⁵⁹⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, Intelligence Report: Colombia Paramilitaries Assuming a Higher Profile, August 31, 1998, National Security Archive.

⁵⁹⁵ 'La Masacre de Trujillo fue Escogida por la CNRR como eje de su Informe Sobre Crímenes Emblemáticos,' *El Tiempo*, August 27, 2008.

⁵⁹⁶ 'Trujillo Declassified: Documenting a 'Tragedy without End,' National Security Archive.

⁵⁹⁷ *ibid.*

Paramilitarism enjoyed a degree of legality under the rubric of 'private vigilante groups'. In 1996, the government of President Ernesto Samper (1994-1998) promoted creation CONVIVIR. The legalisation of paramilitarism is a favoured tactic of Latin American states. The CONVIVIR in many ways functioned like the Peruvian *Rondas Campesinas*, which contributed to the dismantling of the *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path), Guatemalan 'civil patrols' and more recently the Mexican vigilantes that are driving out violence with government forces.⁵⁹⁸ For Colombian authorities local civilians were seen as a highly effective force and intelligence source to counter the growing insurgency in rural areas. This highly problematic method of enforcing security from above has cost the lives of thousands of Colombians. It is widely estimated that paramilitary violence has been responsible for '80 per cent of non-combatant killings in the country'.⁵⁹⁹

The CONVIVIR operated under the Directorate of Security and Surveillance of the Ministry of Defence. In official terms, the objective of the private vigilante groups was to provide logistical and intelligence support to the Armed Forces. Within a year, over 500 CONVIVIR were established and 9,633 were armed through the programme.⁶⁰⁰ One of the main supporters for this controversial system was the then Governor of Antioquia, Álvaro Uribe, who went on to win the presidency in 2002. During his two-year governorship, CONVIVIRs displaced an estimated 200,000, mainly in Urabá region of Antioquia. Which accounted for 18 per cent of the total number of displaced people in Colombia at the time.⁶⁰¹ CONVIVIRs were declared illegal in 1999 following a public outcry of the atrocities carried out by the groups of armed militia. However, as expected, the Colombian state struggled to recover the arms and munitions and the operation of some of these groups continues today.⁶⁰² According to

⁵⁹⁸ 'Mexican Vigilantes Drive Out Religious Drug Cartel from Gang-Held City,' *The Guardian*, February 9, 2014.

⁵⁹⁹ Adam Isacson and Jorge Rojas, 'Firm Hand, Large Heart,' *Human Rights Dialogue*, Vol. 2, No. 8 (2002).

⁶⁰⁰ Richani, *Systems of Violence*, p. 52.

⁶⁰¹ Forrest Hylton, *Evil Hour in Colombia* (London: Verso, 2006) p. 93.

⁶⁰² 'Convivir, las Dueñas de la Ilegalidad del Centro De Medellín,' *El Tiempo*, April 8, 2013.

Guillermo Pardo of the *Consultoría de Conflicto Urbano*, CONVIVIRs operations in Medellín currently extend to the ‘sale of drugs, child sexual exploitation and the organisation of illegal gambling’, which illustrates the pervasive nature of paramilitarism in Colombia and how the official state sanctioning of armed groups has spiralled violence during the 1990s.⁶⁰³

The AUC, led by Carlos Castaño, followed a brutal strategy of social cleansing. In order to eliminate the influence of the FARC and the ELN, the rural population was terrorised. For the AUC, if the civilian population refuses to have any contact with insurgent groups for fear of retribution by the paramilitaries, then the groups such as the FARC and ELN will eventually lose support. However, these methods are incredibly questionable in achieving their aims. The country’s largest insurgent group, the FARC, was able to bear the escalation of military and paramilitary attacks. Arguably, the widespread terror furthered the case of the FARC in rural areas. It allowed the insurgent groups to present themselves as legitimate adversaries in the conflict.

The Administration of César Gaviria, 1990-1994

President César Gaviria sought to change the relationship between the Colombian military and the state. In order to achieve this, Gaviria created the role of Presidential Secretary for Defence and Security. Although the reforms of the 1990s, as discussed earlier in this chapter, failed to make the necessary changes in military matters, it was an unprecedented change. The executive branch could now assume a role that was previously strictly reserved for the Ministry of National Defence. This allowed Gaviria to make civilian appointments in a bid to create a system of civilian oversight, which illustrates the recognition that the problems facing Colombia were political rather than military in nature.⁶⁰⁴ President Gaviria was able to achieve

⁶⁰³ ‘Convivir y Paras: Amor a Primera,’ *Semana*, April 14, 2007.

⁶⁰⁴ Francisco Leal Buitrago, ‘Armed Actors in the Colombian Conflict’ in Kees Kooning and Dirk Kruijt, (eds.) *Armed Actors: Organized Violence and State Failure in Latin America* (London: Zed Books, 2004) pp. 92-93.

successes where previous administrations had failed. This included the successful negotiated peace agreements with small splinter insurgent groups, and most importantly, the M-19, who participated in the Constituent Assembly that produced a new constitution in 1991. For Gaviria Constituent Assembly was an opportunity to create a 'new Colombia'.⁶⁰⁵

However, Gaviria failed in persuading the FARC and ELN to participate in the creation of this 'new' country. Negotiations largely failed due to the conditions placed by the insurgent groups and the Colombian government. It is important to note that these negotiations were taking place in the midst of political genocide of the left that has continued since the mid-1980s. The Colombian government demanded that the guerrillas lay down their arms before any talks began whilst the guerrillas insisted on security guarantees, which the military found unacceptable.⁶⁰⁶ For Marc Chernick 'the outcomes of the peace initiatives of the Gaviria administration were partial peace agreements, major constitutional reform, expanded guerrilla activity, higher levels of violence, and dirty war'.⁶⁰⁷ This was indeed a mixed result, however the Gaviria administration marks a high point for negotiations between the government and the insurgent groups. This period was also marred by significant military failures, in which the FARC and ELN were able to make significant advances, and the same observation could broadly be made regarding paramilitary forces.

⁶⁰⁵ Russell Crandall, *Driven by Drugs: US Policy Toward Colombia* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002) p. 71.

⁶⁰⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁰⁷ Marc Chernick, 'Negotiating Peace and Multiple Forms of Violence: The Protracted Search for a Settlement to the Armed Conflict in Colombia' in Cynthia J. Arnson (ed.) *Comparative Peace Processes in Latin America* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Centre Press, 1999) p. 182

The Administration of Ernesto Samper (1994-1998)

President Ernesto Samper is notorious for his alleged connection with the Cali Cartel that plagued his administration.⁶⁰⁸ Due to these repeated accusations, Samper's government expended much of their time and energy in protecting his presidency rather than addressing the increasing political violence and in particular the paramilitary problem. Revenues from narcotics infiltrated the recently reformed Colombian political system with an estimated \$6 million US dollars received from the Cali drug cartel in Samper's presidential campaign. Accordingly, Samper's administration marked a low point in US-Colombian relations and resulted in the decertification of Colombia.⁶⁰⁹ In 1998, the US Department of State concluded that this controversy 'significantly diminished the president's moral authority and political ability to govern' and as a result, 'the control of the central government over the national territory was increasingly challenged by longstanding and widespread internal armed conflict and rampant violence – both criminal and political'. Under Samper's presidency, Colombia's security conditions had deteriorated significantly. By 1998, the Colombia Country Report on Human Rights Practice suggested that the insurgent groups had 'significant influence in 57 per cent of the nation's municipalities.'⁶¹⁰ Despite enduring attacks from both the military and paramilitary forces, the FARC continued to make advances and exercise its authority against the state. In August 1996, the FARC captured sixty members of the Colombian Armed Forces in the Amazon jungle region. In order to secure the release of the military personnel President Samper was forced to remove all remaining troops from the area.

