Evil Hour in Colombia

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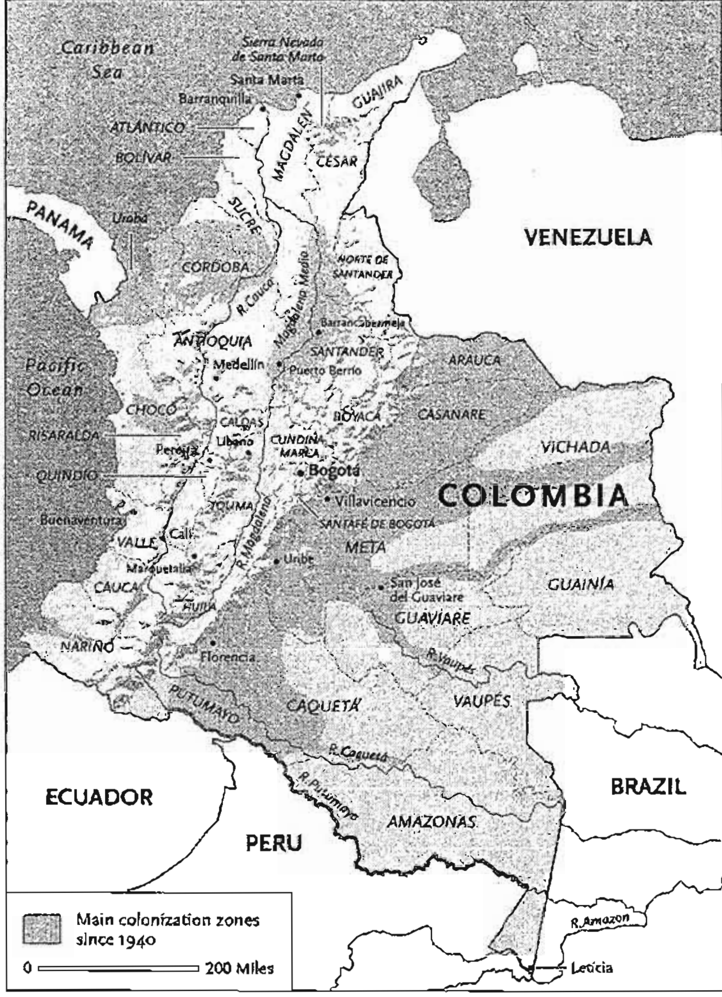

Caribbean Sea
Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
Santa Marta
Barranquilla
ATLÁNTICO
BOLÍVAR
MAGDALENA
GUAJIRA
CESAR
PANAMA
Urabá
SUCRE
CÓRDOBA
R. Cauca
Magdalena Medio
NORTE DE SANTANDER
VENEZUELA
Barrancabermeja
ANTIOQUIA
SANTANDER
ARAUCA
Pacific Ocean
Medellín
Puerto Berrío
CHOCÓ
CALDAS
BOYACÁ
CASANARE
RISARALDA
Líbano
CUNDINAMARCA
VICHADA
Pereira
QUINDÍO
Bogotá
COLOMBIA
Villavicencio
TOLIMA
Buenaventura
SANTAFÉ DE BOGOTÁ
VALLE
Cali
R. Magdalena
META
Marquetalia
Uribe
CAUCA
San José del Guaviare
GUAINÍA
GUAVIARE
HUILA
NARIÑO
Florencia
R. Vaupés
PUTUMAYO
CAQUETÁ
VAUPÉS
R. Caquetá
ECUADOR
R. Putumayo
BRAZIL
AMAZONAS
PERU
Main colonization zones since 1940
0
200 Miles
R. Amazon
Leticia

In 1929, the PSR's "Bolsheviks of Líbano" rose up in a failed insurrection in northern Tolima; the first explicitly socialist rebellion in Colombia, it represented an alliance formed by radical artisans and provincial intellectuals with tenants, sharecroppers, and smallholders.[66] Indeed, peasants took the offensive, staging land takeovers throughout the coffee axis, and the export proletariat waged its largest strikes to date in the multinational enclaves. Coffee capitalism under Conservative Catholic rule created expectations of property ownership, workers' control, and higher wages that it could not meet, and it crumbled in the face of widespread radical-popular mobilization.

Regions were racialized as relatively privileged sectors of the peasantry were incorporated into networks of patronage and clientelism. Those excluded from the benefits of coffee capitalism mobilized in protest. Indian peasant rebellion spread after 1914, organized labor struck the capitalist enclaves in oil and bananas after 1925, and a wave of multi-ethnic peasant land takeovers swept across the coffee frontiers from 1928. Radical-popular movements achieved greater independence and autonomy from the two parties than in the past, through direct action and the formation of revolutionary Left parties.

3

The Liberal Pause, 1930–46

> Colombia was, and continues to be, proof that gradual reform in the framework of liberal democracy is not the only, or even the most plausible, alternative to social revolutions, including the ones that fail or are aborted. I discovered a country in which the failure to make a social revolution had made violence the constant, universal, and omnipresent core of public life.
>
> Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life* (2002)

Although its effects lasted, the long period of Conservative domination rested on shaky foundations, and suffered from a basic contradiction: it gave rise to expectations of property ownership that it could not satisfy. Ushered in on a wave of mass mobilization, the "Liberal Pause" lasted from 1930 until 1946. New forces dovetailed with the Left wing of the Liberal Party – grouped around the charismatic leadership of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán – to constitute the first radical-popular movement with a national horizon. Indeed, Gaitán's nationalism was cross-class, multi-ethnic, and anti-elitist, allowing the Colombian working class to overcome its weakness vis-à-vis capitalist firms and entrepreneurs, on the basis of its inclusiveness.[67] By 1945, accelerated urbanization, politicized middle and working classes, and peasant pressure for agrarian reforms led to a decline in the political weight of landlords throughout the continent. But in Colombia landlords defeated tenants and sharecroppers, as industrialists bested organized labor. Whereas elsewhere in the region mass mobilization created new parties, forced agrarian reform, labor legislation, or overthrew governments, in Colombia neither urban populism nor agrarian social democracy lasted as a national force.[68]

I Incipient Populism

Organized labor, radical peasant movements, the Colombian Communist Party, and Gaitán experimented with organization and mobilization outside the Liberal Party in the first half of the 1930s, before rejoining it in the second half. In conjunction with this new wave of radical-popular mobilization, which now had a national horizon and focus, tepid Liberal agrarian reform and labor legislation met with strong opposition from the Conservative Party. Blessed by the Catholic Church, Conservatives redoubled efforts to rule unopposed in rural areas in order to make up for territory won by Liberals in the cities. This explains why, although social democracy triumphed throughout Latin America at the end of the Second World War, Catholic counterrevolution won the day in Colombia through institutionalized political terror.

With the economic basis of Conservative rule temporarily gone, and their political cohesion broken, the door was left open for Liberals to regain the presidency after fifty years in the wilderness. Their candidate, Olaya Herrera, had been Ambassador in Washington under the Conservatives, with whom he enjoyed good relations, and his vote was less than that of the Conservative rivals combined. There were no startling policy departures. But Gaitán broke from the Liberal Party in 1933 to found the National Union of the Revolutionary Left (UNIR), and approved the founding of peasant leagues to compete with those sponsored by the Liberal Party – and, crucially, with those of the Partido Comunista Colombiano (PCC).[70]

The PCC was founded in 1930 by leaders of the PSR, two of whom, José Gonzalo Sánchez and Dimas Luna, had led the *Quintinada* indigenous movement in the early 1920s. There was continuity with earlier struggles in Cauca and Tolima, and the PCC initially gave priority to peasant struggles on the coffee frontiers, especially in Tolima and Cundinamarca, where the largest plantations were owned by merchant bankers from Bogotá, as well as Germans and North Americans. It set up peasant leagues to capitalize on the wave of land occupations after 1928, and in the early 1930s gained political legitimacy through its "revolutionary agrarianism" based on the "formation and protection of autonomous smallholder communities."[71] Gaitán accused the PCC of skipping stages of historical development: while communist peasant leagues aspired to usher in the socialist revolution, UNIR's were designed to remove the feudal blocks on the development of capitalist agriculture. The countryside was hotly contested political terrain in the early 1930s, and – this was the Comintern's sectarian Third Period – the PCC viewed UNIR as its principal political opponent, especially in Tolima and Cundinamarca.[72]

When Liberals won again – unopposed: the Conservatives boycotted the election – their leader was Alfonso López Pumarejo, the scion of a rich banking family, and a former employee of a US investment firm, Baker-Kellogg. Raised in England and the USA, admirers billed him as the Roosevelt of the Andes. The "Revolution on the March" proclaimed by López was a limited affair, more sweeping in its rhetoric than its reforms, but it raised hopes for populist redistribution and state arbitration of class conflict.[73] Taxation went up, more was spent on schools and roads, and labor legislation was liberalized, which opened the gates to a further growth in unionization, a process that had begun under Olaya. Most importantly, popular expectations of the results of political participation soared.

Effort was invested mainly in revising the Constitution of 1886 to ensure separation of Church and state, but, coupled with the other measures, this was enough to pull Gaitán back into the Liberal fold in 1935. It prompted the PCC, in line with Popular Front policies, to throw its weight behind the López regime, demobilizing its peasant leagues and renouncing its revolutionary vanguardist ambitions.[74] With the support of the PCC, which dominated key trade unions in the transport sector and the export enclaves, López created the Colombian Workers' Confederation (CTC), with the aim of turning organized labor into a clientelist bloc under the control of the Liberal Party.

II Two Steps Back

Though the "Liberal Republic" lasted until 1946, its promise was buried during the second López administration of 1942–45. Embroiled in corruption scandals, López repealed reforms, such as the eight-hour day and social security, which had not been a dead letter for organized labor. He reversed limited land reform in 1944 with Law 100, known as "*la Revancha*," or "Revenge."[75] Law 100 demonstrated the Liberal Party's inability to resolve "the agrarian question" between peasants and landlords, and highlighted the weight of the latter within the ruling class. The

coffee growers' lobby (FENALCO), the landlords' *gremio*, or business lobby (SAC), and the employers' association (APEN) had all pushed for Law 100, which closed the door on sharecropper dreams of independent smallholding. It protected landlord property and labor contracts, prohibited the cultivation of crops that would compete in the market, and made it legal to expel sharecroppers and tenants. Older landed groups were able to fashion alliances with the new coffee export elite in order to preserve their privileges. In Cauca, Tolima, and Cundinamarca, where peasant struggle had been vigorous in the 1930s, Law 100 opened the gates for class war from above against mobilized tenants and sharecroppers.

An important interpretation has it that the anti-capitalist labor movement, allied with peasant and indigenous movements in the 1920s, was co-opted and institutionalized in the 1930s, even as peasant struggle intensified leading up to the passage of Law 200 of 1936. Law 200 was a reform. It established effective occupancy of land as a legal basis for tenure, and it has been argued that this partial victory of coffee workers – it was very partial: landlords benefited far more – in securing access to frontier lands in the 1930s led, ironically, to the isolation of more militant trade unions in other sectors, such as oil and transport. However strong the latter grew, they were unable to affect the central area of the economy. Hence the subsequent fragmentation of the labor movement as a whole, and, in consequence, the strengthening of the two traditional parties. Well before *la Violencia* – so the argument runs – independent class politics had been eclipsed, as smallholders in the coffee belt gained family plots, and were integrated into one of the two parties, while Gaitán and organized labor fit within the Liberal Party fold. During *la Violencia*, intra-class competition to avoid proletarianization, mediated by the clientelist practices and the coffee growers' association, took a fanatically bloody turn, while the urban labor movement was beaten back.

