Where Were You When They Killed Lara Bonilla?
Politics of Drugs and Peace in Colombia
(1982-1984)

By

Jamie L. Shenk

Advised by Professor Robert Karl

A senior thesis submitted to the History Department of Princeton University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Princeton, New Jersey

April 5, 2016

This paper represents my own work in accordance with University regulations.
/s/ Jamie Shenk

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to first thank my advisor, Professor Robert Karl, for his support throughout the course of this project. I began my study of Belisario Betancur's presidency in the fall of my junior year in Professor Karl's junior seminar. Since then, he has served as my essential guide, helping me navigate the nuances of my argument, the archives of Bogotá, and anything and everything Colombia-related.

The opportunity to spend a summer in Colombia conducting research for this project proved crucial for the development of this thesis. My understanding of my topic's broader context in Colombian society is largely built on what I learned outside of the archives. For that I must thank my friends in Bogotá and Medellín. So many were willing to share their personal stories of how this period in history touched them and their families. Their candidness provided both invaluable information and inspiration. Moreover, I would like to thank the archivists and professors who often went out of their way to track down and explain documents for me. In particular, I am thankful for Professor Óscar Calvo Isaza at the University of Antioquia, who gave me the most detailed explanation of Medellín's archives that anyone could ever ask for. I also thank Diana Andrade Melgarejo, who helped orient me during my first weeks in Bogotá. Moreover, I wish to thank the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies for the generous funding that made possible my summer research in Colombia.

Although only I began this project my junior year, it very much the product of my relationship with two people—Dr. Peter Neissa and Sra. Clara Isaza Bishop—who played a central role in fostering my fascination with Colombia. Their classes pushed me far beyond simple Spanish grammar and elementary “cultural” lessons to think critically about all aspects of Latin American culture and history. Throughout my time in high school, they carefully nurtured my particular interest in their home country. Years later, they have continued to show interest in and support me in my studies. Their guidance was immeasurably helpful in writing this thesis.

Most importantly, I would like to thank my family for their endless love, understanding, and support. Being able to articulate and share my passion for this topic and this country with my parents, Georgia Lee and George Shenk, and my brother, Michael Shenk, has been far and away the most special part of this thesis-writing experience.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1.
The National Front's Long Shadow	5.
An Armed Alternative	9.
Violent History, Fractured Studies	14.
A Note on Sources and Structure	20.
 CHAPTER ONE: Politics of Peace, Politics of Violence	23.
"The Non-Conformist Colombia Needs"	24.
Redefining the <i>Guerrilla</i>	32.
A New Violent Actor	37.
MAS and the Military	43.
Searching for Security	50.
 CHAPTER TWO: From Industry to National Security Threat	57.
The Emergence of an Industry	58.
Accommodating the Emerging Class	63.
Making an "Honest" Man	68.
Hot Money	73.
A "War Without Quarter"	83.
 CHAPTER THREE: Drugs: Health, Morality and Crime	97.
Early Drug Policy	98.
Invasion of the <i>Zuqueros</i>	106.
Wars on Drugs Converge	113.
 EPILOGUE	119.
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	133.

INDEX OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Map of Colombia	vi.
Figure 2: “The Non-Conformist Colombia Needs”	25.
Figure 3: “Poem of Peace”	49.
Figure 4: Doodle of Rodrigo Lara Bonilla in <i>Medellín Cívico</i>	78.
Figure 5: Cartoon of Lady Justice	85.
Figure 6: Banco Cafetero Advertisement: “Drugs Destroy Your Brain”	111.
Figure 7: Army Attack on the Palace of Justice	124.

ABBREVIATIONS

Government Agencies:

Administrative Department of Security
(*Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad*) DAS

Colombian Military Special Forces
(*Grupo de Operaciones Especiales*) GOES

U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency DEA

Guerrilla and Paramilitary Groups:

19th of April Movement
(*Movimiento 19 de Abril*) M-19

Death to Kidnappers
(*Muerte a Secuestradores*) MAS

Marxist-Leninist Communist Party of Colombia
(*Partido Comunista de Colombia Marxista-Leninista*) M-L

National Liberation Army
(*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*) ELN

Popular Liberation Army
(*Ejército de Liberación Popular*) EPL

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
(*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*) FARC

Political Parties:

Liberal Renewal Movement
(*Movimiento Renovación Liberal*) MRL

National Popular Alliance
(*Alianza Nacional Popular*) ANAPO

MAP OF COLOMBIA

“Where were you when they
killed Lara Bonilla?”

People of my generation do
these things: we ask each other
what our lives were at the
moment of those events—
almost all of which occurred
during the 1980s—which
defined or diverted them before
we knew what was happening
to us. I’ve always believed that
in this way, verifying that
we’re not the only ones, we
neutralize the consequences of
having grown up in that decade,
or we mitigate the feeling of
vulnerability that has always
accompanied us. And those
conversations tend to begin
with Lara Bonilla, the minister
of justice.

—Juan Gabriel Vásquez, *The Sound of Things Falling*

INTRODUCTION

“Why Belisario?” This question, sometimes muttered as an exasperated sigh rather than an interrogative, was the standard reaction I received when Colombians asked me about my research for this project during my two months spent in Bogotá. “He was the worst president we have ever had,” many of my taxi drivers complained as they navigated roads riddled with potholes on the way to the archives. “He is a monster,” my Colombian roommate tried to explain to me one night over dinner. Former President Betancur himself, as we sat down for an interview in his secluded office in northern Bogotá, jokingly asked what he could have done during his presidency to warrant such interest from a young, U.S. student. Betancur’s joke, ironically, hints at the source of his countrymen’s frustration. Thirty years after Betancur left office, his presidency represents to many Colombians the moment their country went to hell. The images of Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla’s bullet-riddled car sitting on Calle 127 in Bogotá in 1984, or of the Palace of Justice engulfed in flames during the M-19’s 1985 siege dominate the memories of many Colombians who lived through that period. Betancur’s administration could also be characterized by promises he left unfulfilled: full political inclusion, lasting peace with the country’s *guerrilla* groups, an answer to the drug mafia. What interests me about Belisario Betancur, however, is how the bleak memory of his term stands in a stark contrast to the hopeful optimism that greeted him in 1982.