⁶⁰⁸ 'Ernesto Samper Cenó con el Cartel en Cali,' *El Tiempo*, July 24, 1997; 'Samper Revela Acuerdo con Cartel de Cali,' *El Tiempo*, July 25, 1997; 'Las Acusaciones de Botero Contra el Presidente Samper,' *El Tiempo*, March 27, 1996.

⁶⁰⁹ Conditioning Security Assistance: Human Rights, End-Use Monitoring and the Government's Inability to Curb the Paramilitary Threat,' National Security Archive.

⁶¹⁰ US Department of State, *Colombia Country Report on Human Rights Practice for 1997*, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, January 30, 1998.

Administration of President Pastrana, 1998-2002

President Andrés Pastrana's preferred means of achieving peace was the renewal of the state's negotiation process with the FARC and ELN. Under these negotiations an agreement with FARC was reached. A 'demilitarised zone' of 16,266 square miles (around the size of Switzerland) in the Amazon jungle region was under the control of FARC until 20 February 2002 when negotiations formally ended'.⁶¹¹ In July 1998, a historic meeting occurred between the then president-elect and the commander-in-chief of the FARC, Manuel Marulanda. This provoked a tremendous amount of public enthusiasm. After years of failed peace processes many Colombians felt that the new president could finally broker a meaningful peace agreement. In the months following Pastrana's visit, the Colombian government and the FARC began talks with regards to the establishment of a liberated zone (*despeje*) in the south central region of the country, one of the FARC's strongholds.

On November 7 1998, the Colombian government granted the FARC a *despeje* for around ninety days. In this agreement, the Colombian military forces were extracted from the region and allowed the FARC to run a parallel government, which included a judicial system and police force. Serious peace negotiations began with the FARC in the *despeje* in early January 1999. Despite these advances, the leader of the FARC Manuel Marulanda did not turn up to greet President Pastrana for the opening ceremony and in the following three years numerous peace dialogues were frozen and cease-fires broken.⁶¹² The lack of trust between the two parties and increasing political opposition to the *despeje* led to the spectacular failure of this round of peace negotiations. Despite repeated attempts at negotiations, in the midst of widespread state-sponsored paramilitarism and an on-going counter-subversive campaign, Colombia entered the 21st century with the largest humanitarian crisis in the hemisphere.

⁶¹¹ Kline, 'Colombia: Lawlessness, Drug Trafficking,' p. 173.

⁶¹² Russell Crandall, *Driven by Drugs: US Policy Toward Colombia* (London: Lynne Reiner Publishers, 2002) p. 73.

Conclusion

The 1990s saw the further deterioration of Colombia's security conditions. During this period, the number of deaths linked to the activities of paramilitary groups exceeded that of the insurgents and the connection between the paramilitary groups and the Colombian military continued to develop apace. At the same time, successive governments made overt attempts at achieving peace through repeated rounds of negotiations. Colombia's conflict during the 1990s has been largely framed through a post-Cold War frame which has heavily emphasised the 'ideological void' nature of violence in the global South.

Colombian violence during the 1990s not only increased because of the drugs trade. Both licit and illicit trades are heavily embroiled in the war system, which is perpetuated by a combination of globalisation and internal factors. By 2002, the country had endured 56 years of violence with no end in sight and at an enormous human cost. Importantly, this decade marked a further exacerbation of the agrarian problem and the exponential growth of irregular armed groups, in which the issue of land tenure was ignored at the state level despite attempts for reform and peace. Indeed, global demands for Colombian products such as gold, coal, emeralds, oil and palm oil has been one of the factors exacerbating the issue of land in Colombia since the 1990s. Through an exploration of the relationship of the global, regional and local factors in relation to the central question of land in Colombia we are better placed to understand the solutions that are needed on all three of these levels in terms of policy.

Chapter Nine

The Long Road to Peace: 2002 – the Present Day

By the advent of the 21st century Colombia was deep in an abyss of violence. Colombian citizens were at the mercy of the country's eight warring factions: the Colombian Army, National Police, CONVIVIRs, paramilitaries allied with the AUC, criminal gangs involved in a myriad of illicit trades as well as three guerrilla groups, the FARC, ELN and EPL. Colombia's future looked bleak. Violence had infiltrated almost every part of the country's political, social and economic processes.⁶¹³ Although Colombia's political elite in Bogotá may have not wanted to declare the country a 'failed' or 'failing state', in humanitarian terms Colombia's situation was more troubling than ever before.⁶¹⁴ In 2002 alone, the violent situation cost the lives of some 33,500 Colombians. A further 1,358 were forcibly disappeared and 412,000 displaced.⁶¹⁵ Yet remarkably, little more than a decade on from the election of Álvaro Uribe in 2002, the Colombian counterinsurgency efforts have been heralded a 'success' and a 'model' for other far-flung violent states, such as Afghanistan. The Colombian intelligence operatives are seen as the 'masters of today'.⁶¹⁶ For US foreign policy analysts and security experts, Colombia is the success story of the Global War on Terror.⁶¹⁷

⁶¹³ Peter Waldmann, 'Is There a Culture of Violence in Colombia?,' *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2007) pp. 61-75.

⁶¹⁴ Phillip McLean, 'Colombia: Failed, Failing, or Just Weak?,' *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (2002) pp. 123-134.

⁶¹⁵ Ann Mason, 'Colombia's Democratic Security Agenda: Public Order in the Security Tripod,' *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (2003) pp. 391-409.

⁶¹⁶ Douglas Porch and Jorge Delgado, "'Masters of Today": Military Intelligence and Counterinsurgency in Colombia, 1990-2009,' *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2010) p. 289.

⁶¹⁷ Robert Haddick, 'Colombia Can Teach Afghanistan (and the United States) How to Win,' *Air & Space Power Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (2010); Thomas E. Ricks, 'Colombia's Neglected Story,' *Foreign Policy*, July 29, 2010; Thomas A. Marks, 'A Model Counterinsurgency: Uribe's Colombia (2002 – 2006) vs. FARC,' *Military Review*, Vol. 87, No. 2 (2007) pp. 41-56.