Whereas in other parts of Latin America a mobilized peasantry would play a key role in radical coalitions, after Colombian coffee growers conquered their family plots in the 1930s and 1940s, workers' solidarity disappeared.[75] Although this explains key developments along the coffee axis, it misses the radical challenge *gaitanismo* posed as the first radical-popular movement in Colombian history to unite subordinate groups nationally, across racial, regional, and class divides. It also downplays the importance of *gaitanismo*'s message of class struggle for rural proletarians, tenants, and sharecroppers excluded from property ownership, on the one hand, and the majority of urban workers outside the sphere of organized labor, on the other.[77]

Following the recovery of coffee exports after 1936, and nearly a decade of a 10 per cent annual manufacturing growth, in the early 1940s a consensus emerged among Colombian ruling groups that it was time to return to liberal economic orthodoxy that had prevailed in the capitalist world until the 1930s. Social reforms and pro-labor policies would have no place. In 1944 the city's Conservative manufacturing elite formed ANDI, the national industrialists' organization, and in 1945 coffee merchants founded FEDECAFE. Though they had their differences over the next decade, these groups, joined by intermarriage, subsequently dictated economic policy to successive governments behind the public's back.[78] The Unión de Trabajadores de Colombia (UTC) was set up by the Catholic Church in Medellín in 1946, and was to become the model for organized labor federations.

Liberal Alberto Lleras Camargo, a former Marxist intellectual and Ambassador to Washington, took over when López Pumarejo quit before his time was up, and increased repression of organized labor. In 1945 Lleras Comargo crushed the Communist-led river workers' strike – their union, FEDENAL, had been the most successful in the CTC, and was the only one to achieve a closed shop. Linking the Andean highlands to the Atlantic coast, FEDENAL's workers – sailors, shipwrights, stevedores, mechanics – carried coffee to the world market; their structural position in the economy gave them the possibility of shutting it down. Their defeat in 1945 represented a major step back for the working class as a whole.

III Toward *la Violencia*

Gaitán was bound by his own contradictions: he would not leave the Liberal Party, but could not meet the demands of his constituency within the oligarchic biparrisan system. Yet only Gaitán – the leading labor lawyer of the day, who had occupied the posts of senator, city councilor, mayor of Bogotá, minister of education and of labor – contested these developments through official channels, winning a huge following among the Liberal electorate. Though the PCC leadership loathed

him, Gaitán enjoyed support from Communist Party cadres and organized labor – rail, oil, and telecommunications workers backed him enthusiastically.[79] When the Liberal establishment locked him out of contention as the party's candidate for the presidency in 1946, he ran on his own ticket. Though Gaitán took many cities – Bogotá, Barranquilla, Cali, Cartagena, Cúcuta, Ibagué, Neiva, Santa Marta – the result was to split the Liberal vote and let the Conservative candidate, Mariano Ospina Pérez, through, as Conservatives had planned.

The period known simply, though misleadingly, as *la Violencia* – the defining moment of Colombia's short twentieth century – is often said to have begun with Gaitán's assassination in 1948. But that is to foreshorten it by three years, if not two decades. To understand its roots, it is necessary to go back to the origins of the Liberal Republic.[80] When Conservative rule came to an end in 1930, tensions long simmering in the countryside began to explode. Memories of the partisan slaughter of the War of a Thousand Days, when Liberal and Conservative notables mobilized peasant militias to kill each other in a struggle that cost the lives of one out of every twenty-five Colombians, were still vivid in many localities. Scarcely had Olaya Herrera taken office when Liberals wreaked revenge in the Santanders and Boyacá.[81] Conservative fears were thus far from irrational. Once Liberals were entrenched in power, they resorted to persistent intimidation, police violence, and fraud. In retaliation, Conservatives boycotted every presidential election down to 1946. In the early 1940s, Liberals turned the police into an appendage of their party – a move that would have dire consequences during *la Violencia*, when the police were "conservatized." Throughout the "Liberal Pause," there was a menacing background of killings in the *municipios*, as political polarization and landlord violence, though still highly localized, spread incrementally.

If, in Boyacá and the Santanders, the logic of the "defensive feud" between embattled local communities, each with recollections or fear of grievous injury, was in place from the beginning, two national developments overdetermined this underlying dynamic.[82] The first was the shift in the electoral balance between the two parties, once even a moderate degree of urbanization – and in Colombia it was still quite moderate – had taken hold. The strength of Conservative loyalties had depended on the influence of the clergy, which was far stronger in small towns and the countryside. Once the proportion of city-dwellers passed a

certain threshold in the 1940s, Liberals started to command a permanent majority at the polls. This became clear in the 1946 presidential election itself, which they lost; the two Liberal candidates totaled over 60 per cent of the vote, a level that has been the norm ever since.

On the Conservative side, loss of power had increased the influence of the most extreme wing of the party. Under the charismatic leadership of Laureano Gómez, the party was bent on increasing its rule over the countryside in order to recoup losses in the cities. Dubbed the "creole Hitler" by his foes, Gómez was seen at the time, and has been since, as a fascist demagogue, driving his party to fanatical extremes and plunging the country into civil war. In the ingrown world of the Colombian political elite, he had been a good friend of both López Pumarejo and his successor, Eduardo Santos, and benefited from the former's financial ties. He had solid backing from the key *gremios*, FEDECAFE and ANDI. In the mid-1930s, he had written blistering attacks on both Mussolini and Hitler, but he was a Catholic integrist. Latin America of the 1930s and 1940s was filled with movements and leaders, not all of them reactionary, impressed by the successes of German or Italian fascism: Toro and Busch in Bolivia, Vargas in Brazil, and Perón in Argentina.

What was distinctive in Colombia was that the same kind of attraction pulled Gómez and his party toward Franco, as a traditionalist and religious version of counterrevolution, free of any of the populist connotations of the Italian or German regimes. The result was a rhetorical escalation, to Spanish Civil War levels, of historic enmities toward Liberalism, now represented as indistinguishable from communism. Racist verbal assaults and caricatures of Gaitán – as well as his followers – were unrelenting. Gaitán was known to Bogotá's political elites as "el Negro Gaitán," an epithet that played on his phenotypic features and large Afro-Colombian following in the Caribbean, causes for ridicule and fear. Blacks were "lazy," "unruly," and "immoral." The Hispanophile, Catholic *reconquista* would put them and their leaders – in river, road, and rail workers' unions – in their place.[83]

Like Núñez, seventy years before him, Gómez aimed to return Colombian society to an idealized internal colonial totality in which subalterns knew their proper places, but Gómez lived in the age of total war, and helped push political terror to previously unthinkable levels.

The mid-1940s represented a brief moment of radical-democratic opening almost everywhere in Latin America, with populists swept into power. In Colombia, it saw an aggressive Catholic counterrevolutionary assault on organized labor and radical peasant movements.

4

La Violencia, 1946–57

> La violencia is unchained, ordered, and stimulated beyond risk, by remote control. The violence most typical of our political struggles is that which atrociously produces humble victims in the countryside, towns, and city slums . . . But the fuel has been given off by urban desks, worked through with coldness, and astutely elaborated in order to produce its fruits of blood.
>
> Alberto Lleras Camargo (1946)

La Violencia (1946–57) was a mix of "official terror, partisan sectarianism, and scorched earth policy" that resulted from the crisis of the coffee republic, the weakness of the central state, and the contest over property rights. It was distinguished by the "concentrated terror" used to suppress radical-popular politics and confine rising racial/ethnic and class conflict within bipartisan channels.[84] Long a staple of politics in regions and municipalities, violence was first unleashed on the national level against *gaitanista* insurrections, which broke out in the capital and in provincial cities and towns across the country after Gaitán was assassinated in 1948. Appreciation of the threat that the *juntas gaitanistas* posed to central government authority – as well as racial hierarchies and property rights – allows us to register the magnitude of reversal suffered by nascent national-popular forces. *La Violencia* began in the coffee zones of Santander and Boyacá, and was centered in the coffee heartland of northern Valle del Cauca, Viejo Caldas, and Tolima.[85] Mass slaughter took place as it had during the War of a Thousand Days, but the bloodletting lasted longer. Some 300,000 people, 80 per cent men, most of them illiterate peasants, had been killed, and 2 million forcibly displaced, when it officially ended in 1964.[86] It cannot be understood

without recognizing the dependent incorporation of the majority of coffee-growers into the clientelist apparatus of each party in smallholding areas of Boyacá, the Santanders, Antioquia, and along the coffee axis.[87]

Colombian participation in the cold war was international, but also domestic: President Laureano Gómez sent Batallón Korea to fight with the US 31st Infantry in 1951, and in 1952, the first group of Colombians trained at the Army Ranger School in Fort Benning, Georgia. Three years later, under General Rojas Pinilla, the US government sponsored chemical warfare – in the form of Colombian-made napalm bombs – against communist "independent republics" in the south. In coordination with US advisors, Colombian veterans of the Korean War led the campaign. It was to be the first of many counter-insurgent failures.

I The *Bogotazo* as Failed Revolution

Amidst growing sectarian conflict and partisan polarization, in April 1948 President Mariano Ospina Pérez hosted the Ninth Pan-American Congress in Bogotá. Along with Latin American presidents and diplomats, US Secretary of State George C. Marshall attended in order to clarify the role of the USA in the postwar period. Though strengthening regional alliances and establishing the OAS was the ostensible purpose of Secretary Marshall's visit, Washington's chief priority was to maintain its long-standing power and influence in the face of a perceived Soviet "threat." Colombian rulers were eager to be seen as important regional players in world events, and militant anti-communism dovetailed with older creole attitudes toward radical-popular mobilization. This was the combustible setting in which Gaitán was killed.

While attending a conference of anti-imperialist student leaders, Fidel Castro met Gaitán briefly in Bogotá, and the two planned to meet again the following afternoon, 9 April, but Gaitán was assassinated on his way to lunch. News of his murder unleashed the largest urban riots in twentieth-century Colombian history, the so-called *Bogotazo* – a sociopolitical storm that swept the provinces as well as the capital. In the capital, after nearly overwhelming a weakly guarded Presidential Palace, huge crowds from peripheral neighborhoods gathered in the city center. Food rioters against hunger and speculation attacked businesses, especially ones owned by merchants of Middle Eastern origin, and perceived as "foreign." As looting

ensued, rioters directly appropriated food, clothing, consumer goods, tools, and hardware. Arsonists torched Church and government buildings, as well as Gómez's newspaper, *El Siglo*. *Gaitanista* professionals and radicalized students from the National University seized radio airwaves, calling for the establishment of revolutionary juntas throughout the country – a reference to the political bodies formed during the wars of independence from Spanish colonialism.