“When I say that my government will be a national government, by ‘national’ I mean for everyone, for the good of everyone...not only for the desires of the political

class or only those privileged groups with the influence to make themselves heard.”¹

With this assertion in 1982, then-presidential candidate Belisario Betancur introduced a new model for Colombian politics. The country’s political system was in the midst of a contentious transition. The end of the sixteen-year long National Front period in 1974 ushered in an era dictated by a new set of political actors. Popular protests and a growing cadre of armed Leftist groups challenged Colombia’s tradition of oligarchical rule and forced a reevaluation of the political structure. Meanwhile, a new generation of reformist leaders attuned to popular politics advocated for change from within the system.

Programs like Betancur’s *Movimiento Nacional* (National Movement) offered the possibility of inclusion beyond the traditional Liberal and Conservative parties. However, the power of the entrenched political elite proved a formidable barrier against any transition to a truly democratic system. Thus, the success of politicians depended on their ability to balance their promises to the general populace with the desires of the traditional ruling class, all the while navigating a highly bureaucratic system.

In order to establish political legitimacy among both the ruling class and its armed, Leftist opponents, the movement toward political reform necessitated a reconstruction of Colombian national identity. Betancur’s politics rested on the concept of “nationalism,” which would extend and ensure rights and protections for all Colombian citizens, reconfiguring politics to address citizens’ real needs rather than party interests.² Betancur

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this work are the author’s. “450.000 Liberales votaron por mí,” *Semana*, June 7, 1982.

² I use the term “nationalism” here in specific reference to Betancur’s program of replacing partisan politics with national politics, rather than in reference to the greater field of nationalism in Latin America. Overall Betancur’s program related more to state-building through social programs than to nationalistic ideology. For works related to Latin American nationalism, see Miguel Angel Centeno et al., “Internal Wars and Latin

named this process his “apertura política,” or political opening, and specifically sought to incorporate *guerrilla* groups into the formal political system and reform the electoral system to allow for more equitable political participation.³ As the poet Gustavo Gómez Ardila pronounced, “to read or listen to Belisario Betancur is to discover one’s self, to feel that we are protagonists in our own history, creators, for better or worse, of our own paths, and if we have not been, it is because those who have always controlled the course of the *patria* [the leading class] did not let us.”⁴ By promising to open the political system, Betancur’s *Movimiento Nacional* offered hope for an alternative to armed revolution by *guerrilla* groups as the only way to secure political change for the benefit of the masses.

The rising influence of the drug mafia during Betancur’s presidency would complicate this process of political reform.⁵ At its height in the late 1980s and 1990s, the drug mafia mesmerized and terrified the Colombian public in equal parts as it undermined state legitimacy through corruption and horrific displays of violence. But when Betancur took office in 1982 concerns about the drug trade barely registered in

American Nationalism,” in *Nationalism and War*, ed. John A. Hall and Sinisa Malesevic (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 279–305; José Itzigsohn and Matthias vom Hau, “Unfinished Imagined Communities: States, Social Movements, and Nationalism in Latin America,” *Theory and Society* 35, no. 2 (2006): 193–212.

³ Gary Hoskin, “Colombian Political Parties and Electoral Behavior During the Post-National Front Period,” in *Democracy in Latin America: Colombia and Venezuela*, ed. Donald Herman (New York: Praeger, 1988), 48.

⁴ Belisario Betancur and Gustavo Gómez Ardila, *Belisario Betancur, la voluntad de un pueblo!: El pueblo interroga a Belisario* (Producciones Catatumbo, 1981), 7.

⁵ The term “drug cartel” is more widely recognized in the United States, but nearly every Colombian source that I have reviewed from the time period refers to those involved in the drug trade as “the drug mafia” or simply “the mafia.” In addition, scholars of the Colombian drug trade contend that the term “mafia” is better suited to describe the trade’s commitment to criminality, whereas the term “cartel” refers exclusively a particular set of business practices. See Álvaro Camacho Guizado’s recent essay for a more detailed analysis of the term “mafia” in relation to the Colombian drug trade: “Mafia: los usos de un concepto polisémico y su aplicabilidad al caso colombiano,” *Historia Crítica No.40*, no. 41 (August 2010): 208–21, doi:10.7440/historit41.2010.12.

national politics. The drug mafia had not captured significant public attention, as traffickers like Pablo Escobar were more often viewed as local, “Robin Hood”-like heroes and had not yet been transformed into enemies of the state. Meanwhile, increasingly liberal attitudes toward marijuana in the United States in the late 1970s during the Carter administration resonated in Colombia. Politicians on the extreme side of the spectrum advocated for the legalization of marijuana, but even among more moderate politicians, attitudes toward the drug trade tended toward tacit acceptance or indifference.⁶ Barely two years into Betancur’s term, these attitudes undergo a radical shift.

This thesis examines the assassination of Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla as a turning point in both Betancur’s presidency and Colombian history more broadly. The first two years of Betancur’s presidency featured unrelenting optimism about the prospect of real political change, despite the numerous challenges to the president’s cornerstone plan for an end to the country’s decades-long internal armed conflict. But behind the scenes, the increasing power and ambition of the *narco*-elite had silently transformed the drug trade from an industry run by wily entrepreneurs into a national security threat with devastating potential. The assassination of Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla on the night of April 30, 1984, marked the moment when these two forces—Betancur’s popular politics and *narco*-ambition—collided. The resulting “war without quarter” between the state and the drug mafia forced the president to redefine his nationalist politics in order to balance the new threat of the *narco*-elite with his increasingly complicated peace process.

⁶ James Henderson, *Víctima de la globalización: La historia de cómo el narcotráfico destruyó la paz en Colombia*, trans. Magdalena Holguín (Bogotá: Siglo del Hombre Editores, 2012), 54.

Meanwhile, the public outcry at Lara's murder and its symbolic decapitation of the justice system compelled the country as a whole to reconsider its relationship with both the international drug trade and the drugs themselves. The fear and frustration that this turning point introduced would become the salient feature of Betancur's legacy, as the country descended into a period of uncontrolled violence that would define Colombia for decades to come.