Álvaro Uribe: Security Advances

For the former Colombian president, Álvaro Uribe, the Global War on Terror provided a complimentary framework for the definition of the country's internal security conditions. According to Uribe, who was president from 2002 to 2008, Colombia did not face an internal armed conflict, but rather a terrorist struggle.⁶¹⁸ Under this rubric, Colombia security was framed as a democratic nation confronted with a threat from terrorists. In order to combat the lack of state authority, which was viewed as a fundamental motor of violence, a stronger state presence through military means was deemed necessary.⁶¹⁹ Uribe's electoral banner, *mano firme, corazón grande* (firm hand, big heart), was aimed at demonstrating his willingness to confront the insurgent threat. During the election campaign, Uribe unveiled the Democratic and Security Policy (DSP), the centrepiece of the Uribe administration. The ambitious policy package offered the Colombian electorate the promise of democracy and security with a strong emphasis on a change from the approach of previous governments that were characterised by an almost non-stop process of failed negotiations and national security approaches, in which unchecked powers led to widespread human rights abuses.

Uribe's DSP marked a change in the governmental approach to the conflict. The breakdown of negotiations between the Colombian state and the FARC in February 2002 allowed Uribe to redefine the conflict and present the DSP as the single solution to the conflict.⁶²⁰ In order to combat the threat of terrorism against the democratic Colombian state, peace was 'to be born out of state authority'. For Uribe, 'in the fight against terrorism it is not the sovereignty of nations that counts, but the sovereignty of democracy. It is a struggle between

⁶¹⁸ Conflicto Interno o Amenaza Terrorista? *El Espectador*, May 5, 2011. This view is also purported by the following: José Obdulio Gaviria Vélez, *Sofismas del Terrorismo en Colombia* (Bogotá: Planeta, 2005); Eduardo Posada Carbó, *La Nación Soñada* (Bogotá: Editorial Norma, 2006); Alfredo Rangel Suárez, '¡Viva el Plan Colombia!', *Semana*, March 21, 2009.

⁶¹⁹ Ministry of Defense, Democratic Security and Defense Policy, Presidency of the Republic, Republic of Colombia, June 2003, pp. 37-41.

⁶²⁰ Josefina Echavarría, *In/Security in Colombia: Writing Political Identities in the Democratic Security Policy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010) p. 231.

the sovereignty of democratic nations against the sovereignty of terrorism'.⁶²¹ The country's Defence Minister between 2002 and 2003, Marta Lucía Ramírez, emphasised the idea that the security of the state is jeopardised by vacuums that permit non-state threats to flourish.⁶²²

The DSP called for a strong Colombian state and the active cooperation of the citizenry. From 2002, the Colombian people were invited to join what was deemed a popular war effort against 'terrorists'. The DSP outlined the role of the Colombian people by specifying that security is 'the result of a collective effort by the citizens: it is the responsibility of all'. In this context, 'active citizen participation, co-operation in the administration of justice and support for the authorities all play a major part in the strengthening of the justice system and democracy'. These are 'constitutional duties which every citizen must strive to fulfil'.⁶²³ Uribe called for 'solidarity between citizens and solidarity with the security forces' and redefined the role of the Colombian state in the conflict. For Uribe, 'the Armed Forces and National Police represent the coercive element of the Constitution'.⁶²⁴ The security forces were explicitly excluded from the role in the perpetuation of violence. According to Uribe, 'they are not "actors" in a war or conflict and should not be put implicitly on the same level as the terrorist organisations which they confront'.⁶²⁵ The framing of the Colombian conflict as democratic state labouring under the threat of terrorism legitimised the state's use of military action and extraordinary use of non-democratic measures to achieve 'peace'.

How democratic is the DSP? Given the lack of civilian oversight over the military and intelligence services and the history of human rights abuses at the hands of the armed forces, the DSP was particularly problematic. In August 2002 a state of 'internal commotion' was declared. Special powers were granted to Colombia's security forces including the 'interception of

⁶²¹ Democratic Security and Defense Policy 2003, p. 6.

⁶²² Mason, 'Colombia's Democratic Security Agenda,' p. 396. Also see: Marta Lucía Ramírez, Democratic Security, Transnational Threats and the Rule of Law, Ministry of Defense, Republic of Colombia, October 2002.

⁶²³ Democratic Security and Defense Policy 2003, p. 17.

⁶²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶²⁵ *ibid.*

private communications, the detention of citizens, and the searching of private property without specific charges, and in certain cases without prior judicial authorization'. The military presence in conflict-ridden zones involved 'roadblocks, curfews, restrictions on movement, house-to-house searches, and detention powers.'⁶²⁶ Whilst these measures were justified to the public in order to effectively pursue irregular armed forces, these measures were also indiscriminately applied to the rural civilian population.

Networks of informants were established in which the citizens were paid to provide intelligence on 'narco-terrorists' or paramilitary activity. A programme of *soldados campesinos* (peasant soldiers) was introduced to support the military efforts. In August 2002, as many as 15,000 *soldados campesinos* were deployed. Indeed, civilian soldiers were seen as an essential contribution to Uribe's war effort; at the time of Uribe's electoral victory, Colombia had fewer soldiers per hundred thousand inhabitants than its relatively peaceful Latin American counterpart Chile.⁶²⁷ This is remarkable given the long history of violence in Colombia. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, Uribe's previous attempt at arming civilians under the CONVIVIR programme led to widespread human rights abuses and in many cases the AUC acted as an umbrella organisation for the disparate vigilante groups. Most importantly, the incorporation of civilians in military operations blurred the line between civilians and combatants, which ultimately threatened the stability of rural conflict zones.⁶²⁸ Although the DSP was presented as a significant change from previous approaches to national security, in reality, it was alarmingly similar to conventional security strategies where military responses to internal threats dominate.

During the Uribe administration, significant advances were made against irregular armed groups. According to official figures released by the country's intelligence services, DNI and the Colombian government, the armed offensive against the FARC and ELN has dramatically reduced the number of irregular combatants. The country's largest insurgent group, the FARC, has

⁶²⁶ Mason, 'Colombia's Democratic Security Agenda,' p. 397.

⁶²⁷ Alfredo Rangel Suárez, 'Los Soldados Campesinos,' *El Tiempo*, August 30, 2002.

⁶²⁸ Mason, 'Colombia's Democratic Security Agenda,' p. 401.

seen its numbers cascade from an estimated 20,766 members in 2002 to 7168 by 2013.⁶²⁹ The ELN at its apex commanded an army of close to 5,000.⁶³⁰ Today its numbers are estimated at 1,380.⁶³¹ Furthermore, the disarmament programme, DDR, led to the demobilisation of over 40,000 combatants with 18,000 weapons surrendered by 2007.⁶³² Despite these impressive figures, the question of how to reintegrate such a large number of former combatants looms large. Moreover, the number of those combatants who have returned to paramilitary activity is unclear.⁶³³

In a country where more than half of the population are employed in the informal sector, it is perhaps unsurprising that the many former combatants in paramilitary organisations have turned to criminal enterprises.⁶³⁴ The rise of the '*bandas emergentes*' (Emerging Bands or BACRIM) is particularly troubling for the Colombian state as evidence suggests that this emerging group largely consists of former paramilitary combatants. According to Luis Alberto Bonilla of the Human Rights Ombudsman Office, the victims of BACRIM violence who approach his office reported the same human rights crimes that victims of the AUC reported in the 1990s and early 2000s. This includes forced displacement, targeted killings and enforcing the social control of rural communities.⁶³⁵ A report by Human Rights Watch concluded that the involvement of BACRIM in the terrorising rural populations 'is the greatest threat to Colombians trying to reclaim stolen land' during the almost seven decade long conflict.⁶³⁶

⁶²⁹ Juan Guillermo Mercado, 'Desmovilización, Principal Arma Contra las Guerrillas,' *El Tiempo*, September 22, 2013.