This helped to galvanize the provinces, and after 9 April, radical-popular resistance, organization, and rebellion in areas of recent settlement put the political foundation of the republic in crisis. This was the case in the Magdalena Medio, the valleys of Sinú and San Jorge on the border of Antioquia and Córdoba, as well as northeastern Antioquia, Cali, northern Valle, Cundinamarca, and Tolima. Organized labor established revolutionary juntas in Bogotá, Cali, Remedios, Zaragoza, Puerto Berrío, Barrancabermeja, and dozens of *municipios*.[88] Even though goals were modest, popular mobilization after Gaitán's death was so intense and widespread as to "transform" the "reformist content" of the demands. In terms of power and authority, the world was briefly turned upside down: the persecuted became the powerful, prisoners executed guards, police took the side of the *pueblo gaitanista*, peasants rustled cattle and took over land, and oil workers held the refinery in Barranca. Insurgents spoke of a revolutionary new order backed by popular militias.[89]

Lacking support from the capital, and isolated from one another, the juntas were quickly vanquished, however. Although the *Bogotazo* was an expression of popular rage, it did not lead to a seizure of power, except in the provinces, and then briefly. The populism Gaitán sketched on the left flank of Liberalism was a growing threat to the country's oligarchy, which he named as such. Viewed comparatively, though, it was still relatively weak. The dispersal of the big-city population into at least four regional centers, Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, and Barranquilla, none of which had over half a million inhabitants by 1940, deprived a potential Colombian populism of a critical mass of urban, working-class organization. Gaitán himself noted, in 1943, that less than 5 per cent of the country's workforce was unionized, and though juntas took power around the country, they could not hold it. Secretary Marshall saw the Soviet Union and its tool, "international communism," as the invisible hand directing the *Bogotazo*. Fidel Castro left for Cuba on

10 April, but offered a different interpretation: "No one can claim to have organized what happened on April 9 because what was absent on April 9 was precisely that, organization. This is the key: there was absolutely no organization."[90] Without preparation, leadership, or a program for self-government, *gaitanista* insurrections could not have led to revolution.[91] Yet in light of new studies, the classic view of *La Violencia* as a reaction against the radical thrust of *gaitanismo* is persuasive.[92]

II *La Resistencia* and *La Reconquista*

Instead, partisan conflict spread across the coffee axis, following the precedent set in Boyacá and the Santanders, beginning in 1945. Liberal notables in coffee districts of Quindío and Tolima, fearing Conservative revenge for the upheaval – which materialized in a wave of local assassinations – mobilized peasant clients into guerrilla militias, hoping for an outcome different from the War of a Thousand Days. Unlike nineteenth-century military conflicts, dominated by oligarchic leaders, during *la Violencia* Liberal commanders were peasants, with *noms de guerre* like "Sangrenegra" (Blackblood) and "Capitán Desquite" (Captain Vengeance).

The goal of these Liberal-communist guerrillas was to overthrow Conservative government, not establish a new society. Yet this resistance further ignited the counterrevolution in the countryside. "Order" was restored in the capital when troops and volunteers came from nearby Conservative Boyacá to reinforce the Army, which remained loyal to Conservatives. The volunteers, known as *chulavitas*, were at first used locally in Chulavita County in Boyacá, where Liberal violence had been widespread in the 1930s: but in 1949, Liberal presidential candidate, Darío Echandía, was assassinated in Bogotá. Thus Conservatives used *chulavitas* in Boyacá and the capital during and after the *Bogotazo*, and, later, in the coffee axis further south: Tolima, Valle del Cauca, and Viejo Caldas (Caldas, Risaralda, Quindío). *Chulavitas* were devoted to the Virgin of Carmen, as theirs was a "holy war" to rid the countryside of atheists, masons, and communists – in a word, Liberals.[93]

Backed by the clergy, in Antioquia, Gómez's Catholic legions mobilized to "conservatize" municipalities before upcoming elections; in Nariño they did the same. Those from Nariño, in turn, were recruited to

help conservatize northern Valle, where Conservative advance was total. Liberal communities defected en masse in self-preservation once Conservative "civil police" replaced Liberal police in 1947–48, and were then organized into a professional force of political assassins in 1949–50.

When war broke out after Gaitán's death, the PSD – already outlawed by Ospina – focused on clandestine work in the countryside, advocating armed self-defense.[94] In 1949 its first groups formed along the railway line in Santander, in the oil enclaves of Shell, Socony, and Tropical Oil in Northern Santander and Ariari; and, most importantly, given the subsequent course of events, in Tolima and Cundinamarca, where the PCC and UNIR's peasant leagues had been strongest in the 1930s. At the end of the year, Liberal chieftains, backed by the departmental governor, as well as leading merchant-landlords, approached the party for help in setting up guerrillas. By 1950, with official sectarianism operating at a feverish pitch, *gaitanistas* formed a guerrilla front with PSD fighters in southern Tolima. The force was led by the Loayza clan, one of whose members, Pedro Antonio Marín, a.k.a. Manuel Marulanda, or "Tirofijo" (Sure Shot), leads the FARC today.[95]

The response to 9 April and the revolutionary juntas was barbarous reprisal: Conservatives cut out the tongues and eyes of at least forty Liberals, and disemboweled others in San Rafael in Valle del Cauca, for example. *Gaitanista* county seats – there had been many in Valle in 1948 – were subject to "little jobs" (*trabajitos*), or selective assassinations, carried out by *los pájaros*. These were birdlike killers working for Conservatives, who circulated in black cars without plates, and "flew back" to daily life in the towns as devout Catholic butchers, drivers, bartenders, tailors, laundrymen, or police inspectors. Their leader, León María Lozano, "El Cóndor," began his participation in *la Violencia* with the defense of a chapel – where he had erected a shrine to the Virgen María Auxiliadora – against *gaitanistas* in Cali. He would soon run the largest, most well-protected gang of Conservative Catholic gunmen in northern Valle. He brought in professionals from Boyacá, Antioquia, Santander, Tolima, or Quindío, but recruited others from hamlets and *municipios* around Tuluá.

When he was a colonel in charge of the Third Brigade in Valle, Gustavo Rojas Pinilla appeared with El Cóndor in a photograph. Rojas Pinilla and the Conservative governor planned the suppression of the *gaitanista* revolt that had taken over Cali's Palacio de San Francisco. This

was an important step in Rojas's political ascent, which he secured by putting down *juntas revolucionarias* throughout the department. Thereafter, Lozano and the *pájaros*, working with secret police, terrorized the region. Under *laureanista* Governor Nicolás Borrero Olano, owner of the right-wing daily, *Diario del Pacífico*, Rojas Pinilla's declaration of "neutrality" in the face of spreading *pájaro* violence allowed free circulation of anonymous killers hired to murder Liberals. Military "neutrality" was essential to the success of the "little jobs," or assassinations, in which the new Conservative police participated in gangs of three or four, with *pájaros*. Coffee and cattle merchants, as well as medium-sized landowners, rose in their shadow.[96]

El Cóndor was only the most legendary of those in the business of political assassinations; he had counterparts in Viejo Caldas and Tolima. As in Viejo Caldas, the business of *la Violencia* in northern Valle and Tolima created avenues for upward mobility for middle sectors. The networks of patronage and protection in which the *pájaros* moved were run by politicians who filled important legislative, diplomatic, and ministerial posts after *la Violencia* ended.[97]

The more "the partisan content of oppositions was emphasized, the more these were stripped of their political potential," which led to the "disaggregation, disorganization, and disarticulation" of radical-popular forces.[98] In vain, the Liberal oligarchy, at the suggestion of López Pumarejo and the insistence of Carlos Lleras Restrepo, tried to recuperate the broken bipartisan consensus. In Bogotá, the Liberal newspaper, *El Tiempo*, as well as the houses of Lleras Restrepo and López Pumarejo, were torched by Conservatives in 1949, demonstrating the impossibility of slowing the momentum of Conservative extremism.[99] In coffee smallholding zones, the aim was not to achieve victory on the battlefield, but to expel the enemy from the region. Conquest of territory – the accumulation of land, livestock, and coffee – was the goal, and killing obeyed a sinister calculus of pain and cruelty. Pregnant women were disemboweled and fetuses destroyed, so new members of the opposite party would not be born.

In Tolima, different cuts were used to send messages. In the "necktie cut," the victim's tongue was pulled down through an opening in the throat; in the "florists' cut," severed limbs were inserted in the neck after decapitation; in the "monkey's cut," the victim's head was placed on his or her chest.[100] Mutilation of ears, fingers, penises, and breasts were

common, as were rapes. Tens of thousands were disemboweled and thrown into rivers like the Cauca, which was said to have run red with blood. Arson was another common tool of terror, and millions of peasants either watched their houses and crops burn or left them behind.

In Antioquia, where bipartisan consensus was a well-established elite tradition, levels of violence were lower than in the coffee regions of Valle del Cauca, Viejo Caldas, and Tolima. Political radicalism, internal colonialism, and the location of natural resources largely determined when and where state-sanctioned terror escalated without limits. During the second phase (1950–53) of *la Violencia*, those who lived on regional peripheries differed from accepted cultural norms of whiteness in the Antioquian heartland. They suffered the consequences of army and police violence – or, in the east and Urabá, privatized landlord violence – to a degree unknown during the first phase (1945–49), which had been centered in southern and southwestern coffee municipalities like Fredonia. There, conflict was kept within strict, bipartisan limits, designed to "conservatize" Liberal municipalities located in Conservative areas. Middle-class politicians, journalists, and intellectuals helped polarize politics along bipartisan lines.

In the second phase, Laureano Gómez, elected president in 1950, was determined to prevent a repetition of the *Bogotazo* and its provincial variants. Once *laureanistas* took over, violence in Antioquia was concentrated in geographically peripheral, but economically strategic regions, where Afro-Colombian majorities – organized in the 1940s as *gaitanista* railroad workers, miners, and road workers – supported radical opposition politics and armed insurgency. There, the central and regional state's institutional presence was limited to the police and armed forces. Where these proved ineffective, as in Urabá and the east (the Lower Cauca, Magdalena Medio, and the northeast), power was transferred to the *contrachusma* – parastate forces that, set in motion, proved even more difficult for Conservative elites to manage than police and the armed forces.

Gómez withdrew due to poor health soon after his term began, and Roberto Urdaneta Arbeláez became the titular head of government in October 1951, as *la Violencia* took on a greater intensity, appeared in new forms, and affected new regions. Gómez was the first president whose national program sanctioned the most reactionary developments in the regions. The peasantry suffered the brunt of state violence: recently

returned from Korea, for example, Batallón Colombia massacred 1,500 peasants in a rural area outside El Líbano, Tolima, in 1952.

Clientelist co-optation of smallholding petty producers through civil war in the coffee axis could not put a stop to independent class politics altogether, but it did shift their geography toward more recently settled frontiers. The eastern plains, for example, evolved toward an embryonic agrarian revolutionary society in 1952–53. Law 1 was issued in September 1952, after a meeting of delegates from the country's guerrilla organizations in "Red Viotá" (Cundinamarca) in August, which then became the First National Conference of the Popular Movement of National Liberation. It organized a rudimentary justice system under self-designated civilian and military authorities, stipulating rules for land use, as well as individual rights and obligations regarding community labor. It set up guidelines for the establishment of dairy farms and "revolutionary" agrarian settlements, and regulated the cattle market – the economic lifeblood of the eastern plains. As efforts to establish a national guerrilla coordination advanced, Law 2 of the Eastern Plains, written by José Alvear Restrepo, regulated life in the vast liberated zones, and sketched designs for revolution and a popular government.[100]

The law established a government of popular assemblies and district councils in charge of planning production, consumption, and distribution. It laid down rules regarding the relations between combatants and civilians, expressly prohibiting torture and the scorched-earth policies that marked *la Violencia*, and mandating civilized behavior toward Conservatives. Communist enclaves were the only territories where life was *not* regulated by terror. Law 2 also addressed civil marriage, divorce, women's equality, and indigenous rights. Laws 1 and 2 of the Eastern Plains represented "the most complete democratic project proposed by the armed movement."[102]

III Cold War Dictatorship

When Gómez attempted to resume his duties in 1953, he was ousted by Colombia's only military coup of modern times, in part because the Conservatives had split between extremists and moderates. The latter abhorred the parastate *contrachusma* and its variants, as well as the generalized persecution and criminalization of upstanding Liberal citizens. General Rojas Pinilla, now head of the Army, seized power with the

support of Gómez's factional opponents within the Conservative Party, with which he had close family and personal connections. He set about molding organized labor into a clientelist bloc. His anti-oligarchic, nationalist discourse has led some scholars to see him as a figure similar to Argentina's Juan Perón. But Rojas Pinilla participated in the Conservative bloodletting as a commander – even the US Embassy complained that he "saw a red behind every coffee bush" – and, as president, amassed a fortune in crooked cattle and real-estate deals.[103] He also personally intervened to free El Cóndor, leader of the *pájaros*, from jail in Buga.