The National Front's Long Shadow

Colombia's recent political history shaped the context in which Betancur's presidency operated. Colombia's democracy holds the honor of being one of the oldest in the Western Hemisphere, a fact often cited by scholars for its uniqueness in a region characterized by a history of dictatorships and military regimes.⁷ Colombia's outwardly democratic system, however, did not necessarily engender truly democratic processes. After a long period of partisan violence known simply as *La Violencia* (1948-1958) and subsequent rule by the military dictator Gustavo Rojas Pinilla (1953-1957), the leading families of the two traditional political parties, the Liberals and Conservatives designed what Colombian historian Marco Palacios describes as a "gentleman's agreement." The ruling class's compromise, the National Front (*Frente Nacional*), which lasted from 1958 to 1974, consisted of a set of pacts that split the Congress and lower rungs in the

⁷ Jorge Osterling begins his book with this fact, while Stephan Dudley, Robert Dix, and John Martz, among other scholars all note the irony that a country famous for its violence would have one of the longest running democracies in the region. See Jorge P. Osterling, *Democracy in Colombia: Clientelist Politics and Guerrilla Warfare* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1989); Steven Dudley, *Walking Ghosts: Murder and Guerrilla Politics in Colombia* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Robert H. Dix, *The Politics of Colombia* (New York: Praeger, 1987); John D. Martz, *The Politics of Clientelism: Democracy and the State in Colombia* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1996).

government bureaucracy equally between the two parties and alternated the presidency every four years.⁸

While the coalition prevented violent clashes between Liberals and Conservatives, its rigid structure of alternating presidencies undermined the legitimacy of the political system. The political scientist Harvey Kline observes that while the National Front minimized competition within parties, intra-party competition weakened the two-party system as a whole. He describes a “strange hybrid situation during the National Front period,” as party leaders wanted to mobilize as many voters as possible to create an illusion of real democracy, “but at times [the mobilization] was for the presidential candidate of the other party.” Party loyalty played a central role in mobilizing voters, but was used to prop up the ruling class rather than for sectarian reasons. As we will see, this change would pave the way for future politicians to break from the mold of traditional party politics and form new political movements.⁹

Changes in Colombia’s social structure placed additional stress on the political system. Between 1951 and the time Betancur took office in 1982, the urban population exploded, climbing from forty percent of the total population to between sixty-five and seventy-four percent.¹⁰ Urbanization caused problems beyond strains on cities’ infrastructure and unemployment issues. It fundamentally changed the country’s political landscape. Rapid migration resulted in a further dissolution of the traditional dichotomy

⁸ Marco Palacios, *Between Legitimacy and Violence: A History of Colombia, 1875-2002*, trans. Richard Stoller (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 245.

⁹ Harvey F. Kline, “From Rural to Urban Society: The Transformation of Colombian Democracy,” in *Democracy in Latin America: Colombia and Venezuela*, ed. Donald Herman (New York: Praeger, 1988), 23.

¹⁰ Palacios puts the figure at 65 percent, while Hoskin argues that the total number had reached 73 percent. Palacios, *Between Legitimacy and Violence*, 226, 240; Hoskin, “Colombian Political Parties,” 53.

between Liberal and Conservatives. With few real differences in the political agendas of the two parties, Colombians had historically inherited their party affiliations just as they inherited their family name. For example, a profile on Betancur in the popular news magazine *Semana* attributed his membership in the Conservative Party to a product of his “being born a Betancur. It was inevitable. If he had been born a Cano he would be Liberal.”¹¹ Urbanization broke this pattern. When Colombians moved from the countryside to the major cities of Bogotá, Cali, and Medellín, they left behind their political affiliations, creating an independent, but inactive, electoral class. Party dynamics that mobilized voters in the countryside by relying on local strongmen did not gain the same traction in urban areas, as evidenced by the high rates of voter abstention. For example, in the post-National Front period, voter abstention rates for all elections averaged around 75 percent in Medellín, 73 percent in Bogotá, and 67 percent in Cali.¹² Furthermore, with power entrenched in the ruling class and without a true opposition, the National Front had little incentive to react to social changes and acknowledge new sources of votes.¹³ The National Front agreement had already been scheduled to end in 1974, but scholars including Francisco Leal Buitrago agree that the political system’s

¹¹ “El hijo del arriero,” *Semana*, June 28, 1982. Historically, the major difference between the Liberal and Conservative parties lay in their views on the role of the Catholic Church in the Colombian state. However, as described above, the National Front era essentially erased this difference. See Palacios for an in-depth analysis of Colombia’s early political system. Palacios, *Between Legitimacy and Violence*.

¹² Hoskin, “Colombian Political Parties and Electoral Behavior During the Post-National Front Period,” 53–55.

¹³ Francisco Leal Buitrago, “Estabilidad macroeconómica e institucional y violencia crónica,” in *En busca de la estabilidad perdida*, ed. Francisco Leal Buitrago (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo Editores, 1995), 25.

inability to react to “the most pressing concerns of the country” ensured that the National Front would not be extended.¹⁴

The National Front formally ended in 1974, but the election of Alfonso López Michelsen did not usher in significant changes to the political system. Legislation meant to ease the transition from the National Front to full democracy placed restrictions on political reform. Specifically, Article 120 of the Constitution stipulated that the president had to offer “adequate and equitable participation to the largest party other than his own,” ensuring that the “bipartisan machine-oriented” political system continued.¹⁵ In fact, Marc Chernick and Michael Jimenez’s analysis of Leftist politics in the post-National Front period indicates that rather than a transition away from Colombia’s traditional oligarchy, “on the contrary, the 1970s and 1980s witnessed a greater concentration of political and economic power in the hands of old as well as emergent elites.”¹⁶ Perhaps the most indicative representation of the entrenchment of the political elite lies in the familial ties of the presidential candidates in the 1974 election—all were children of former presidents.¹⁷ Four years later, López Michelsen’s presidency had done little to restore Colombians’ faith in the political process; the government’s crisis of legitimacy continued with increasing voter apathy. Only 34 percent of eligible voters participated in

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Kline, “From Rural to Urban Society,” 26.