⁶³⁰ 'ELN,' *Insight Crime*, <http://www.insightcrime.org/groups-colombia/eln>.

⁶³¹ Juan Guillermo Mercado, 'Desmovilización, Principal Arma Contra las Guerrillas,' *El Tiempo*, September 22, 2013.

⁶³² Douglas Porch and María José Rasmussen, 'Demobilization of Paramilitaries in Colombia: Transformation or Transition?,' *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 31, No. 6 (2008) p. 520.

⁶³³ Enzo Nussio, 'Learning from Shortcomings: The Demobilization of Paramilitaries in Colombia,' *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2011) pp. 88-92.

⁶³⁴ 'La Informalidad no Cede Terreno y Cobija a más de la Mitad de los Trabajadores Colombianos,' *El Tiempo*, February 19, 2007.

⁶³⁵ Mariel Pérez-Santiago, 'Colombia's BACRIM: Common Criminals or Actors in Armed Conflict?,' *Insight Crime*, July 23, 2012.

⁶³⁶ Human Rights Watch Report, *The Risk of Returning Home: Violence and Threats Against Displaced People Reclaiming Land in Colombia* (Washington DC: Human

In recent years a series of scandals involving the military and intelligence forces has shaken Colombian politics.⁶³⁷ Former members of the paramilitary group, AUC, have insisted that their organisation bankrolled the electoral campaign of Uribe.⁶³⁸ Around 30 members of Congress and a further 30 lawmakers were implicated in the '*parapolítica*' scandal, related to links between the Uribe administration and paramilitary death squads.⁶³⁹ The '*falso positivos*' affair revealed that an estimated 3,500 innocent Colombians from rural areas were killed by the military forces and presented to the authorities as insurgents belonging to the FARC and ELN in a bid to inflate body counts.⁶⁴⁰ The Colombian Army's practice of killing innocent civilians is not new phenomenon. Declassified material reveals that as early as 1994, the US government was aware of the 'body count mentality'. Field officers who did not show 'records of aggressive anti-guerrilla activity (wherein the majority of the military's human rights abuses occur) disadvantage themselves at promotion time'.⁶⁴¹

Uribe's administration reshaped the representation of the conflict. Poverty, environmental degradation through crop fumigation and mining, political exclusion, humanitarian crises and rural underdevelopment are seen as effects of 'narco-terrorism' rather than as conditions for the emergence of violence.⁶⁴² The Colombian government during 2002-2008 portrayed the country as a democratic nation-state, where democracy can only be exercised based on the principle of state authority and state presence driven by military operations.⁶⁴³ The government is turn presented as fighting 'terrorism' for the

Rights Watch, 2013) p. 167-168; Miriam Wells, 'BACRIM: The Greatest Threat to Colombia Land Restitution: HRW,' *Insight Crime*, September 19, 2013.

⁶³⁷ Zakia Shiraz, 'Drugs and Dirty Wars: Intelligence Cooperation in the Global South,' *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 10, pp. 1758-1760.

⁶³⁸ 'Manusco Insiste: Financiamos a Uribe,' *El Heraldo*, May 11, 2012.

⁶³⁹ Sibylla Brodzinsky, 'Colombia's 'Parapolitics' Scandal Casts Shadow over President,' *The Guardian*, April 23, 2008.

⁶⁴⁰ 'La Historia Inédita de los Falsos Positivos,' *Semana*, July 6, 2013.

⁶⁴¹ 'Body Count Mentalities: Colombia's "False Positives" Scandal Declassified,' The Colombia Documentation Project, US National Security Archive, George Washington University. Also see: Michael Evans, 'Los "Falsos Positivos" son una Práctica Vieja en el Ejército,' *Semana*, January 7, 2009.

⁶⁴² Gaviria Vélez, *Sofismas del Terrorismo*.

⁶⁴³ Echavarría, *In/Security in Colombia*, p. 124.

cause of national development and democracy. The fundamental driving motors of Colombia's conflict were undermined during the Uribe administration. However, instead of offering an alternative solution to violence, the DSP saw the increase use of conventional security measures through military operations in a bid to improve the security conditions of the country.

Juan Manuel Santos: The Return of the Agrarian Question

Uribe's successor following his failed attempt at securing a third presidential term was the former Minister of Defence, Juan Manuel Santos.⁶⁴⁴ It was widely expected that Santos' victory would see a continuation of Uribe's hard-line military policies. However, only 18 months into his successor's first term, Uribe emerged as one of the most vocal opponents of President Santos. As the Minister of Defence, Santos was keen to continue to implement Uribe's security build up, however in his role as president, Santos' approach differed significantly. In July 2013, at the public hearing on the Legal Framework for Peace, Santos stated that he as 'the President of the Republic, on behalf of the Colombian state acknowledges responsibility for the human rights violations in the armed conflict. For Santos, the 'Colombian state has been responsible in some cases by default, in other cases by direct action of some government agents of serious human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law'.⁶⁴⁵ This historic speech marked the first formal acceptance of the role of the Colombian state in the violence in the almost seven decade long conflict. Public apologies were offered to individual communities that had suffered at the hands of state security forces. One of these cases is that of the Peace Community of San José de Apartado, who were accused by the former president Uribe of being allies of the FARC and subject to a counteroffensive operation leading to 'deaths of several villagers,

⁶⁴⁴ Only two consecutive presidential terms are allowed under the Colombian constitution. Uribe's request was for a referendum to ask voters whether to allow third consecutive terms was rejected by the Constitutional Court in February 2010.

⁶⁴⁵ 'Lea el Discurso Íntegro del Presidente Santos,' *Semana*, July 25, 2013.

including two minors'.⁶⁴⁶ Once again the diagnosis of the Colombian conflict was redefined, with the issue of land at last emerging on the political agenda. This is of particular importance as it shows the limitations of the external grand narratives that are applied to the Colombian conflict. The agrarian issue continues to be at the crossroads of peace in Colombia.