With heavier and more decentralized repression, rural violence was far from extinguished under Rojas Pinilla. Beginning with Gómez, violence had become part of central government policy. No longer exclusively regional, it had become a national terror that increased rather than decreased after the "guerrilla threat" was absent. The foundations of the cold war national security state were erected earlier in Colombia than anywhere else in Latin America, since they meshed with creole traditions of partisan sectarianism.

Under Gómez, partisan sectarianism had begun to open the fault lines of the bipartisan system itself, however; and, to the delight of Liberals, Rojas Pinilla made "reconciliation" between the two parties his first priority. Toward that end, his most significant act as president was to declare a general amnesty for Liberal guerrillas. The first demobilization, backed by merchants, landlords, and political bosses, took place in central Tolima. It was widely publicized as a means of enticing guerrilla chiefs in northern and southern Tolima to follow, which they did. Commanders like Rafael Rangel, who operated in the Magdalena Medio, and Captain Franco Yepes in Antioquia, were not far behind. After five years of fighting, the strongest Liberal guerrillas, a force of some 10,000 on the eastern plains, turned over their arms, under the leadership of Guadelupe Salcedo.

The movement of armed Left resistance fragmented in response to Rojas Pinilla's offer, and after guerrillas from the eastern plains demobilized, wind was taken from revolutionary sails. Under intensified military pressure, some communist militias demobilized. In southern Tolima, a zone characterized by decentralized leadership, a micro-war unfolded between former allies, as Liberals – now reintegrated into the party apparatus – succeeded in expelling the communists from much of the region.

Those who had displayed an "exaggerated support or adhesion" to the Gómez regime were amnestied in June 1954. To stamp out one of the remaining communist redoubts, though, Rojas Pinilla unleashed the War of Villarica in 1955. Batallón Colombia, the veterans of Korea, targeted a highland municipality of northern Tolima that had been home to peasant unions and the Communists' Democratic Front for National Liberation. Rojas Pinilla ordered a blitz of 5,000 troops, with US-donated F-47s and B-26 bombers, and a torture center, known as "the Cunday Concentration Camp," was established. Napalm was sprayed on the "target area," as in Korea, and it was occupied by government forces. An estimated 100,000 peasants were displaced. Half the communist guerrillas fled to Sumapaz, across the border in Cundinamarca. Another column, with 100 armed men and 200 families, made the legendary "long march" over the eastern cordillera into the lowlands, to found the settlements of El Guayabero in western Meta and El Pato in north-western Caquetá, as trade union or peasant leaders in the mountains became military commanders in new colonies on the frontier.[104]

Overall, *la Violencia* was a huge historical regression, in which partisan hostilities swamped not only the legacy of Gaitán's populism, but also the chance of mass-based independent class politics beyond it.[105] It spawned new modes of terror. In the nineteenth century, terms of military engagement were agreed upon, but during *la Violencia*, neither rules nor limits obtained – elderly men, women, and children were frequently targeted.[106] Although its geography largely coincided with the coffee frontiers settled in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – as the case of Antioquia demonstrates – *la Violencia* was about more than a generalized escalation of bipartisan competition and conflict over patronage, votes, land, labor power, and commodities.[107] In Antioquia, internal colonialism and the racialization of regional peripheries through terror and expropriation were crucial in beating back the tide of *gaitanismo*.

Though *la Violencia* received a decisive push nationally with the election of Laureano Gómez as president in 1950, it was orchestrated and controlled at the subnational levels. Regional guerrilla movements, some of which left offshoots that grew into durable communist insurgencies during the cold war, formed in alliance with the Liberal Party throughout the country. Conservative parastate forces took over many county seats and village hamlets. Through "the agrarian question," the Liberal Party

had made important inroads in rural districts in the 1930s and 1940s, challenging Conservative dominance of the countryside for the first time since the 1870s.[107] Like the Regeneration seventy years before it, Gómez's *reconquista* aimed to return Colombian society to an idealized internal colonial totality in which subalterns knew their places.

It was during *la Violencia* that the precedent for the bloody resolution of the agrarian question, through terror, expropriation, and dispossession, was established. Forms of cruelty that became widespread in late twentieth-century Colombia were institutionalized in Latin America's most regressive historical development at mid-century. They persisted as part of the cold war counterinsurgent repertoire, helping prepare the ground for endemic Left insurgency.

5

The National Front: Political Lockout, 1957–82

> Is there no way that Colombia, instead of killing its sons, can make them dignified to live? If Colombia cannot respond to this question, I prophecy a curse: "Desquite" will come back to life, and the earth will be spilled with blood, pain, and tears.
>
> Gonzalo Arango (1966)

National Front agreements signed in 1958 rebuilt the coffee republic on an axis that revolved around the Liberal Party, with vanquished Conservatives given half the spoils, and radical-popular expressions banned. Forgetting was the "central leitmotif" of the period, and the effect was to "kill the memory" of *la Violencia*.[109] The historical profession contributed to this state of affairs with its "private commitment to create collective amnesia."[110] Growth without equity reigned, patterns of inequality were maintained or deepened, and clientelism was recreated.[111] When US-sponsored, right-wing military dictatorships swept Latin America during the 1960s and 1970s, Colombia was held up as a showpiece of democracy in the struggle for the "free world." In contrast to Venezuela, whose political system was also praised during the cold war, the Colombian state succeeded neither in neutralizing nor defeating its guerrilla insurgencies, intact since the 1960s. In part, their longevity is due to the exclusion of popular – particularly peasant – demands from the mainstream political system.

I Counterinsurgency

When Rojas Pinilla made clear his intention of staying in power indefinitely, cracking down on opponents and simulating populist

gestures for urban consumption, the oligarchy, which had always prized civilian rule, closed ranks. They were especially threatened by his attempt to control patronage and build independent clientelist bases. By early 1957, not only both political parties, but industrialists, coffee exporters, and the Church wanted him out; a business-organized shutdown toppled him. Two months later, Gómez – exiled in Franco's Spain – signed the Pact of Sitges with Alberto Lleras Camargo.

This formally committed Conservatives and Liberals to create a National Front that would share power equally between the two parties, with alternating occupation of the presidency and parity of representation at all levels of government. Supported by business leaders, the Church and party elites, the pact was scheduled to last until 1974; in practice, it endured, with minor modifications, until 1990. The Church, abandoning its exclusive affiliation with the Conservative Party, sought to unify the two formations.[112]

Hopes for unity among the nation's armed peasant groups across the eastern cordillera died when Guadelupe Salcedo was assassinated in Bogotá in 1957, and though Laureano Gómez did not last as president, he returned, politically triumphant, in 1958 to preside over the Senate, where he put Rojas Pinilla on trial. Since anti-communism was a pillar of the world view he expressed as a political columnist, Conservative Party leader, and president, his paranoid obsessions with "masons" and "atheists" were now tolerated. Like Rojas Pinilla, Gómez helped to institutionalize impunity for government-sanctioned political violence. He was thus the true victor in the contests of *la Violencia*. The 1950s were like a nightmarish return to the nineteenth century, but Gómez and his followers were very much of the twentieth.[113] Theirs was a merciless, enforced forgetting, based on historical myth and fantasies of total dominance.

The traditional two-party system had stunted and twisted the expression of political oppositions, but could not repress them altogether. In the 1930s and 1940s, in a replay of the nineteenth-century period of Liberal hegemony (1862–75), an incipient left-populist dynamic developed, and Conservatism was reinforced by a flamboyant defense of private property, the family, and the altar. In their way, each of these had escaped elite control, unleashing a sectarian conflict worse than the War of a Thousand Days, which eventually came to threaten the diarchy itself. The National Front restored the two-party system, now drained of

any real tension between its components. In cold war conditions in Colombia, the New Deal had been buried, and the Cruzada Nacionalista was melded with a shared referent, anti-communism, that was sufficient unifying cement for the two parties.

The result was to proscribe political expression of radical and reformist demands, as the state became a machinery of common elite interests that apportioned all government offices and posts to Liberals and Conservatives in advance. Coffee exports provided the basis of state budgets and subsidized a protected domestic industry. As early as 1941, the private organization of the coffee growers, FEDECAFE, began to direct the National Coffee Fund without public oversight, and this arrangement continued through the 1970s. In spite of the interventionist regulatory mechanisms introduced by López Pumarejo in the 1930s and 1940s, the Liberal state became an executive committee of the bourgeoisie, but one that had no hegemonic fraction and no national project.[114]

Regional and local political power remained more important than central government authority in most places, and though it had been officially forgotten, "the Violence . . . formed the substance of rural and small-town life" through the early National Front.[115] The effects were particularly evidenced by the proliferation of banditry: Conservatives, like Efraín González, led gangs of young men who roamed the central and western cordilleras attempting to avenge the deaths of loved ones through atrocity. Just as Liberal guerrillas and Conservative *contrachusma* had never confronted one another during the second phase of *la Violencia* in Antioquia (1950–53), the same was true of González and Capitán Desquite, the bandit captain hired by Liberal coffee hacienda owners in Quindío to stop Efraín González – the one whom Antioquian writer Gonzalo Arango mentions in the epigraph. The *bandoleros* and *cuadrillas* moved back and forth, from the western to the central cordillera, between Quindío and Tolima. With several exceptions, bandits in the coffee axis did not last under National Front arrangements. The Colombian Armed Forces, led by the army's Batallón Colombia, which was supported by US military advisors, training, and funding, eliminated them.[116]

Radical-popular movements under the National Front were criminalized by state-of-siege legislation that equated protest with subversion. Quasi-official opposition forces, such as the Revolutionary Liberal Movement (MRL), led by Alfonso López Michelsen, had support in

the countryside, and the Alianza Nacional Popular (ANAPO), led by Rojas Pinilla after his return from exile, had a growing base in the cities. Both had to run candidates on Liberal or Conservative slates. The MRL brought together Marxist intellectuals, radical writers, students, excluded public sector workers, and modernizing bureaucrats with peasants. ANAPO, in which the Conservative bandit Efraín González participated actively until his death in 1965, was classic right-wing populism: anti-imperialism combined with attacks on birth control and, later, support for Pablo VI's Papal Encyclical of 1968. Banned from elections, communists fell into line behind the Liberal Party, which constituted the "spinal column" of National Front politics, as the pattern established under López was institutionalized.[117]

Low electoral participation rates were an invariant feature of the National Front. If Colombia was spared the experience of the military dictatorships that decimated middle-class, labor, and peasant radicalism elsewhere in Latin America during the 1960s and 1970s, it is because the National Front was a semi-authoritarian parliamentary dictatorship. Though labor militancy increased in the mid-1960s, in a rapidly deteriorating economic situation caused by falling coffee prices, the labor movement remained fragmented and weak after *la Violencia*. With the closure of political space in the civilian arena blocking the re-emergence of vibrant urban populism centered on the trade unions, one avenue for social protest seemed available.