¹⁶ Mark W. Chernick and Michael F. Jimenez, “Popular Liberalism, Radical Democracy, and Marxism: Leftist Politics in Contemporary Colombia, 1974-1991,” in *The Latin American Left: From the Fall of Allende to Perestroika*, ed. Barry Carr and Steve Ellner (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 67.

¹⁷ López Michelsen was the son of Alfonso López Pumarejo (1934-38, 1942-45); Alvaro Gómez Hurtado was the son of Laureano Gómez (1950-53); and María Eugenia Rojas was the daughter of General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla (1953-57). Buitrago, “Estabilidad macroeconómica e institucional y violencia crónica,” 33.

the 1978 presidential election, with voter turnout predictably lower in urban areas. Meanwhile, a new set of actors threatened to blow up the political system altogether.

An Armed Alternative

The National Front's souring effect on the legitimacy of the formal political system was compounded by the proliferation of armed Leftists movements in the 1970s and 1980s. As political scientists Marc Chernick and Michael Jimenez describe, the historiography of Leftist protest in the post-National Front period is rich with theories explaining its dramatic upsurge, a thorough discussion of which is outside the scope of this project. The most prominent explanation, espoused by Francisco Leal Buitrago, traces the conditions for armed revolution directly back to Colombia's bipartisan system and the National Front. The narrow state structure prevented "the emergence of civil society and the forging of citizenship," providing few outlets for opposition to the traditional ruling oligarchy to enter or to create political space. Another argument looks at the international context and the global Marxist-Leninist movements as the catalyst for armed revolutionary groups in Colombia. Yet another theory posits that a redesign of the Colombian capital system in the 1970s and 1980s contributed to "growing social protest, violence, and reduced space for democratic options in that period."¹⁸ All of these explanations share a description of a closed political system that left disillusioned Colombians with the perception that few options existed to challenge the existing system

¹⁸ Chernick and Jimenez, "Popular Liberalism, Radical Democracy, and Marxism," 62.

through traditional political channels. The *guerrilla* movements provided a means to fight back against this system to create a “revolutionary change.”¹⁹

It is tempting to refer to these separate movements under the vague umbrella of “*guerrilla* groups,” as contemporary Colombian press tended to do. However, for this project it is important to acknowledge the different origins and demands of each group, given that Betancur’s attempt at establishing peace between the state and the *guerrillas* would need to acknowledge and negotiate with each group as a distinct entity and sometimes find too a lack of cohesion even within groups. While numerous *guerrillas* operated during this period, the two most significant organizations in relation to Betancur’s peace initiative and Colombian violence were the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC; *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*), and the 19th of April Movement (M-19; *Movimiento 19 de Abril*).

The FARC were, and continue to be, Colombia’s oldest and largest *guerrilla* organization. The FARC officially came into being as a conglomeration of peasant self-defense groups during the late 1960s.²⁰ However, the Colombian sociologist Eduardo Pizarro traces its roots as far back as the 1930s, when agricultural workers employed self-defense groups to protect their efforts to establish agricultural settlements on public land and large estates under the Communist slogan “the revolutionary taking of the land.”²¹

¹⁹ Daniel Pécaut, “Guerrillas and Violence,” in *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective*, ed. Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1992), 221.

²⁰ Malcolm Deas, “The Troubled Course of Colombian Peacemaking,” *Third World Quarterly* 8, no. 2 (April 1986): 646.

²¹ Eduardo Pizarro, “Revolutionary Guerrilla Groups in Colombia,” in *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective*, ed. Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1992), 180.

The FARC promoted the thinking of the Moscow-line Colombian Communist Party, but Pizarro is also careful to note that the FARC did not arise, like other armed Colombian communist groups, “from a strictly voluntarist decision or as a mechanical effort to transplant the Cuban Revolution.” Rather, the FARC’s origins constituted a domestic response to official violence and militaristic aggression in the 1960s.²² This distinction would prove important in Betancur’s dealings with the group.

The M-19 derives its name from the supposedly fraudulent election that took place on April 19, 1970. Rojas Pinilla’s followers allege that it was on this date that the National Front coalition robbed him and his party, the National Popular Alliance (ANAPO; *Alianza Nacional Popular*), of victory. Founded by a socialist wing of ANAPO and expelled members of the FARC in 1972, the group’s aims in the 1980s were somewhat difficult to articulate in comparison to the FARC. Its program can be best characterized as highly nationalistic with the goal of dismantling the political elite class, albeit without any concrete program or manifesto.²³ While the number of M-19 fighters was considerably smaller than that of the FARC, the M-19 was far more aggressive in its tactics. It preferred daring and spectacular attacks, such its theft of Simón Bolívar’s sword from a Bogotá museum in 1972, or its siege of the Dominican embassy in 1980. The demographics of M-19’s membership also differed from the FARC. The M-19 appealed primarily to urban populations, especially students, professionals, and the underemployed who saw little opportunity for work or mobility under the traditional political system.²⁴ This membership, combined with the group’s brazen acts, made the M-

²² Ibid., 181.

²³ Deas, “The Troubled Course of Colombian Peacemaking,” 648.

²⁴ Pizarro, “Revolutionary Guerrilla Groups in Colombia,” 186.

19 highly visible as a threat to Colombia's social order, and thus one of Betancur's primary targets for peaceful integration into a political process.

The focus of this thesis requires mention of an equally armed, but less revolutionary set of actors that consolidated power during the post-National Front period: drug traffickers. The introduction of marijuana and cocaine to Colombia is a well-worn history. U.S. documents date Colombian involvement in European drug smuggling rings back to the 1930s. After a brief hiatus when World War II disrupted trade routes to Europe, illegal drug smuggling through Latin America rose again in the 1950s with cocaine processing laboratories documented throughout the Andean corridor, including Peru, Bolivia, Chile, and Colombia.²⁵ The introduction of marijuana to Colombia's Guajira peninsula and Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta regions in the 1970s led to the first drug boom in Colombia, nicknamed the "*bonanza marimbera*."²⁶ But the real increase in profits began after September 11, 1973, when a military coup in Chile forced the transfer of cocaine processing from Chile to Colombia, thus changing the landscape of the cocaine trade in the Andes.²⁷

The growth of the illegal drugs industry in Colombia, while subject to a number of variables related to international supply and demand, was not simply a product of the staggering amounts of money that illicit drugs could earn. Rather, it depended on the

²⁵ Álvaro Camacho Guizado, *El narcotráfico en la sociedad colombiana*, vol. 4, *Obra Selecta* (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2014), 239.