Importantly, Santos recognised that additional policies were necessary in order to achieve peace. One of the first policies of the Santos administration was the *Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras* (Victims and Land Restitution Law, Law 1448) in June 2011. The law was presented as a mechanism that would facilitate the restitution of millions of hectares of land that were stolen in Colombia's conflict.⁶⁴⁷ One of the main achievements of this law was the re-recognition of land as a fundamental motor of violence in the country and the restitution of land as the key to achieving a lasting peace. Law 1448 marked the first serious attempt by any Colombian government to address the conflict through the issue of land and marked a significant shift to previous attempts at reform – the burden of proof to prove land ownership was moved to favour victims and provided extensive rights to land restitution than previous legislation.⁶⁴⁸ Under this legislation 'all victims are granted rights to damages, restitution of prior living conditions, a range of social services, and special protection in legal proceedings'. Those who have been displaced as a result of the violence 'are entitled to the return of their land or, in certain circumstances, to an equivalent plot of land or monetary compensation'.⁶⁴⁹ For the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Juan Camilo Restrepo, Santos' land restitution law 'is as or more important than the Law 200 of 1936', the Agrarian Reform Law under Alfonso López Pumarejo's *Revolución de la Marcha*.⁶⁵⁰ The law also established a day for

⁶⁴⁶ Santos Pidió Perdón a Comunidad de Paz de San José de Apartadó,' *El Tiempo*, December 10, 2013.

⁶⁴⁷ Amnesty International, *Colombia: The Victims Land Restitution Law, an Amnesty International Analysis* (Amnesty International Publications: London, 2012).

⁶⁴⁸ Nicole Summers, 'Colombia's Victims' Law: Transitional Justice in a Time of Violent Conflict?,' *Harvard Human Rights Journal*, Vol. 25 (2012) p. 226.

⁶⁴⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 225-226.

⁶⁵⁰ 'Esta Ley es más Ambiciosa que la de López Pumarejo,' *Semana*, March 17, 2012.

the 'remembrance and solidarity with victims' on the symbolic date of April 9 when Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was assassinated in 1948.⁶⁵¹

However, significant obstacles to the implementation of Law 1448 remain. The provisions to deal with land restitution have 'provoked strong opposition from both sectors of society who fear it may jeopardise their control of lands seized illegally through human rights violations, and those seeking the return of lands they were forced to abandon'.⁶⁵² The security of those returning to stolen land poses serious risks, with many facing threats, violence and death. The refusal of the Colombian government to acknowledge the continued role of paramilitaries, who have often colluded with state security forces, despite the reported successes of the DDR process poses significant problems for the successful implementation of the Victims and Land Restitution Law. According to a report by the *Comisión Colombiana de Juristas*, in 2009 paramilitary forces were responsible 32.9 per cent of displacements where the perpetrators have been identified, more than any other armed group.⁶⁵³ As the majority of paramilitary activity today is defined as criminal, under the rubric of BACRIM, victims of paramilitary violence have little chances to access protection under the Victims and Land Restitution Law.⁶⁵⁴ The definition of 'victims' under this law is also problematic. A victim is defined as a person who has suffered a violation of human rights as a result of the conflict since 1985. Civilians who suffered prior to this may still be considered as victims, however are not entitled to damages or restitution.⁶⁵⁵

The true scale of land theft through Colombia's almost seven decade long conflict remains unclear. According to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development the total amount of stolen land is 'not four but two million hectares that are estimated to have been stolen in the conflict', which is 'the conclusion reached in the course of numerous calculations including those

⁶⁵¹ Francisco Miranda, '9 de Abril: ¿Por Qué Gaitán?', *Semana*, April 9, 2013.

⁶⁵² Amnesty International, *The Victims Land Restitution Law*, p. 5.

⁶⁵³ Comisión Colombiana de Juristas, *Colombia: La Metáfora del Desmantelamiento de los Grupos Paramilitares, Segundo Informe de Balance Sobre la Aplicación de la Ley 975 de 2005* (Bogotá: Comisión Colombiana de Juristas, 2010) p. 41.

⁶⁵⁴ Amnesty International, *The Victims Land Restitution Law*, pp. 6-7.

⁶⁵⁵ Summers, 'Colombia's Victims' Law,' p. 226.

undertaken by the Commission Following Public Policy on Forced Displacement'.⁶⁵⁶ However, Restrepo's estimations do not correspond with the figures provided by numerous reports and investigations carried out by inter-governmental and international organisations. In November 2005, the Office of the Comptroller General revealed that between 2000 and 2005 alone, '2.6 million hectares had been stolen after the members of 265,000 households had been forced to flee'. According to the World Bank estimates, by 2005 a total of 4 million hectares of land were forcibly taken or abandoned as a result of the violence.⁶⁵⁷ The Third Public National Verification Survey of the Rights of the Forcibly Displaced Population carried out in 2010 estimated that 'more than 6.6 million hectares of land had been misappropriated or abandoned between 1980 and July 2010'.⁶⁵⁸ The lack of consensus on this key element of land restitution is one of the most pressing problems that face the implementation of Law 1448 and is illustrative of the varying opinion on what exactly constitutes as the illegal appropriation of land.

US foreign policy specialists and civil conflict theorists have been silent on the issue of land in Colombia. As we have seen, the agrarian question has featured remarkably little in both these areas of scholarship. However, despite the conventional wisdom on the Colombian conflict, which has focussed heavily on the drugs trade and criminal activity, the agrarian question and economic and security grievances remain at the core of the Colombian problem. The Human Development Report of 2011 summarises the problem facing Colombia, which unsurprisingly does not differ significantly from the challenges faced in 1946. Land concentration remains in the hands of few, with 52 per cent owned by 1.15 per cent of the population. The overall Gini coefficient index for Colombia, at 0.58 is one of the worst in the world, reflecting the persistent levels of inequality in the country that surpass that of its Latin American counterparts.⁶⁵⁹ It is estimated that 20 million Colombians, 45.5 per cent of the population live below the national poverty line, with 16.4

⁶⁵⁶ Amnesty International, *The Victims Land Restitution Law*, p. 12.

⁶⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁵⁸ *ibid.* This figure excludes those lands collectively owned by Afro-Colombians and indigenous communities.

⁶⁵⁹ 'Tierra Concentrada, Modelo Fracasado,' *Semana*, September 25, 2011.

per cent living in extreme poverty.⁶⁶⁰ The importance of the agrarian question and the socio-economic situation of rural Colombians are underlined by the discussions currently taking place on the negotiating table at Havana. As one leading Colombian commentator noted, for the first time in half a century, 'the two parties are speaking the same language'.⁶⁶¹

Peace Negotiations: 2012 to the Present Day

Recent developments in Colombia reveal much about the complexities of the country's security situation. On September 4 2012, a decade after the last round of failed peace talks, President Santos announced the start of formal negotiations between the Colombian state and the FARC. Santos' decision to press for a negotiated solution to the armed conflict was unexpected given his role as the Minister of Defence during the previous administration. Perhaps the person who was most taken back by Santos' decision was his predecessor and political ally at the time, Uribe. The public rift between two of the most prominent men in Colombian politics, referred to as the 'the war between the presidents',⁶⁶² is illustrative of the fissiparous nature of the political system and the varying diagnoses of the conflict that persist within the country. Uribe use of Twitter to express his dismay at the current negotiations has attracted international attention; he has gone as far as to describe his former Minister of Defence as a 'traitor' and 'scoundrel'.⁶⁶³ For Uribe, 'future generations will be pained by the current weakness of negotiations with terrorists'.⁶⁶⁴ Uribe's discontent with his former underling is so strong that in 2012 he formed his own political party, the *Centro Democrático* (Democratic

⁶⁶⁰ United Nations Development Programme, 'Colombia: Inclusive Economic Development,' available at:

<http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Poverty%20Reduction/MDG%20Strategies/colombia.pdf>.