In the 1960s and 1970s, just as the country's majority went from being rural to urban, the vehicle of choice for opposition forces became rural insurgency. This was rooted in the long prehistory of the peasant struggles and land occupations along the coffee frontier, and their engulfing by the larger turbulence of *la Violencia*, which lingered as banditry through the early years of the National Front. But there were also still enclaves of communist resistance. In 1961, Laureano Gómez's son, Álvaro, at that time a senator, coined the term "independent republics" to refer to sixteen areas over which the central government did not exercise territorial sovereignty. Under the Liberal presidency of Lleras Camargo – who crushed the 1945 river-workers' strike and was handpicked by Laureano Gómez as the National Front candidate in 1958 – these "red zones" were surrounded by a military cordon that effectively isolated them from the outside world.

Once the Cuban Revolution put Washington into high gear, there was

a new urgency to eradicate guerrilla forces in Colombia. During the Alliance for Progress, anti-communist counterinsurgency moved into its second phase, as the mission of Latin American militaries changed from "hemispheric defense" to "national security."[118] The "external threat" from the Soviet Union was to be handled by the USA, as demonstrated in the Cuban missile crisis; while the "internal threat" of communist subversion would be managed by the police and armed forces of a given country. An early veteran of Vietnam, Colonel William Yarborough, headed the Special Warfare Center at Fort Bragg, and led a military mission to Colombia in 1962, and complained of its lack of preparation and professionalism, recommending the organization of local death squads accountable only to the US government.[119]

A territorially fragmented counterinsurgency confronted agrarian reform when President Lleras Camargo founded a government bureaucracy, Incora, in 1961, to be run by the president's cousin, Senator Carlos Lleras Restrepo, who formed a corps of young economists, many of them US-educated. Their power within the state was still nascent, and confined to Incora. But their vision of progress entailed the elimination of the large estate, seen as backward and unproductive, and the conversion of "serfs" into a yeoman citizenry.[120] The reform process continued under Guillermo Valencia, a poet from the former colonial slaveholding city, Popayán, but Valencia sympathized with General Franco and the Spanish Falange, and one of his principal campaign promises was to eliminate "independent republics." After steady industrial and commercial growth through the 1950s, in 1962, economic crisis, due to falling coffee prices, led to the lowest rates of industrial growth since the early 1930s, and after 1964 urban unemployment became widespread. Future fractures in the National Front were thereby guaranteed.

Plan Lazo, a "hearts-and-minds" counterinsurgent strategy that had at its core a military-civilian force and specialized units, designed to hunt and kill alleged communist supporters, determined that civilians would be either collaborators or targets.[121] As General Alberto Ruíz Novoa explained at the Conference of American Armed Forces in the Panama Canal Zone in 1963, the only way to defeat the insurgencies was by mobilizing and militarizing rural communities through "civic-military action."[122] Ruíz Novoa had been the commander of Batallón Colombia in Korea, and fought the Chinese People's Liberation Army with the Polar Bears of the US Army's 31st Infantry.

Ruíz was convinced that, in order to defeat Colombian peasant guerrillas, it would be necessary to drain the sea in which they swam. To do so, the state would have to invest in regions of communist influence, as well as enlist civilian collaboration with the armed forces. General Ruíz thought of these "peasant self-defense" forces as an elite group, trained to coordinate with the army, particularly in intelligence work – similar to what Colonel Yarborough recommended, but answerable to Colombian authority. Ruíz's plan, known as Plan Lazo, would isolate the guerrillas from their potential support base by improving infrastructure, health, and education.[123]

II Insurgency

National Front counterinsurgency operations unleashed a wave of armed migrations, from the central highlands to the southern jungles and eastern plains. In late May 1964, Plan Lazo failed dramatically when, in coordination with its US allies, the Colombian Armed Forces launched "Operación Marquetalia" (Operation Sovereignty), to retake the municipality of Marquetalia, a communist hamlet in the extreme south of Tolima, on the border of Cauca and Huila. Another Korean veteran, Lieutenant Colonel José Joaquín Matallana, led an assault that featured the use of Huey helicopters, T-33 combat planes, seven army battalions, two specialized counterinsurgent companies, and intelligence groups (GIL), designed to wipe out the community and its now legendary leader, Tirofijo. Here, and in other coordinated military attacks, territory was captured, but only briefly; "the enemy" remained at large. After Marquetalia, families forced to flee once more found their way either to the Cauca or into the tropical lowlands of Caquetá and Meta. Unable to settle in their villages, fighters formed a guerrilla column.

Both Matallana and Tirofijo agreed that Marquetalia forced agrarian communists to cease being a sedentary self-defense militia and become a mobile force.[124] US advisors had supervised "Operation Sovereignty" at a nearby military base, but soon after it was launched, comandantes from Marquetalia, Río Chiquito, and El Pato came together, as the Bloque Sur, to issue a new agrarian program. This "people's response to violence and militarist aggression" was later to be commemorated as the birth of the FARC, officially named in 1966. According to their historian, through the 1970s, the FARC functioned as a "regional structure of social warfare, of individual and collective survival," and developed in "a setting for the building of real local power."[125] The secret of the FARC's early success was the subordination of insurgent organizational goals to demands and movements of frontier smallholders, tenants, and rural laborers.

This emerges especially clearly in comparison with competitors on the Left, for two other guerrilla forces emerged in these years. The ELN is usually characterized as a middle-class, university-based group that followed Che's theory of the *foco* to the letter. It was convinced that, given the size of Colombia's peasantry, and its recent history of armed popular mobilization during *la Violencia*, a small band of mobile guerrillas – in place of the working class and the peasantry – could trigger an insurrection that would lead to socialist revolution. This was typical of groups that followed Guevara in these years: for them, revolution was an act of consciousness and will, capable of overcoming material and political determinations.

Strategic differences aside, however, the ELN was no less rooted in the history of popular liberalism, communism, and peasant-proletarian struggle than the FARC. The patriarch of the Vásquez clan had participated in the *gaitanista* takeover of the country's oil port, Barrancabermeja, in 1948, and led Liberal militias under Rafael Rangel during *la Violencia*, where he met his death. The Vásquez brothers, Fabio and Manuel, went to Cuba with a small group of scholarship students during the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. On their return, they set up the first ELN *foco* in San Vicente de Chucurí, Santander, where Rangel's guerrillas had been active, as Liberal guerrillas in the War of a Thousand Days had been before them.

The ELN counted on support from sectors from the Oil Workers' Union, USO, following the strike against the newly formed state petroleum company, ECOPETROL, in 1963, as well as elderly peasant squatters who had led the "Bolshevik Uprising" in El Líbano, Tolima, in 1929, and *juntas gaitanistas* in 1948. Some early cadres had fought under Rangel, while Fabio Vásquez started out in the youth wing of the MRL, looking for a way to avenge his father's death. Others, like Manuel Vásquez and Rodrigo Lara, came to the guerrillas via student struggle at the Universidad Industrial in Bucaramanga. The ELN announced its presence with the "takeover of Simacota," a town in Santander, in January 1965, and later that year accepted priest and sociologist Camilo

Torres Restrepo, who was promptly sent to his death in combat in early 1966. This provided liberation theology with its first martyr.[126]

In 1967, the Maoist People's Liberation Army (EPL) was formed out of this matrix of armed agrarian radicalism. One of its founders, Pedro Vázquez Rendón, had been the PSD's political commissar in southern Tolima during *la Violencia* – he suggested that Pedro Antonio Marín call himself Manuel Marulanda, in honor of one of the leaders of the PSR in the 1920s. The PCC-ML (Communist Party-Marxist-Leninist) emerged from the youth wing of the PCC in 1965, following the Sino-Soviet split. With the help of former Liberal guerrilla commander and MRL militant, Julio Guerra, the EPL set up a *foco* in Urabá with the goal of waging prolonged popular war. As Maoists, they believed that in rural "Third World" countries like Colombia, the peasantry, led by a vanguard party, would play the leading role in making socialist revolution.[127]

In spite of the internationalist patina imported from Moscow and Beijing, the unfinished business of *la Violencia* gave rise to all three Left insurgencies. Like much of the rest of small-town and rural Colombian society, *la guerrilla* continued to be marked by the experience of *la Violencia,* decades after it officially ended. Quindío and Risaralda, for example, were coffee regions that had been home to Conservative gunmen and Liberal bandit gangs, as well as the Vásquez family and Tirofijo. Kidnapping, *la vacuna* ("the vaccination," a form of protection rent), and *el boleteo* (the charging of war taxes via threatening letters), first developed in Viejo Caldas and northern Valle. Given new names (*la retención, el impuesto de guerra*), they were incorporated into the repertoire of guerrilla tactics.

Both Fabio Vásquez and Tirofijo saw their fathers murdered by Conservatives, and personal vendettas gave the guerrilla movements continuity with *la Violencia.* So did Ricardo Franco and Eribito Espitia, who had both been with the regional Liberal bandit chieftain, "Chispas," before going their separate ways. Espitia was a founding member of the ELN, and Franco became the commander of the FARC's IV Front in the Middle Magdalena.[128]

In order to ward off what was correctly perceived to be a threat of rising conflict in the countryside, President Carlos Lleras Restrepo (1966–70) – who had been one of Gaitán's staunchest opponents in the Liberal Party, and presided over his funeral – instituted a new agrarian reform program. Lleras also created a peasant organization, the

National Association of Peasant Users (ANUC), to drum up clientelist support for the initiative.[129] It moved in radical directions, far beyond what Lleras Restrepo and the Liberal technocrats had envisioned, especially along the Atlantic coast, where *latifundismo* was most extensive.[130] Under Valencia's Decree 3398, in 1965, and Law 48, passed by Congress in 1968, however, regionally based landlords organized death squads on the model of *los pájaros,* and targeted the student and labor Left for selective assassination in the cities.[131] This continuity was matched by a similar continuity in the counterinsurgency, whose vision of total war on civilians was refined and systematized in the cold war.

III . Counter-reform, Repression, Resurrection

The ideological audacity and relative popular legitimacy of the guerrilla groups should not lead us to exaggerate their size, nor to overlook the rapid demographic shift from country to city in these years. By the mid-1970s, the EPL was practically non-existent; Fabio Vásquez spent the early years purging the ELN's meager ranks, and the *foquistas* were nearly eliminated by an onslaught of 30,000 troops at Anorí, Antioquia in 1973. The FARC were still confined mainly to the lowland regions southeast of Bogotá, which they had helped to colonize. In the cities, meanwhile, where two-thirds of Colombians now lived, though secondary education and health care expanded, unemployment rose sharply during the 1960s. Protectionist industrial policies failed to generate jobs, so the working and lower-middle class saw hopes of social mobility dashed. In 1969 ANAPO won majorities in municipal councils and departmental assemblies.

Deterioration of the edifice of the National Front was clearly visible. In 1970 Rojas Pinilla, running as a Conservative on an anti-National Front platform, mobilized an anti-oligarchic discourse reminiscent of Gaitán's – supplemented by a reactionary defense of a Catholic tradition that was gradually losing ground to mass-media influence – to win an estimated 39 per cent of the vote, mainly from the lower-middle and working class. The National Front resorted to thinly disguised last-minute fraud to deny him victory and impose its own candidate, Conservative Misael Pastrana.