²⁶ See Lina Britto's work for a unique historical analysis of the Colombian marijuana boom of the 1970s. Lina Britto, "Hurricane Winds: Vallenato Music and Marijuana Traffic in Colombia's First Illegal Drugs Boom," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 95, no. 1 (February 1, 2015): 71–102, doi:10.1215/00182168-2836916.

²⁷ See Gootenberg's book for a detailed discussion of the birth of "*narcos*" in the precursor countries to Colombia's cocaine boom, including Cuba, Chile, Argentina, and Brazil. Paul Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine: The Making of a Global Drug* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 245–289.

country's crisis of political legitimacy related to the National Front. In fact, the prominent political economist Francisco Thoumi sees the growth of the illegal drugs trade as inevitable in Colombia, a development tied directly to the country's political economic system.²⁸ High rates of urbanization during the latter half of the twentieth century contributed to rising levels of unemployment, particularly in cities like Medellín, where urbanization also coincided with a decline in the city's main industry: textiles.²⁹ Palacios argues that urbanization, combined with the economic stagnation that plagued Latin America in the late 1970s contributed to the rise of drug trafficking, a crime he describes as born of an urban society under hypercompetitive capitalism.³⁰ The historian John Martz offers a similar analysis. The drug trade, he argues, quickly became the best way for Colombians with few options to "rise within the stratified class system and better themselves financially."³¹ Furthermore, failed land reform, unequal income distribution, inefficient government, and rising expectations—all factors that led to the growth of armed revolutionary movements—facilitated the growth and cultural acceptance of criminal underground economies. These factors, Thoumi writes, "contributed to a system in which the majority of the population does not accept the current system as legitimate or worthy of respect. This continuing process of 'delegitimization' expresses itself in a growing gap between the legal system and socially accepted behavior."³²

²⁸ Francisco E. Thoumi, *Political Economy and Illegal Drugs in Colombia* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 1995), 3.

²⁹ Mary Roldán, "Colombia: Cocaine and the 'Miracle of Modernity in Medellín'," in *Cocaine: Global Histories*, ed. Paul Gootenberg (New York: Routledge, 1999), 168.

³⁰ Palacios, *Between Legitimacy and Violence*, 240, 242.

³¹ Martz, *The Politics of Clientelism*, 226.

³² Thoumi, *Political Economy and Illegal Drugs in Colombia*, 2.

By the early 1980s, the drug trade had become entrenched in Colombia's social and economic systems. Colombia's economy relied heavily on the influx of foreign capital from the drug trade. Thoumi cites evidence from foreign trade invoices that money laundering was common starting in the mid-1970s. In fact, the massive amounts of foreign capital saturating the black market in 1974 prompted Colombia's Central Bank, the *Banco de la República*, to open its "*ventanilla siniestra*," or "sinister window," which allowed the Bank to exchange foreign dollars for pesos, no questions asked.³³ Initially, the drug trade, while internally violent, had no inherent desire to use violence to change the state structure. Unfortunately, this would quickly change during the course of Betancur's administration.

Violent History, Fractured Studies

The two main threads of my research—political reform and the drug mafia—have been well studied as separate phenomena, but rarely in dialogue with each other. This separation reflects a characteristic of Colombian political history that differentiates it from the U.S. field of history. While historians tend to segment modern U.S. political history by presidential administration, Colombian historiography favors broader periodization with four main eras: the Republic, the National Front, the post-National Front period, and the post-Constitution of 1991 period. The result of this periodization is the production of historical analyses that are temporally broad, but thematically limited, such as Chernick and Jimenez's examination of Leftist politics in the post-National Front period.³⁴ Studies that include Betancur's presidency tend to examine his peace process as

³³ Ibid., 51.

³⁴ Chernick and Jimenez, "Popular Liberalism, Radical Democracy, and Marxism."

the hallmark of his presidency and mention the drug trade only in passing. John Martz's section on Betancur in his book *The Politics of Clientelism*, for example, focuses almost exclusively on the administration's peace process, mentioning the drug trade briefly as a contributing factor to increased violence toward the end of Betancur's term.³⁵

A notable exception to this trend in historiography with special relevance to this study is the field of *violentología*. *Violentología*, or the study of violence, was born out of the Colombian government's desire to make sense of the bloody period of *La Violencia*. Between 1958 and 2012, there have been twelve national commissions for the study and investigation of extrajudicial violence in Colombia, the most relevant of which was formed by President Virgilio Barco, who succeeded Betancur in 1986, and who commissioned a study on the principal causes of contemporary violence.³⁶ In his book, *Pasados y presentes de la violencia en Colombia*, Jefferson Jaramillo Marín examines the "committee of *violentólogos*," as the commission came to be known, as a crucial contributor to understanding the complexity of extra-state violence during the 1980s.

Some more recent studies of extra-state violence in the 1980s, however, have been critical of the committee of *violentólogos*' findings. For example, James Henderson's work, *Víctima de la globalización: La historia de cómo el narcotráfico destruyó la paz en Colombia*, argues that works published in the 1970s and 1980s on Colombian violence reflected a particular historical tradition that he calls the "*Nueva Historia de Colombia*." Writers from this period—he specifically cites the committee of *violentólogos*—were profoundly influenced by Leftist ideology as a result of having

³⁵ Martz, *The Politics of Clientelism*.

³⁶ Jefferson Jaramillo Marín, *Pasados y presentes de la violencia en Colombia: Estudio sobre las comisiones de investigación (1958-2011)* (Bogotá: Editorial Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2014), 27.

watched the success of the Cuban Revolution during their youth and coming of age during the National Front period in Colombia. Leftist ideology predisposed the academic community disproportionately to blame internal causes, like the inequality and exclusionism of the National Front, for the violent nature of Colombian society in the 1980s.³⁷ In contrast, his somewhat convoluted analysis places the blame squarely on the rise of drug trade. My thesis, in part, aims to parse through these two views on Colombian violence.