⁶⁶¹ Antonio Caballero, 'Una Lengua, Un País,' *Semana*, November 9, 2013.

⁶⁶² John Otis, 'In Colombia, the War Between the Presidents,' *Time*, July 13, 2012.

⁶⁶³ Juan Forero and Marina Villeneuve, 'Colombian Ex-President Sounds off his Successor's Peace Talks with FARC Rebels,' *The Washington Post*, October 5, 2012.

⁶⁶⁴ 'Santos vs. Uribe,' *The Economist*, April 7, 2012

Centre), to block Santos' initiatives and challenge the incumbent leader's re-election campaign in May 2014.

Peace negotiations under Santos' administration are point of contention in Bogota. However following the military successes against the FARC and the demilitarisation of the AUC, it highlights that military action is not the only way to achieve peace. The FARC have suffered huge losses along with the ELN since 2002. The weakening of these insurgency movements in terms of numbers of combatants and territory and the opportunities presented by Santos for a broad negotiation agenda have created an air of optimism for both parties. The future of the Colombian peace process now rests in the hands of the electorate. The upcoming election in the midst of the most promising negotiations in Colombia's conflict will without a doubt have a large implication on not only the path of the peace process, but also on the legislative changes on the restitution of land during Santos' administration. In June 2013, the Colombian government rejected the FARC's request for the postponement of the election.⁶⁶⁵ This is not surprising given the strong tradition of elections in the country, that have taken place every four years with almost no breaks throughout the history of the republic. Although there is no doubt the election in the coming months will continue as normal, Uribe's political onslaught on Santos comes at a crucial moment that endangers the future of peace.

The current peace agenda covers five major points: land reform and rural development; political participation; illicit drugs; rights of victims and peace deal implementation. So far agreements have been reached on two of the points on the agenda; a partial agreement on land reform and rural development as well as on the thorny issue of political participation. Although the negotiations in Havana have been somewhat lengthy, one of the most important achievements of this process is an agreement on two of the most contentious elements of the conflict. A joint statement from the FARC and government in May 2013, following the partial agreement on land reform read,

⁶⁶⁵ Milagros López de Guereño, 'Farc Pide Aplazar Elecciones y el Gobierno Rechaza la Propuesta,' *El Tiempo*, June 11, 2013.

'this agreement will be the start of a radical transformation of rural Colombia'.⁶⁶⁶ In November 2013, a full agreement on political participation was announced with the FARC chief's negotiator stating that it is 'an important step in the right direction to end the conflict and achieve a real democracy in Colombia'.⁶⁶⁷ Although the exact details of the agreement between the two parties remain unclear and will do so until the final point of agenda is agreed upon, these developments confirm the convergence of the Colombian state and the FARC to ensure the economic and social development of rural areas, the continued restitution of land, political guarantees for those entering electoral politics and the creation of new political parties. The relative successes of these initial rounds of negotiations are certainly promising for both the Colombian government and the FARC. One of the most likely outcomes of the agreements with the FARC is the prospect of negotiations between the government and the ELN. However, as the FARC is by far the strongest of the insurgent groups, it is likely that the negotiation with this group will set a precedent for the agenda between the government and the ELN.

The current round of negotiations is focussed on the issue of illicit drugs. The FARC has proposed a ten-point plan that aims to rid the country of narco-trafficking. The centrepiece of this proposal is the de-criminalisation of drug usage.⁶⁶⁸ Although the issue of FARC's link to the drugs trade through the funding of its war machine from taxing traffickers has been a historical source of contention between the government and the insurgent group, there is some room for optimism in reaching an accommodation in this area. The Summit of the Americas, held in Cartagena, Colombia in 2012 marked the first open declaration of the failure of the war on drugs by a number of Latin American leaders. The historic summit led to a 'game-changing' report on global drugs policy, *The Drug Problem in the Americas*, which was initiated by President Santos, and presented to international bodies, as well as to US President

⁶⁶⁶ 'Colombia and Farc Rebels Reach Agreement on Land Reform,' *BBC News*, May 27, 2013.

⁶⁶⁷ 'Colombia Agrees Farc Political Participation,' *BBC News*, November 6, 2013.

⁶⁶⁸ Nizah Richani, 'FARC may Have the Answer to Colombia's Drug Woes,' *Al Jazeera*, December 9, 2013.

Barak Obama in May 2013. The extensive study marked the first high-level, multilateral study produced by Latin American governments examining drug production, trafficking, distribution and the relationship between the drugs trade and organised crime, which fundamentally questioned the effectiveness of current legislation.⁶⁶⁹

Given the international repercussions of the drugs trade, the response of the US and European governments to the negotiations is particularly disappointing. The Obama administration's response to the negotiations with the FARC has been somewhat lukewarm, with no coherent position or open support for the peace talks, despite the loosening of drug laws in some US states in recent months.⁶⁷⁰ Cocaine consumption in the UK is the highest in Europe, however London has offered little open support to the Colombian peace process on this crucial element of the agenda.⁶⁷¹ As the contender for the Conservative party in 2005, the current Prime Minister, David Cameron advocated 'more liberal drugs laws' and called on the government to 'initiate a discussion within the UN about alternate ways – including the possibility of legalisation and regulation – to tackle the global drugs dilemma'.⁶⁷² However, as the leader of the Conservative party and Prime Minister, Cameron has been largely silent on the issue of drug reform, only speaking to refuse his support for a Royal Commission on drug reform.

By contrast, the Deputy Prime Minister of the UK, Nick Clegg, has been somewhat more vocal on the issue of drug reform following his recent visit to Colombia. Clegg called for a 'proper debate' and the 'need for a different strategy' on drugs, in which cooperation with 'international partners such as President Santos and his government in Colombia' is necessary to tackle the problem of drugs, both at home and the source country.⁶⁷³ Clegg should be

⁶⁶⁹ Zakia Shiraz, 'Drugs and Dirty Wars: Intelligence Cooperation in the Global South,' *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 10 (2013) pp. 1761-1762.

⁶⁷⁰ Nizah Richani, 'FARC may have the Answer to Colombia's Drug Woes.'

⁶⁷¹ Andrew Anthony, 'Cocaine: Why we are all Talking About it,' *The Guardian*, December 1, 2013.

⁶⁷² Marie Woolf, 'Tory Contender Calls for More Liberal Drug Laws,' *The Independent*, March 3, 2014.

⁶⁷³ Nick Clegg, 'The Lesson from Latin America: We Need to Rethink the Drugs War,' *The Guardian*, February 8, 2014.

commended on his efforts to raise the profile of the peace process and the role that the UK should play in international drugs debate. However, Clegg's rather naïve and shortsighted account of the conflict did not take into account the contribution that foreign investment and business could make to peace.