Once in office, Pastrana sponsored public works and urban remodeling in an attempt to generate employment and the appearance of reform,

but he also supported a process of counter-reform in the countryside. Cattle ranchers (FEDEGAN), agribusiness and landlords (SAC), as well as industrialists (ANDI), were united in their determination to roll back reforms initiated under Lleras Restrepo – or, as in Urabá, to turn them to their advantage, just as landlords had done with Law 200 in 1936. The reaction was a response to ANUC land takeovers that swept Boyacá, Tolima, Huila, Valle del Cauca, the Magdalena Medio, the eastern plains, and the Atlantic coast. In 1971, in Toribio, Cauca, the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca was formed to craft local development proposals based on recuperation of community reserves (*resguardos*) that had been incorporated into large, privately held estates. While defining their goal as the attainment of indigenous autonomy, members of CRIC self-consciously built on the struggles of Quintín Lame and the PCC. They therefore focused on land as the basis of collective life and culture, local self-government through *cabildos*, and the formation of broad, national-popular alliances with intellectuals, workers, and especially non-indigenous peasants, in order to overcome regional, ethnic, and class barriers to unity.[132] On the border of Urabá, in areas of extensive cattle ranching in the Sinú Valley in Córdoba, where *gaitanista* resistance had been strong in 1948, and in neighboring Sucre, ANUC led a third of all marches and land takeovers undertaken nationwide between 1970 and 1973. The area along the Atlantic coast was thus the hotbed of agrarian struggle in this period. Frustrated with the limits of reform under Lleras, ANUC had the firm backing of Left parties, a vigorous university movement protesting the privatization of public education, and insurgencies attempting to channel the movement toward sectarian ends.

In January 1972, Pastrana brought together leaders of both parties, as well as the key *gremios*, to forge the "pact" of Chicoral. In exchange for paying taxes, landowners were promised easy credit, generous loans, and even more limited land distribution. They were also given a free hand to organize violence against peasant and Leftist leaders, coordinating their efforts with the armed forces. In 1971, ten years after Lleras Restrepo had initiated agrarian reform with Law 135, and five years after he had implemented it as president, roughly 1 per cent of lands that fell under the reform's purview had been expropriated. Landlords with regional power bases formed a solid wall of opposition. Like those of the 1930s, experiments with progressive legislation in the 1960s demonstrated that reform-minded fractions of the elite lacked the capacity to achieve hegemony within the Colombian ruling class. Regional power, based on commerce and landed wealth, stood in the way.

President López Michelsen (1974–78), son of López Pumarejo, had been an intellectual and important political player in his own right for decades, and as founder and leader of the MRL, he had been a fiery rebel against his party during the National Front. Technically, he was the last to serve under the National Front. Through popular caciques like Alfonso Barberena, a leader of squatter settlements in Cali, he courted the urban constituency that had supported Rojas Pinilla. López outlined two Colombias: the first, connected to coffee and manufacturing, included Antioquia, the western Andean departments (Valle, Caldas, Risaralda, Quindío), and the Caribbean port of Barranquilla; it received the bulk of government investment in infrastructure and government services. The 5 per cent of the population that owned more than half the land received half of the national income, and they lived in and governed from the first Colombia. The second, said to cover 70 per cent of national territory, was where blacks, Indians, and frontier settlers lived – the southern and eastern plains and lowlands, and the Pacific and Atlantic coasts. These regions received little investment and had virtually no state presence, electricity, public services, or even minimal infrastructure.

Though coffee prices temporarily reached new highs in the mid-1970s, inflating state budgets, debt service requirements, the near-collapse of traditional industries and elite opposition ensured that López Michelsen's promises of reform and national integration remained unfulfilled. Although López announced his aim of converting Colombia into the "Japan of South America," he was the first president of the National Front to propose neoliberal measures: with Pinochet's Chile as a model, López called for market liberalization, privatization of state enterprises, and fiscal decentralization.[133] Rising entrepreneurs in the marijuana and cocaine businesses helped the change in direction by laundering money legally through the Banco de la República.

General Álvaro Valencia Tovar fought in Korea, at Marquetalia, and Anorí; a follower of Ruíz, he was appointed head of the armed forces under López Michelsen. Like his mentor, he stressed the need for social investment in education, health care, infrastructure, and credit, in areas where communist support predominated.[134] General Luis Camacho

Leyva, a lawyer who saw radical ideas as a cancer in need of extirpation, soon replaced Valencia; this was to be the end of "social investment" as a component of cold war counterinsurgency. Camacho proposed modifying the 1886 Constitution in order to pass a law regarding "thought crimes" (*delitos de opinión*), specifically targeting Left academics and party-affiliated intellectuals. Convinced that most of Colombia's trade unions and universities, as well as community, neighborhood, and peasant organizations were infected by communist propaganda, he publicly accused García Márquez of having guerrilla ties. By 1974, however, ANUC, the main radical opposition movement, had been repressed, co-opted, and rent by Left sectarianism, and the other movements were hardly poised to forge a nationwide coalition for radical change. To the extent that they had survived the first phase (1964–74) at all, rural insurgencies were dormant.

Simmering urban discontent, however, took dramatic form in 1974, when a new group, M-19 – named after the day, 19 April, when the election had been stolen from Rojas Pinilla – announced its appearance by stealing Bolívar's sword from the historical museum in central Bogotá. Composed of middle-class *anapistas* as well as young FARC and PCC dissidents, from the outset, M-19 had a keen sense of how best to exploit the communications media to cultivate the same aura of romantic bravado that had surrounded the urban guerrillas of the Southern Cone, some of whose veterans swelled M-19 ranks. An explicitly national-popular movement, with electoral ambitions in the tradition of Gaitán, M-19's goal was not the overthrow of capitalism or the Colombian state, but the opening up of the existing political system to electoral competition; in this, M-19 was similar to Castro's M-26 movement in pre-revolutionary Cuba.[135] It generated broad though diffuse support among the working and middle classes that had voted for Rojas Pinilla and López Michelsen, and proved far more "popular" than either the FARC or the ELN.

The mid-1970s saw the spread of protests over public services, led by the working class on the urban peripheries, mobilizing through neighborhood associations and cooperatives rather than trade unions. In 1977, the three major trade union confederations staged a *paro cívico*, or civic strike, which General Camacho punished with extreme repression. Thereafter, high unemployment, lower wages, decreased social security and the rise of the "informal sector" – in which more than half the

Colombian proletariat would be toiling by 1985 – further weakened an already divided labor movement.[136]

The crushing of the *paro cívico* set the stage for a widespread crackdown under the next Liberal president, César Turbay Ayala (1978–82). General Camacho was chosen to lead the assault on thousands in the cities targeted as "subversives" by the army, police, intelligence services, and a growing number of paramilitary organizations. Those arrested were tortured, imprisoned, or "disappeared," and death squads like AAA (Anti-Communist Alliance) appeared on the Argentine model.[137] Political violence grew much more intense than it had been during the previous decade, and General Camacho's forces struck particularly hard at M-19. For the first time, counterinsurgent operations affected daily life in the cities, and along with the countries of the Southern Cone, Colombia began to receive attention from the international human rights movement.[138]

The overall climate in the late 1970s and early 1980s, with the urban trade union and civic movements in retreat, and state repression on the rise, was a propitious one for guerrilla growth. There was as yet no discourse of "armed actors of the Left and Right" (as would be pioneered by northern analysts of El Salvador in the 1980s). The brutal repression the Turbay administration meted out, coupled with hopes unleashed by the Nicaraguan revolution and the processes unfolding in El Salvador and Guatemala, gave guerrillas a new lease on life. They argued that Colombia under Turbay was no different from the military juntas of the Southern Cone, while in Nicaragua the Sandinistas had shown that armed struggle was the way to overthrow dictatorship.

Despite the repression directed against it, M-19 initiated its first urban operations in 1978 on General Camacho's watch. The following year, its militants stole 4,000 machine guns from the armory in Bogotá, and, in 1980, occupied the Dominican Embassy with the US envoy inside – operations that were typically flashy and risky, and did not require a broad social base or mobilization.[139] For its part, the EPL dropped Maoism – which had led to innumerable internal splits – in 1980, and made headway in the cattle country of Córdoba and the banana zone of Urabá, which it would later dispute with the FARC.[140]

This latest phase of guerrilla growth, however, took place within a rapidly changing political-economic environment. Restructuring had begun within the fragmented oligarchy during the long stagnation of

industrial manufacturing in the 1960s and 1970s. Important factions shifted their investment away from production, toward speculation and the capture of rents. New enclaves, dominated by foreign capital and the production of a single commodity for export, multiplied – the petroleum regions of Arauca and Northern Santander, the coal sector of the Guajira, bananas in Urabá. This latter shift provided the guerrillas with the material basis for expansion.

The marijuana business, initially organized by Peace Corps veterans and quickly taken over by Colombian smugglers, flowered in the Cauca, Cesar, and Magdalena departments, and La Guajira.[141] Construction and banking soared, as a new layer of outlaw rentier capitalists began to acquire the wealth that would allow them to fund the counterinsurgency and enrich themselves through the war economy.[142] The Conservative base continued to shrink.

While fumigation of marijuana in the Cauca and the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, and the extradition of leading marijuana traffickers to the USA began under Turbay, cocaine had already replaced marijuana as Colombia's most profitable export commodity. By the early 1980s, narcotics mafiosos entered politics, and "drugs" became the pivot of US-Colombian government relations. The coffee sector was at the beginning of the end of its economic predominance, but the Liberal Party was given a boost with the drug trade, which allowed it to survive, while the Conservative Party all but disappeared. Modernizing technocrats in Bogotá saw their already limited power over the departments diminish further, as new political brokers – more corrupt, cynical, and willing to work with the cocaine mafia than some of the traditional caciques – came to dominate regional and local political landscapes. Provincial clientelism was revamped, and the military and police assumed more prominent roles as the upholders of "public order."

It was within this new context that the ELN, reborn after near annihilation at Anorí, began, from the early 1980s, to target multinational export enclaves as part of a new "ABC" strategy, based on an analysis of the country's new pattern of resource extraction. They surfaced in the petroleum regions of Arauca and Northern Santander, the El Cerrejón coal-mining zone of the Guajira, and the gold-mining regions of southern Bolívar and northeastern Antioquia, offering a new model of revolution, taken from Central America rather than Cuba. Building on liberation theology, they joined popular movements and

worked closely with the more radical sectors of the oil workers' union, USO, as petroleum caught up to coffee as Colombia's leading legitimate export. What the FARC had done in its early days, the ELN did once it dropped Che's *foco* theory and got rid of Fabio Vásquez. They built local power by supporting popular movements.

This move came as a response to armed competition from the Left. At their VII National Congress in 1982, the FARC abandoned its defensive strategy, in theory (they had already done so in practice), to project themselves throughout the national territory – a change symbolized by the initials, EP (Army of the People), added to the group's name. The FARC had already expanded from its bases in Caquetá, Meta, and Putumayo, into the Urabá, the Middle Magdalena, and areas of the southeastern plains – Guaviare, Vichada, and Vaupés – which had indigenous majorities. This was the jump-off point from which, feeding on taxes levied from the country's thriving new cocaine industry, the FARC would become a military enterprise dedicated to territorial expansion and control.