Given the importance of drug trafficking to Colombia's recent history, it is not surprising that various aspects of the drug trade's impact on Colombian society have been studied extensively. Many *violentólogos* turned their attention to examining the proliferation of drug violence, bringing with them the *Nueva Historia* framework that influenced their study of generalized violence. These authors include Álvaro Camacho Guizado, a member of Barco's commission whose later work on drug trafficking is prolific and extensive enough to fill a four hundred-page tome entitled *El narcotráfico en la sociedad colombiana*.³⁸ Also significant is Francisco Thoumi's 1995 analysis of the political economy of the illegal drugs industry. Thoumi introduces an institutionalist model for understanding the development of the illegal drug trade in Colombia, explaining both how the country's historical political economy contributed to the emergence of the trade, and vice versa.³⁹ The drug trade's transformation of the city of Medellín has inspired particular attention to regional studies of Antioquia. Mary Roldán's "Colombia: Cocaine and the Miracle of Modernity in Medellín" provides an excellent

³⁷ Henderson, *Víctima de la globalización*, 27.

³⁸ Camacho Guizado, *El narcotráfico en la sociedad colombiana*.

³⁹ Thoumi, *Political Economy and Illegal Drugs in Colombia*.

example of a regional history of the drug trade.⁴⁰ Alonso Salazar's interviews with Medellín's child assassins in *Born to Die in Medellín* offers an intimate study of the mafia's influence on Medellín's youth in the 1990s.⁴¹

These works greatly inform a historical perspective of the drug trade, but the majority of them fall into the fields of sociology or political economy. Furthermore, since many were published in the late 1980s and early 1990s during the height of the mafia's violence against the state, they lack the critical perspective of historical analysis. The scholars of those decades are now being supplanted by a new generation of drug scholars offering new analyses of the drug trade informed by comparisons with the more recent Mexican trafficking organizations. Gustavo Duncán's work, *Más que plata y plomo: El poder político del narcotráfico en Colombia y México* exemplifies this new approach. His study of the mafia's impact in Mexico and Colombia moves beyond an analysis of its violence to explain how mafias create parallel institutions that rival those of the state to maintain control over significant sectors of the population.⁴² Recent works related to drug policy also reflect a shift in the Latin American debate over drug policy. The failure of the United States-led War on Drugs has prompted a movement advocating a different approach to drug policy, which has exerted substantial influence on recent publications by Colombian authors. For example, Daniel Mejía and Alejandro Gaviria Uribe's work, *Políticas antidroga en Colombia: Éxitos, fracasos, y extravíos*, features a prologue written by former Colombian president César Gaviria Trujillo (1990-1994), a leader in

⁴⁰ Roldán, "Colombia: Cocaine and the Miracle of Modernity in Medellín."

⁴¹ Alonso Salazar J., *Born to Die in Medellín*, trans. Nick Caistor (London: Latin America Bureau, 1992).

⁴² Gustavo Duncán, *Más que plata o plomo: el poder político del narcotráfico en Colombia y México* (Bogotá: Debate, 2014).

the new drug policy movement.⁴³ From a historiographical point of view, however, these works present shortcomings similar to the earlier generation of drug studies; the majority of these scholars come from the fields of sociology, politics, and economics.

The popular allure of the 1980s generation of drug traffickers' rags-to-riches personal narratives encouraged a proliferation of journalistic pieces, memoirs, biographies that aim to paint a more personal image of the trade. For example, Guy Gugliotta and Jeff Leen's 1990 book of pop journalism, *Kings of Cocaine*, focuses heavily on the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency's (DEA) role in chasing almost caricatured figures of Pablo Escobar, Carlos Lehder, and the Ochoa family.⁴⁴ Alonso Salazar's *La parábola de Pablo: Auge y caída de un gran capo del narcotráfico*, provides a more balanced portrait of the famed drug-lord, and is widely regarded as one of the better biographies available.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, despite the abundance of literature on the drug trade and its associated violence, serious historical analysis and archival research has only recently been applied to studies of the Latin American drug trade. In the context of Colombian history, Lina Britto's recent work on the marijuana boom of the 1970s serves as a singular notable exception.⁴⁶ In their introduction to the February 2015 *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Paul Gootenberg, the leading historian of cocaine in the Andean region, and Isaac Campos, a prominent historian of illicit drugs in modern Mexico, call for the contextualization of drugs within broader Latin American histories to

⁴³ Alejandro Gaviria Uribe and Daniel Mejía Londoño, *Políticas antidroga en Colombia: éxitos, fracasos y extravíos* (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2011).

⁴⁴ Guy Gugliotta and Jeff Leen, *Kings of Cocaine* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990).

⁴⁵ Alonso Salazar J., *La parábola de Pablo: Auge y caída de un gran capo del narcotráfico* (Bogotá: Planeta Colombiana Editorial, S.A., 2001).

⁴⁶ Britto, "Hurricane Winds."

“help restore a balanced sense of historical agency and interaction instead of one-sided blame” that pits U.S. consumers against Latin American suppliers. The formation of drug policy and perceptions toward specific drugs reflect longer processes than have been previously studied, and “can be productively woven into the largest contexts and problems of Latin American history.”⁴⁷ This thesis aims to do just that: weave the narrative of the drug mafia and Colombian drug policy into an analysis of Betancur’s attempts to address Colombia’s longstanding issues of political exclusion and violence.