Clegg's visit marked the largest UK trade delegation ever to have been sent to Colombia. Representatives from over 40 businesses included HSBC, Rolls Royce and Shell as well as the Universities of Dundee, Edinburgh and Warwick.⁶⁷⁴ Clegg is not misguided in his opinion that economic development is needed in Colombia, but we must ask 'what type of economic development?' In a country that has been ravaged by conflict for almost seven decades alongside steady economic growth and foreign investment, ethical development is desperately needed. If foreign governments are to lend their support to the Colombian peace process they must also ensure that their delegations in seminars such as 'Business is Great' where Clegg addressed a multitude of Colombian and UK organisations, are aware of the human cost of business. Economic development, as we have seen in the case of Colombia, does not always result in jobs, poverty reduction, a greater respect for human rights and improved levels of democracy. Colombia remains one of the most unequal societies in the world. Throughout Colombia's history, social conflict as a result of economic development has led to widespread human rights abuses, from the expansion of coffee plantations in the late-eighteenth century to palm oil and banana plantations in more recent times. Perhaps one of the most obvious shortcomings of the current peace negotiations is the lack of significance given to licit industries in the perpetuation of violence. Recent levels of protest and social unrest are illustrative of the wider social challenges faced by Colombia, which will undoubtedly persist regardless of whether a peace agreement with the FARC is reached or not.

⁶⁷⁴ Ellie Mae O'Hagan, 'Britain's Government Makes Deals with Colombia Despite Human Rights Abuses,' *The Guardian*, February 4, 2014.

The Continuation of Social Unrest

Colombia has a long history of social conflict and strikes. Despite recent security advances against insurgents, the country like many of its Latin American counterparts faces significant problems with social unrest. Since 2013, Santos has experienced a wave of protests and disruption from farmers and workers across various sectors of the economy. The failure of successive Colombian governments to address the needs of small-scale farmers, such as improved road to get their produce to markets and subsidies to counter the soaring costs of inputs, has resulted in outbreaks of violence between *campesinos* and the country's security forces.⁶⁷⁵ Three years into the Santos administration, critics of the government across the country mobilised to highlight the repeated failed promises on improving the country's infrastructure, which in an largely agricultural country that is geographically divided by two mountainous areas and a large swathes of jungle, is necessary to enable small farmers to earn an income.⁶⁷⁶

Journalist, Jonathan Glennie recounted his meeting with farmers in Catatumbo in the department of Santander, one of the centres of the current social unrest. The farmers in Catakumbo explained that their potatoes and onions 'were selling for a pittance', and whilst they were 'desperately trying to avoid the temptation to grow coca' it was increasingly difficult to avoid this fate, which would bring further troubles to their homes.⁶⁷⁷ This is not a problem that is faced by a few Colombian farmers; it is widespread across rural regions. In October 2013, a two-week long farmers strike and roadblocks crippled transportation in the country.⁶⁷⁸ The coal industry, today Colombia's second largest export, was also crippled by strikes and protests that resulted in the halting of 70 per cent of coal mining in February 2013.⁶⁷⁹ In August 2013, 30,000 supporters of the strikes, mainly consisting of students, staged a

⁶⁷⁵ Jonathan Glennie, 'Colombia is Latest Addition to Pantheon of Free-Trade Follies,' *The Guardian*, September 19, 2013.

⁶⁷⁶ 'Infrastructure in Colombia: Taking the Slow Road,' *The Economist*, July 6, 2013.

⁶⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁷⁸ 'Colombia Leader's Rating Plunges After Unrest,' *Al Jazeera*, September 5, 2013.

⁶⁷⁹ 'Colombia's Economy: The Black Stuff,' *The Economist*, March 2, 2013.

peaceful march on the streets of the nation's capital, Bogotá, which quickly deteriorated into a violent altercation between the protesters and the security forces.

The government's response to the recent wave of unrest was questionable. Many Colombians deplored President Santos' dismissal of the protests as 'non-existent'.⁶⁸⁰ Indeed, the heavy hand of the Colombian state reappeared with images of rural *campesinos* dressed in traditional ponchos being met with riot police wearing amour spread across the Colombian newspapers. In his justification for the response of the state, the Defence Minister, Juan Carlos Pizon, stated that the protests were 'infiltrated by FARC rebels'.⁶⁸¹ The use of tear gas and armoured police to counter the protesters has led to a plunging of Santos' approval rating, which in the midst of the most importance peace negotiations in the nation's country and a nearing election in May 2014 may have grave consequences. Whilst the focus of much of the scholarly attention on the tragic case of Colombia has been on the transformation of the conflict, continuities in the fundamental drivers of social unrest and violence remain. In order to achieve peace, the Colombian state must address the social and economic needs of its country. Whilst the agenda at the negotiation table in Havana is an impressive start, the long road to peace in Colombia still lies ahead. And yet, for the first time in the country's conflict since 1946, it can be confidently said that peace is realistically within reach for Colombians, and whilst the attendant social reforms may not be revolutionary, they could mark the beginning of a real transformation.

⁶⁸⁰ 'Colombia Leader's Rating Plunges After Unrest,' *Al Jazeera*.

⁶⁸¹ Helen Murphy, 'Colombia's Farm Protest has been Infiltrated by FARC, Government says,' *Reuters*, August 22, 2013.

Conclusion

The overriding contribution of this thesis lies in the application of an Area Studies approach. Within the various sub-disciplines of the Social Sciences that deal with conflict and security a number of theoretical perspectives have emerged that seek to explain violent conflict on a trans-national basis. Civil war is a pressing policy concern; it causes tremendous human suffering, stalls economic development and leads to political instability that can last for decades. In a globalised world the risk of spill over is increased and it is often entangled with the interests of distant powers. The idea that since the end of the Second World War the prevalence of civil war in the global South has increased forms the basis of studies in the areas of Global Governance, International Security and Development Economics. However, it is worthy to note that the onset of new civil wars has dropped appreciably since the mid-1990s. This is important for two reasons: firstly, it would suggest that civil wars by and large tend to be part of a longer historical trend in the country; and secondly, civil wars can, and in some cases do, last for decades.