During the National Front, Liberal administrations tried and failed to implement agrarian reform and vanquish armed insurgencies in recently colonized regions. In the mid- to late 1970s, a new wave of radical-popular protest by organized labor, students, and colonizers of the urban frontier, along with a new urban guerrilla insurgency, was rolled back with state-sanctioned terror in the shape of death squads. Designed to deal with the Colombian government's incapacity to stop the spread of insurgency, these were structurally similar to those ravishing the societies of Central America and the Southern Cone. Sanctified by the Catholic Church, anti-communism glued the bipartisan system back together.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, intensified repression diminished state authority and created a climate in which Left insurgencies thrived. Their flourishing, in turn, challenged death squads to consolidate themselves as regional paramilitary forces. Political and criminal violence fed into one another, and homicide became the leading cause of death among males, especially in the urban frontier zones. A major economic shift toward rent, speculation in land and urban real estate, and cocaine exports heralded the death of the coffee republic. By moving the productive base away from manufacturing and coffee exports, toward extractive export enclaves and coca frontiers, the multi-

national corporations, the narco-bourgeoisie, and technocratic politicians in charge of "modernizing" and "reforming" the Colombian state created the necessary conditions for guerrilla resurgence. Accelerating state and parastate repression provided sufficient conditions.

6

Negotiating the Dirty War, 1982–90

> It is not only a punitive war but a preventive war . . . a dirty war . . . It is not only a war against the state or of the state against civil society; it is a war of the entire society with itself. It is collective suicide.
>
> Gonzalo Sánchez, "La degradación de la guerra" (1991)

Conservative President Belisario Betancur initiated a peace process with the insurgencies in 1982, out of which a broad electoral Left, tied to the largest guerrilla insurgency, emerged as the first national-popular expression since *gaitanismo*. In response, regional and local paramilitary networks defied Bogotá by implementing a "dirty war" – characterized by high levels of torture, massacre, disappearance, and political murder – with impunity. When peace negotiations broke down, political violence against the broad Left – sanctioned by the executive *ex post facto* – spiraled in proportion to the growing power of cocaine-exporting entrepreneurs.

I Narco-politics and Paramilitarism

Centered, as the coffee export business had been, on Medellín, cocaine processing and transport linked the first Colombia of the central and western highlands to the second Colombia of the eastern lowlands and Pacific and Atlantic coasts, through new cities like Florencia and Villavicencio, as well as roads and airports. Medellín thus recovered its fading industrial glory, becoming the major hub for the one export commodity Colombians owned and controlled. This was facilitated by Antioquian migration to South Florida and Jackson Heights, Queens,

which provided the so-called Medellín cartel with distribution networks.[143]

The growing power of the mafia was first raised in the 1982 elections, when Pablo Escobar and others made inroads into national politics, mainly through the Liberal Party; cocaine had surpassed coffee and earned an estimated 30 per cent of Colombian exports.[144] Escobar became an alternate Liberal deputy in Congress under Alberto Santofimio, one of the most corrupt of the old-style caciques (political bosses).[145] The alliance developed after Escobar had been expelled from "The New Liberalism," led by Luis Carlos Galán and Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, both of whom publicly opposed the growing influence of cocaine entrepreneurs and disputed the legitimacy of caciques within the Liberal Party, like Santofimio.

With their ties to the repressive organs of the state, the Catholic Church, and the two parties, the paramilitaries were able to profit from cocaine exports on a much grander scale than the FARC. They owed this lucrative role to their origin as death squads of the drug cartels and the cattle-ranching anti-communists in the Magdalena Medio Valley. In 1981, traffickers like Escobar, the Ochoas, Carlos Lehder, Victor Carranza, and Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha, organized MAS, or "Death to Kidnappers," a right-wing paramilitary force dedicated to ridding the region of "subversives." Amplifying the findings of the Prosecutor General's report on MAS, as minister of justice, Lara Bonilla had exposed the connections between active and retired military officials, police, party bosses, cattle ranchers, and narcotraffickers in the formation of MAS.

Like the *pájaros* of the 1950s, MAS's radius of action was at first strictly regional, but it soon branched out. Gonzalo Rodríguez had worked as a lieutenant under Gilberto Molina in the Boyacá emerald mines, where each capo had a rudimentary military apparatus to enforce control over labor and rivals. Rodríguez and Victor Carranza served as a bridge between narco-financed paramilitarism in the Middle Magdalena and the southeastern lowlands of Meta – between the first Colombia and the second. As head of the cattle ranchers' association (FEDEGAN) in Antioquia in 1983, Pedro Juan Moreno Villa defended MAS in a public debate with Lara Bonilla in Puerto Berrío. He built another bridge, stretching from the Magdalena Medio to northeastern Antioquia and Urabá.[146] The regional outlines of a burgeoning paramilitarism were increasingly visible.

Paramilitary leader Carlos Castaño describes a more internationalist formation in his 2001 autobiography, *My Confession*. As an eighteen-year-old former army scout serving in the ranks of MAS, his family sent him to train in Tel Aviv, Israel, in 1983. Detailing how he ordered and participated in massacres of civilians, Castaño insists, "I copied the concept of paramilitary forces from the Israelis." As described below, the lessons learnt in Lebanon, the West Bank, and Gaza were applied in the Magdalena Medio. Castaño worked there under the direction of his drug-trafficking brother, Fidel, a.k.a. "Rambo," a business associate of Pablo Escobar's who would soon devote himself full-time to commanding paramilitary death squads. The "House of Castaño," as Fidel called his regional counterinsurgent movement, had begun its ascent.[147]

In 1984, Escobar ordered the assassination of Lara Bonilla, Betancur's minister of justice. Lara Bonilla's offense had been to resist the influence of the cocaine mafia in Liberal Party politics by demanding that leading traffickers like Escobar be extradited to the USA. The repression of the cocaine business after the killing of Lara Bonilla helped lift it out of the crisis into which it had fallen in 1983. The day of Lara Bonilla's burial, for example, in Calamar (Guaviare) the price of a kilo of coca paste was 200,000 pesos; a week later it cost 800,000 pesos. Narco-investment in land, initially concentrated in the Magdalena Medio Valley, grew rapidly.[148]

Cocaine exporters – who had also invested heavily in finance, construction, and communications – merged with "peasant self-defense" forces in order to protect their newly acquired properties. Drug mafias also aligned themselves with Liberal Party bosses in the provinces, as well as active and retired military and police. Increasingly, they set the parameters for official Colombian politics.[149]

II "Political Opening"

Supported by "New Liberalism," Conservative President Belisario Betancur (1982–86) made the first attempt to negotiate a cease-fire and a peace agenda with the insurgencies; his Liberal opponent, López Michelsen, had called for their military defeat along Venezuelan lines.[150] Once a follower of Laureano Gómez, but by temperament a loner in the establishment, Betancur was moved by the deteriorating plight of the majority, and aimed to improve it. In 1982, as a first step, he declared an

amnesty and freed over a thousand guerrillas and political activists imprisoned under Turbay's draconian "Security Statute." Betancur named social inequality as the culprit of the maladies spawned by the guerrillas, and insisted on executive, rather than legislative, supervision of cease-fire negotiations – although any proposed reforms would have had to go through Congress.

This was the beginning of the period Betancur named the "political opening." Here was a window through which demilitarization of political life and a serious discussion of problems – political exclusion, lack of education, services, and infrastructure, violent dispossession and government neglect in the countryside, unemployment as well as shrinking industrial manufacturing jobs in the cities – could be glimpsed.

The failure of the process is easily explained. With US-funded counterinsurgency wars in Central America moving into critical phases, the international context discouraged a negotiated political solution to Colombia's military conflict. US Ambassador Lewis Tambs coined the term "narco-guerrilla" in 1984, the year the cease-fire was implemented, suggesting that the FARC was criminal rather than political.[151] This came during a period in which, following Ronald Reagan's visit to Bogotá in December 1982, the "war on drugs" became the principle theme of US-Colombian diplomacy. Betancur never had the support of the Colombian Army, which opposed peace negotiations and a political solution on both institutional grounds and cold war principle.[152] Nor did Betancur have strong backing from any faction of the ruling class, and he was dependent on a reluctant Congress for structural change.

Terms relatively favorable to guerrillas bent on joining the formal political arena triggered a reaction from local landed elites, as well as the high command of the Colombian Armed Forces. They fought central government policy using counterinsurgent terror, funded in part by cocaine export revenues – like the Nicaraguan Contra forces fighting to overthrow the national-popular Sandinista regime.[153] In the Magdalena Medio Valley, the eastern plains, northeastern Antioquia, and southern Córdoba, older agrarian elites and the new commercial-financial-industrial cocaine elite established regional beachheads for private armies and landed empires.

As in *la Violencia*, as much as the guerrillas themselves, who were present in the above-named regions, what galled traffickers and traditional landlords alike were processes of self-organization, of which

guerrilla insurgency was only one aspect. Self-organization led to escalating demands for redistribution of land, reorientation of credit, and new, state-subsidized technological improvements. Led by the Cattle Ranchers' Association (FEDEGAN), through which paramilitary relations with civil society were organized, landed oligarchs decided the time had come to silence popular demands. This meant death to landless peasants, indebted smallholders, rural proletarians, and the urban movements for homes, services, and public education.

The three insurgencies that entered into negotiations – FARC, EPL, and M-19 – saw the state-sanctioned, public-private repression coming. They exploited contradictions in the peace process to strengthen their own position, calling attention to rising army and paramilitary abuses. Firmly rooted in the savannas of Córdoba and the banana zones of Urabá, the EPL had a major presence in trade unions and community groups. By the time an agreement had been reached in late 1984, the FARC had doubled its number of fronts, from fourteen to twenty-eight. In 1985, hoping a general strike in June would turn into urban insurrection, and complaining of army violations of the cease-fire, M-19 pulled out of the truce. In November their commandos staged a seizure of the Palace of Justice in the center of Bogotá, capturing the Supreme Court within it, and requested negotiations. The Army responded by blasting the building in a tank assault that ended with the slaughter of all those inside. Betancur deferred to the high command; had he demurred, he might have been ousted.[154] The massacre marked the beginning of the end of M-19 as a political-military force.

Within the government, the figure in charge of managing contact with the insurgencies, Jaime Castro Castro, was the political godfather of the Liberal Party cacique, Pablo Emilio Guarín, who supervised anti-communist violence in Puerto Boyacá, a cattle-ranching, paramilitary outpost in the Magdalena Medio Valley. One of the paramilitary training camps there, later staffed by British and Israeli mercenaries, was named after Guarín. During Betancur's peace process, the Magdalena Medio became the territorial heart of the Medellín cartel. "Fumigation of subversion" – through disappearance, displacement, and torture – was carried out. Active and retired military and police officials, and cattle ranchers, coordinated with the XVI Brigade in Puerto Berrío, across the departmental border from Boyacá in Antioquia.[155]

The architect of "peace" in the Magdalena Medio Valley was General

Farauk Yanine Díaz, a School of the Americas graduate who recognized that the key to retaking the area from the FARC and the PCC in the early 1980s was a counterinsurgent "hearts-and-minds" strategy that would integrate the peasantry into the apparatus of repression, whether as informants or combatants.[156] Yanine succeeded where General Ruíz and others had failed in the 1960s and 1970s, so Pablo Guarín considered him a "Super Star . . . within the army."

As the peace process degenerated, developments in the Magdalena Medio met with official approval: in a speech delivered in Puerto Boyacá's Plaza Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, in 1985, President Betancur declared the town a "model of peace" for the rest of the nation. Betancur named General Yanine "the symbol . . . of the resurrection of the Magdalena Medio."[157] Officially, then, peace was understood to mean successful counterinsurgency, based on "political cleansing" and closer collaboration between civilians and the armed forces. Exemplary displays of public-private violence became more common as MAS sowed terror with impunity.[158]

In late 1985, the FARC formed the Patriotic Union (UP) with the PCC, as a civilian front designed to help consolidate a power base within the formal political system prior to laying down arms.[159] The strategy of armed electoral politics carried high risks for UP supporters, especially trade unionists and PCC cadres. But for activists of varying ideological hues committed to progressive social change, the UP became a meeting ground for radicals. A new generation sought to overcome the sectarianism of the 1970s. Most had nothing to do with the FARC or the PCC, so they did not adhere to the *criollo* Leninist doctrine of the "combination of all forms of struggle." UP militants worked for peace, social justice, and "revolutionary change" through the electoral arena. In their commitment to finding a democratic path to revolution, they were similar to the Chilean UP of the 1960s and 1970s – and, if anything, more doomed.