This thesis aims also to fill an important gap by extending the periodization of the drug narrative in Colombia. Because violence against the state in Colombia reached its peak after Betancur’s presidency, traditional drug narratives tend to begin their story with a passing description of Lara’s assassination, but reserve the majority of their analysis for the latter half of the 1980s and early 1990s. This is significant because this later periodization requires the consideration of an important external actor in formulating Colombian drug policy: the U.S. government. Scholars of the era, therefore, tend to assign primary agency in Colombian drug policy formation to the United States. For example, Leal Buitrago argues that the Colombian government exerted little autonomy in forming its policies related to drug trafficking. Instead, official government policies “mirrored” U.S. initiatives, reflecting U.S. interests and control over the region.⁴⁸ However, such a view ignores the influence of both Colombian domestic politics and attitudes toward illicit drug consumption on Colombian drug policy. By focusing on the period before Lara’s death prompted Colombia’s “war on drugs,” this thesis examines

⁴⁷ Paul Gootenberg and Isaac Campos, “Toward a New Drug History of Latin America: A Research Frontier at the Center of Debates,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 95, no. 1 (February 2015): 1, doi:10.1215/00182168-2836796.

⁴⁸ Buitrago, “Estabilidad macroeconómica e institucional y violencia crónica.”

how Colombia's attitude toward drugs differed from the United States through much of its history. Furthermore, situating the Colombian government's response to the drug mafia in the context of other threats to its political legitimacy during Betancur's presidency, particularly the foundering peace process, introduces alternative motivations for Colombian drug policy that sometimes directly challenged U.S. interests.

A Note on Sources and Structure

By focusing on Lara's murder, this thesis approaches Betancur's presidency and Colombian drug policy with a domestic lens. As a result, most of the primary source materials are those that I collected from archives over a two-month period in Bogotá and Medellín. These archives can be classified in three broad categories: 1.) sources produced by Betancur's administration include both published speeches from the Imprenta Nacional accessed at the Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, as well as documents and letters intended for internal review by Betancur's peace commission, which I obtained from the Departamento Administrativo de la República de Colombia; 2.) personal papers from the politician Luis Carlos Galán, Lara's closest political ally, that offer insight into Lara's political movement, the New Liberalism (*Nuevo Liberalismo*) branch of the Liberal Party; 3.) letters and personal papers from the human rights activist Hector Abad Gómez that monitor instances of political violence in Antioquia and the Medio Magdalena region under Betancur's administration. Additionally, I collected articles from numerous national and local publications, including *Cromos*, *La Revista Javeriana*, and *Medellín Cívico*. *Medellín Cívico* is a unique source: a monthly paper founded and owned by Pablo Escobar's uncle, Hernando Gaviria, it provided an important platform for Escobar to build his political career from 1978 to the late 1980s. Thus, it offers a useful medium to

chart the trafficker's rise in Antioquia, and in later national politics. These periodicals are supplemented by the leading publications *El Tiempo* and *Semana*, available digitized online, and articles from various Colombian news media reprinted in monthly issues of *Actualidad Colombiana*, a compilation of the country's most salient news stories.

Despite my efforts to incorporate a wide range of sources on a variety of topics, my documentation suffers a crucial gap. The massive amount of archival documentation of Betancur's peace process and political violence is not matched by easy access to archives related to the drug mafia. It is possible to formulate different hypotheses for the inaccessibility of these documents—lack of sufficient public pressure to release the documents, threats to Colombian national security, government unwillingness to admit complicity in the trade, or simple inept accounting among various government archives—any of which is plausible or at least partially so. Perhaps, this explains the dearth of vigorous historical archival work on the subject. The information gap is a significant shortfall that precludes certain knowledge of what Betancur, Lara, or anyone else in Betancur's administration knew about the mafia at any given time. It thus leaves us uncertain about the motivation behind certain drug policies. It is possible, however, to at least partially fill the gap with a combination of documents from the National Security Archive's collection on Colombia, news archives, *Medellín Cívico*, and biographies and autobiographies about and by traffickers' relatives and members of Betancur's administration. No one of these sources taken on its own can serve as a replacement for government archives—U.S. sources may exaggerate the threat from the drug trade, while biographies and retrospective works by members of Betancur's administration might present a biased perspective—nevertheless, there is value in these accounts. I hope that

by focusing on how the Colombian public's perception of the drug trade influenced Betancur's policy, rather than inside information on the drug trade, I will mitigate this shortcoming.

Chapter One discusses the expectations and challenges that Betancur's administration faced in its first two years. I begin by explaining how Betancur made the peace process with *guerrilla* groups the defining feature of his presidency. Next, I introduce the various actors in Betancur's peace process and the complicated relationship between them to examine how the president's program of peace often created more problems than solutions. Chapter Two discusses the rise of the cocaine mafia in Colombia and the disastrous consequences of the mafia's attempt to break into the political elite class. I begin by tracing the evolution of the Latin American cocaine trafficking network and explain how the drug mafia consolidated its financial and social power in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The remainder of the chapter discusses how traffickers' attempt to enter the political elite eventually destroyed the system to which they sought access. Finally, in Chapter Three I examine how Betancur's presidency fundamentally changed Colombian drug policy, not only in relation to drug trafficking, but also in relation to attitudes toward drug consumption. Rodrigo Lara Bonilla serves as the link between these three chapters. He simultaneously represented Betancur's hope for political reform and the mafia's biggest obstacle to gaining acceptance in the political system. His assassination transformed Colombia's relationship with drugs, those who traffic them, and violence more generally. Colombia continues to grapple with the ramifications of his death today.

CHAPTER ONE

POLITICS OF PEACE, POLITICS OF VIOLENCE

“*¡Sí se puede!*”—“It can be done!”—was the campaign slogan that helped rocket Betancur to the presidency in 1982. Social welfare programs, political reform, and, most importantly, national peace—he promised were all within reach. With the public’s support, he would reorient the government to serve its people and break the country’s cycle of elite-driven rule. With those assertions, Betancur gave the Colombian people a sense of optimism and trust in a presidential candidate that had not existed in years. That hope, however, created expectations for Betancur’s presidency far beyond what he would eventually live up to.