The theories of “New Wars” and “Greed vs. Grievance” have greatly influenced the analysis of civil conflict in the global South. New Wars scholars share a consensus on the negative impact of globalisation. Whilst their detractors have focussed their concerns on whether “new wars” are distinct from earlier forms of conflicts, particularly in the post-Cold War era, the debate within the “new wars” literature is firmly grounded on a critical view of globalisation and in particular the impact of this for global security. Increased global interdependency has come with its fair share of problems. For Colombia, global processes such as free or increased levels of trade, movement of capital and the expansion of extractive industries have had a particularly negative impact – they have exacerbated the issue of land, which has been the primary motor of violence since the coffee boom of the 19th century. In a globalised world, the industries of gold, emeralds, coal and oil

mining as well as the international drugs trade are embroiled in a cocktail of violence that involves a myriad of irregular armed actors and the Colombian state. This body of literature provides an important insight into the way global trends can impact civil conflict and in particular is useful in its characterisation of violence, which for Kaldor includes state failure and a social transformation driven by the intensification of global interconnectedness and liberal economic forces; the breakdown of public authority leading to 'irregular' armies; an increase in ethnic conflicts rather than ideology and territory; a phenomenal rise in civilian casualties; the targeting of civilians as objects of war; a dependence on internal sources of finance, and massive international involvement in the form of foreign media, aid organisations, military advisers, and volunteer forces.⁶⁸²

However, this approach does provide an insight into the relationship between the global, regional and local dynamics. The danger in the sole focus on global trends is that paradoxically it can limit our knowledge by leading to a neglect of more local and even regional trends. Although global changes and pressures have undoubtedly had an impact on the security of Colombia, most prominently in recent years through the explosion of the drugs trade, this thesis places emphasis on the structural problems rooted in the domestic political, social and economic spheres of the country and the relationship between these dynamics on a historical basis. In this regard the use of an area studies approach is important in highlighting the ways in which global trends, in terms of the Cold War, War on Drugs, Global War on Terror, international trades and extractive industries can interact with regional and local conflict dynamics. In short, this thesis uses interdisciplinary insights from violence in Colombia on a historical basis that broadens the current characterisation of violent conflict through the deployment of regional and local perspectives to complement the global ones.

Both the "New Wars" and "Greed vs. Grievance" schools of thought highlight the prevalence of criminality in driving violence. This is particularly important

⁶⁸² Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars* (Cambridge: Polity Press) pp. 1-12.

in policy circles as one of the main forms of military action against Colombian insurgents has taken the form of counter-narcotics operations. The idea that criminality drives violence can certainly provide us with an insight into the duration of conflict. However, in terms of causality it is important to look to more local dynamics. Indeed, if the Colombian government were to defeat the insurgent forces and continue with their recent successes, the demise of insurgency would not necessarily mark the end of organised violence. In this regard, this thesis offers a more nuanced and localised perspective of factors that drive violence.

Earlier cycles of violence and unresolved issues of land tenure have fed subsequent cycles of conflict in Colombia. However, the focus of this thesis has been the most recent cycle of violence, from 1946 to present day with an emphasis on internal drivers of violence – political, economic and security grievances in the form of poverty, political exclusion and human rights abuses that have persisted for almost seven decades. In this context the political, economic and social conditions in which violence has developed is explored with relationship between armed conflict and multiple forms of violence and criminality.

An Area Studies approach has enabled this thesis to move beyond the global and criminal trends to provide a ‘bottom up’ approach to conflict analysis through the application of insights from a range of literature and archival data. This has revealed insights from the internal politics, society, economy, history and geography reveal a complex lineage of violence that is rooted in the issue of land. In particular it has explored the role of the Colombian state and provided a critical analysis of the country’s political systems that are both central to the conflict and any peace which may be achieved. Social scientists have an implicit focus on global trends and forces, whereas Area Studies specialists develop knowledge of specific countries and regions. This thesis bridges this divide by establishing a symbiotic relationship between the two areas. In particular this thesis advocates that Area Studies must build on the general theoretical frameworks that highlight global trends and complements this with insights from a country level analysis of violence and security.

Equally, area specific knowledge can contribute to the understanding of wider dynamics by providing in depth analyses which social scientists rely on to produce accurate generalisations of global trends.

The secondary level contribution this thesis makes is in the deployment of transnational archival data sets. Archival datasets are not commonly used by Social Scientists who study conflict as there is a desire to study global trends. The use of a range of archival material from the UK, USA and Colombia as well as classified material obtained through Freedom of Information Requests is a unique element of this thesis and provides a rich, analytical insight into the local dynamics and development of conflict in Colombia. In particular, it is useful in highlighting the complexities of the political system and how this has contributed to insecurity. This includes political factionalism and partisan violence and the political exclusion of the left, which are the central elements of the structural weaknesses of the Colombian state that have driven political and social instability.

This study has incorporated the impact of *La Violencia* for the Colombian conflict. This is a particularly important element of the thesis in highlighting the humanitarian catastrophe caused by this period of violence and also the ways which *La Violencia* consolidated an elitist political system where the threat of the masses and social revolution launched the two main political parties into a constitutionally bound power-sharing pact. The *Frente Nacional* coalition not only excluded the opposition but also led to the question of the legitimacy of the Colombian political elite. The agrarian issue is continuum throughout the violent history of Colombia, however it was *La Violencia* that brought this to the forefront of the political agenda. The counter-reform period in the 1970s, which effectively signalled the abandonment of agrarian reform by the political elite, had disastrous effects for the country in two ways: firstly, it increased rural support for insurgent groups, and secondly, it did not resolve the problem of under and unemployment thereby creating thereby neglecting a workforce that that went on to cultivate marijuana and coca in rural areas. By the 1980s the traditional political parties remained closed as extremist factions on the left grew. A booming population and high levels of unemployment,

despite warnings from the international community, were ignored. The issue of social and agrarian reform to alleviate the country's social ills remained unaddressed. It is in this context in which we see a marked increase rural and urban insurgency.

The poor choices of the political elite and the structural problems of the Colombian political system have bred insecurity. The threat of insurgent groups has further exacerbated the state sponsored violence since the 1980s, in which the ideological collusion between the state and paramilitary forces has resulted in the killings of thousands of civilians and leftist politicians. Whilst the focus of much of the scholarly attention on the tragic case of Colombia has been on the transformation of the conflict, this thesis has drawn out the continuities in the fundamental drivers of social unrest and violence remain. In short, it argues that in order to achieve peace, the Colombian state must address the social and economic needs of its country and address the agrarian issue. Whilst the agenda at the negotiation table in Havana is an impressive start after seven decades of violence, we will have to wait until 2016 to see the outcome of the full rounds of negotiations and the programme of implementation.

This research is of particular importance for other conflict-ridden countries of the world. Latin America today is the only region of the world with a rising homicide rate. However, it is also one of the most economically vibrant regions of the world. In terms of the nexus between conflict and economic development we must assess this in terms of the political and social structures of a country. This is of particular importance in a globalised world where economic development and trade is seen to be the solution to poverty and insecurity. In terms of the future developments of this research the limitations of the work must be addressed.

This thesis has had its challenges and limitations. In particular, the lack of data from within Colombia and the resources to spend considerable amounts of time in the country to carry out further data collection has resulted in a reliance on archival material, the majority of which is from outside of

Colombia. However, since the original submission further fieldwork has been carried out which will enable the thesis to move into a monograph with insights into various rural movements, the development of criminal networks and importantly the role of extractive industries in the Colombian conflict. This will enable the monograph to engage with broader issues such as the interaction between global, regional and local dynamics further. Quantitative material from within the country also provides an interesting insight to local dynamics and allows a micro-level dataset which brings out country-level nuances, in which the research can explore the links between drug production, extractive industries, geography, state presence and violence. Following the monograph, it would be particularly useful to explore violent conflict with an Area Studies approach in a comparative context. It is hoped that this will be achieved through a comparative study of violence in Colombia and Mexico to provide a regional perspective on violence with lessons for other Latin American countries that are battling their own internal security dilemmas.

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