Given the "correlation of forces" (*correlación de fuerzas*), a social democratic electoral politics tied to the nation's largest guerrilla formation resulted in widespread extrajudicial execution of Left politicians and militants, especially in frontier regions. The "orthodox" faction of the FARC understood this and argued for increased militarization.[160] Jacobo Arenas, the only proletarian in the overwhelmingly peasant high command, was the driving force behind the UP. His dream was not, like Salvador Allende's, to find a parliamentary road to socialism, but rather to build a modern war machine with which to fight the Colombian state and US imperialism.[161] In tragic confirmation of the orthodox position, two years after its foundation, 500 UP militants, including presidential candidate Jaime Pardo Leal – who had won more than any Left candidate in Colombian history in 1986 – had been assassinated.

Pardo realized that the UP and the trade unions had to be independent from the FARC if they were to effect reform. One PCC dissident reflected, "If we didn't embrace democracy and peace in a way that was perfectly open, but rather continued playing on both levels with the UP and the party in the legal sphere and the FARC in the war, we were headed for a holocaust."[162] The orthodox wing of the FARC had no intention of letting go of their "political instrument," and their view gained adherents as bodies piled up. Without analyzing it critically, the FARC justified their existence thereafter by referring to what the victims' families called "political genocide."

Most killings of UP supporters were the responsibility of Rodríguez, Victor Carranza, and the Castaño brothers. Adhering to the declarations of the Colombian Armed Forces, to the effect that the UP was merely the "unarmed wing of the subversion," they declared war without quarter on the party as a way of fighting the FARC. The Castaños, whose father had been kidnapped and murdered by the FARC after the ransom had been paid, had personal reasons for waging their war on civilians. Initially at least, Rodríguez and Carranza, his associate in the emerald mafia, took revenge for a business relationship gone awry.[163] Toward this end, they funded "political cleansing" operations to physically eliminate or forcibly displace those who mobilized for radical democratic reforms.

III Closure

Within the FARC, only Alfonso Cano, the lone intellectual in Joint Chiefs of Staff, saw how the emerging cocaine export elite had begun to supplant older, beleaguered landed elites in frontier regions through paramilitarism. The narco-paramilitary right congealed as a bloc opposed to Betancur's peace negotiations and democratic opening, considering mass mobilization and progressive electoral politics evidence of an unacceptable degree of insurgent political advance. With factions of the armed forces, ranchers, narcotraffickers, Liberal politicians, and

organized death squads coming together against him, Betancur lacked the power to insist on social reform, which would have allowed him to undercut the insurgencies. The process of "political opening" undertaken by the central state was opposed by regional elites, regrouped in defense of "private property" and "public order."

The national political community was not expanded to include Afro-Colombians, indigenous groups, frontier settlers, slum dwellers, feminists, human rights defenders, or green activists working through the UP, much less the Communist Left that had forced the opening. In Urabá and the Chocó, peasant communities, either Afro-Colombian or with a strong Afro-Colombian presence, made the UP their political vehicle; so did mestizo frontier settlers in FARC-controlled areas in the south and southeast (Meta, Caquetá). The insurgencies supported many of the demands of the above-mentioned radical-popular groups. In spite of insurgent efforts to use those struggles for their organizational ends, a broad-based, mostly autonomous mobilization was conflated with "subversion" and suppressed by terror.

The overgrown armed resistance contributed to the weakness and vulnerability of the very movements most likely to bring about changes necessary for a negotiated solution. The *pájaros* had risen again, this time in the guise of MAS and the teenage assassins that made Medellín world-famous. Unlike the *pájaros* of the 1950s and 1960s, *sicarios* in the 1980s and 1990s were hired and protected (or killed) by the cocaine mafia, not the Conservative Party.[164] With Reagan's "war on drugs" – organized out of Miami by then-Vice-President George H.W. Bush in order to fight Left insurgencies – narcotrafficking and extradition would be the main focus of US-Colombian government relations.

Under pressure from Washington, the Barco administration that took over in 1986 – a Liberal landslide on a low vote – pursued the extradition of the Medellín cartel. In an oft-quoted phrase, Escobar declared that he preferred "a tomb in Colombia" to a cell in the USA. He and the group of traffickers he led, known as *los extraditables* ("the ones who can be extradited") depended on informants within the armed forces and intelligence services (DAS, DOC, F-2), and responded by ordering hits on leading judges, politicians, and law-enforcement officials. Yet key ministers, newspapers, and political factions within both parties expressed public support for paramilitary "self-defense" forces, some of them with ongoing ties to the Medellín cartel.

When the paramilitary movement gathered momentum in 1987–88, homicide had already become the leading cause of death among males. Social movements staged massive marches in the cities and the countryside, demanding progressive change, and in some cases moved closer to the guerrilla insurgencies, particularly the FARC and the ELN, who tried to instrumentalize them. The scope of right-wing attacks widened to include students, professors, and distinguished professionals like Dr. Hector Abad Gómez, a human rights activist in the progressive wing of the Liberal Party. As Liberal senator (and perennial presidential candidate) Horacio Serpa pointed out, "In Colombia, thought crimes have become instituted on the ground, and are drastically punished with nothing less than the death penalty."[165] In addition to those whose words and deeds were perceived as "subversive," "disposable people" (*los desechables*) were also targeted. Prostitutes, homosexuals, transvestites, the homeless and mentally ill people, thieves, petty drug dealers, and users were killed in "social cleansing" (*limpieza social*) operations that became generalized in Medellín, Cali, Pereira, Bogotá, and Barranquilla. Active and former police officers were as prominent as traffickers and paramilitaries. Urban violence was dizzyingly plural.

The FARC, meanwhile, had begun its metamorphosis into a tributary statelet in earnest, as kidnapping, extortion, selective assassination, and forced displacement began to figure prominently in zones in which they had recently arrived.[166] The ELN also grew rapidly. By the mid-1980s, extraction of protection rents from the German company contracted to construct the Caño-Limón pipeline in Arauca (with the covert aid of the Kohl government), as well as multinational petroleum companies, gave them the resources needed for expansion. The ELN found supporters and recruits in universities, neighborhood and community organizations, and trade unions. It grew by 500 per cent between 1983 and 1988, and, after the peace process, distinguished itself by its readiness to use terrorist tactics – like kidnapping, car bombings, pipeline and infrastructural sabotage – as a substitute for insurrection.

Although on a lesser scale than the FARC, the ELN could claim a patchwork of regional and local sovereignties. In a covert attack on the ELN, which had not joined the cease-fire, the FARC denounced "kidnapping and all forms of terrorism that threaten human dignity and liberty."[167] In 1987, the FARC and the ELN founded the Simón

Bolívar Guerrilla Coordination (CGSB) with M-19, the EPL, Quintín Lame, and the tiny Trotskyist PRT.[168] Promises of insurgent unity proved illusory, however, as the atmosphere of sectarian competition that had rent the Left since the 1930s lingered.[169] Nevertheless, the CGSB gave voice to a guerrilla movement that, in economic and military terms at least, had become a formidable challenge to the exercise of central government authority. Though we have seen that the FARC had already initiated its organizational transformation into a tributary statelet, it is important to remember how sharply the conflict deteriorated in the late 1980s and 1990s, *after* the peace process had failed.

As part of an official effort to democratize regional politics by loosening the control of the center, in 1988 local elections were instituted for the first time since 1886, with the UP winning 16 mayoral and 256 municipal council races. The unexpected result was to increase violent electoral competition, leading to more "political cleansing" operations. These were meant to deal with the advance of the UP, which threatened to break the bipartisan monopoly at the local level, especially in peripheral or frontier regions. The targets were trade unionists, community organizers, students, professors, indigenous activists, radio journalists, and teachers. As always, above all, they were peasants.

In the banana, logging, and cattle-ranching region of Urabá, massacres started in April 1988 at Mejor Esquina, in which thirty-six peasants died on the orders of Fidel Castaño and Luis Rubio, mayor of Puerto Boyacá.[170] In Remedios, in the gold-mining area of northeastern Antioquia, where *contrachusma* forces had rampaged against *gaitanistas* in the 1950s, the UP won the mayor's office in 1988. Fidel Castaño sent his most methodic killer, a former FARC combatant from the Middle Magdalena, on a homicidal spree the same year.[171] According to an investigation undertaken by the Attorney General's Office, César Pérez, a Liberal Congressman from the neighboring town of Segovia, had been one of the intellectual authors of the crime; paramilitary "self-defense forces" from Puerto Boyacá had also participated.[172] In the Sinú Valley in Córdoba, where *juntas gaitanistas* had also formed after the *Bogotazo*, the EPL and the FARC had thrived alongside vibrant civic, student, and peasant movements. Fidel Castaño bought land in Valencia in 1987, had the UP mayor killed, displaced UP supporters, and from there expanded his political dominion through terror and massacres.[173] Thus the

municipalities of Valencia and Tierralta were reconquered from the UP by the Liberal Party.

Liberal Party bosses had most to lose from the rise of the UP, and refused political extinction at the hands of a party founded by the FARC and the PCC. In allying themselves so closely with the counterinsurgency, they repeated the mistakes the Conservative government had made during *la Violencia*. In La Rochela massacre, also in 1989, at the behest of Rodríguez, a team of assassins killed nine judicial investigators looking into a paramilitary massacre committed in the Middle Magdalena. This changed the relationship of the paramilitaries to the central government, which now declared more than 200 of them illegal.

One of Escobar's *sicarios* then assassinated center-Left presidential candidate and leader of the "New Liberalism," Luis Carlos Galán, in August 1989.[174] Like Lara Bonilla, Galán had been intimidated into taking campaign money from Escobar, and then proceeded to fulminate against *traficantes* in favor of extradition to the USA. He was sure to have won in 1990, and his funeral was an occasion of national mourning. Later that year, *sicarios* working for Fidel Castaño and Rodríguez shot down the Left's two presidential candidates: Carlos Pizarro, leader of M-19, and Bernardo Jaramillo of the UP.[175] Here the issue was not money or extradition, but demands Left candidates would make for social justice, democratization of the political system, and structural transformation.

One of the UP's two chief enemies, Gonzalo Rodríguez, died in 1989 after the Cali cartel infiltrated his organization, in league with the same forces that were to bring down Escobar four years later. Fidel Castaño, responsible for the killings of Pizarro and Jaramillo, continued amassing forces, fortunes, and land in Antioquia and Córdoba, while cultivating his taste for modern art in Paris, New York, London, and Madrid. Twenty of the forty-two cadavers from the Puerto Bello (Urabá) massacre in 1990 were found on his ranch in Córdoba, *Las Tangas*; one paramilitary participant testified to torturing victims there all night.[176] In the four regions of Magdalena Medio (dominated by petroleum processing and cattle ranching), northeastern Antioquia (site of Frontino Gold Mining Co. and extensive ranching), southern Córdoba (ranching), and ranching and coca-growing zones in the eastern plains, the regionally based paramilitary Right kept new political expressions from entering formal politics. The foundations of a national-