This chapter examines the disconnect between the sense of hope that Betancur fostered at the start of his presidency and the stark reality of Colombian violence in order to provide the political context of Lara’s assassination. It begins with a discussion of Betancur’s election and how the framing of his campaign as a national, rather than partisan, movement invigorated the electorate on a scale unseen in recent Colombian politics. The president’s inaugural address, this chapter explains, would explicitly link the public’s optimistic expectations for Betancur’s project of national peace. Rather than focusing on the mechanics of Betancur’s peace process, this chapter focuses on the violence that Betancur’s plan hoped to address. Rhetoric and legislation could only do so much to move the country toward peace; the actual implementation of the president’s policies relied on the cooperation of a complex, interrelated set of actors. The second half of this chapter looks specifically at the emergence, activities of, and government response

to MAS, a paramilitary organization, to illustrate the difficulty of achieving such cooperation.

“The Non-Conformist Colombia Needs”

Figure 2: Album cover graphic of a collection of songs from Betancur’s 1982 presidential campaign.¹

In 1982, Betancur’s presidency promised the Colombian people a new era of politics that would overhaul not only the political class, but also Colombian society more generally. In his third attempt at the presidency, Betancur’s 1982 campaign eschewed traditional party politics by naming his program the “Movimiento Nacional” and

¹ Reediletante, *Disco Campaña Belisario Betancur 1982 contra-portada*, photo, September 28, 2008, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/8069053@N08/2895677455/>.

promised to create a “democratic opening” to dissolve the National Front’s legacy of exclusivity. Betancur designed his platform as a reversal of the past twenty years of Colombia’s political history, rather than as a program with a concrete agenda. The crux of Betancur’s platform, nevertheless, rested on the reincorporation of the “*pueblo*” into the political system as a means of restoring the political system as a true representative democracy.² The first step in this plan was to break away from the National Front’s reliance on party politics. Although he was the Conservative Party’s official candidate, Betancur framed his *Movimiento Nacional* as an option divorced from the traditional Liberal/Conservative dichotomy. He argued that Colombia’s most pressing problems—declining morality, lack of social mobility, and the threat of subversion—were national issues, “neither Conservative nor Liberal,” that could only be solved with his keen attention to the voice of the whole nation. His victory, he proclaimed, would not be his own but rather the victory of “his compatriots who put the interest of the *patria* [motherland] over party interests, over suspicion and indifference, to resume a more just *patria*, to give it back the dignity that had been snatched away [by previous politics].”³

Betancur’s substitution of sectarian tactics with nationalist discourse represented a significant break from the usual Colombian political rhetoric. According to an analysis by political economists Francisco Thoumi and Rensselaer W. Lee, Colombia did not have a strong tradition of nationalism, due, at least in part, to the country’s rugged geography. The difficulty of travel between regional centers encouraged the formation of a decentralized state. In the absence of a strong central government, Colombians identified

² “*Pueblo*” in this instance roughly translates to working-class or general public.

³ “Habla Belisario Betancur: Problemas del país no son conservadores ni liberales,” *El Tiempo*, March 31, 1982, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, March 1982, 12.

with the political party of their local leaders, thus forming discreet regional, rather than national, identities.⁴ Betancur's emphasis on the *patria* rather than a party encouraged a complete reimagining of the Colombian state to match his platform of political reform. Betancur's nationalist rhetoric also served as a savvy political tactic. As the political scientist Harvey Kline notes, Conservative leaders in the post-National Front period realized that as the minority party, they were "better advised to play down their party and pitch their campaigns to something more 'national,'" thereby avoiding sectarian tactics that favored the Liberal majority.⁵ By pitching his campaign directly to the "skeptics, uncommitted, and disenchanted" of an increasingly large class of unaffiliated Colombian voters, Betancur could potentially overcome the Conservative Party's numerical disadvantage among the electorate.⁶

It is important to note that Betancur was neither the first, nor the only politician advocating an overhaul of Colombian politics. For example, Carlos Lleras Restrepo, a prominent leader in the Liberal Party, also launched harsh criticisms of the political system during his run for the 1978 Liberal candidacy. However, one could argue that Lleras represented a flawed spokesperson for political reform, as he himself had served as president during the National Front period (1966-1970). Betancur's background, on the other hand, lent him more credibility. Born in a small town in Antioquia as one of the twenty-two children of a muleteer, Betancur's upbringing distinguished him from the insular political elite. Recognizing this advantage, Betancur emphasized this distinction

⁴ Rensselaer W. Lee III and Francisco E. Thoumi, "Drugs and Democracy in Colombia," in *Menace to Society: Political-Criminal Collaboration Around the World*, ed. Roy Godson (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2003), 74.

⁵ Kline, "From Rural to Urban Society," 35.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

throughout his campaign in an effort to legitimate both his conviction to change the conduct of Colombian politics and his commitment to social reforms. For example, he intentionally stressed his austere, *paisa* lifestyle as a contrast to the perceived corruption of the political class.⁷ Similarly, he used personal stories of the deaths of seventeen of his siblings in childhood from “a common disease in Latin America called underdevelopment” to illustrate his commitment to specific social policies, like low-cost housing.⁸ Moreover, Betancur’s nationalism provided an advantage over the other alternative to the traditional parties in the 1982 election—the New Liberalism movement. Led by the fiery Luis Carlos Galán, this offshoot of the Liberal Party offered an option for political reform by openly criticizing the corruption and clientelism of the Liberal elite. Its platform, however, rested primarily on reforms within the Liberal Party, and thus did not have the national appeal of Betancur’s movement.⁹

While Betancur’s social programs initially captured Colombians’ attention, the repressive nature of the administration of Betancur’s predecessor, Julio César Turbay Ayala, reinforced the *Movimiento Nacional*’s appeal to the general Colombian public. In fact, the celebrated historian of Colombia Malcolm Deas cites Betancur’s position as the “opposition or ‘noncontinuist’ candidate” at the end of Turbay’s administration as the

⁷ Deas, “The Troubled Course of Colombian Peacemaking,” 646. Sander’s 1983 profile on Betancur describes the President’s “*ritmo paisa*” or Antioquian rhythm. Betancur’s invocation of a “*paisa*” identity is significant. The term “*paisa*” refers to Colombians from Betancur’s home region of Antioquia. The *paisa* stereotype connotes a hard-working, traditional, religious character—ideal qualities for a leader in a country marked by social upheaval. Thomas G. Sanders, “Colombia, Betancur, and the Challenge of 1984,” *UFSI Reports*, South America, no. 24 (1983): 1.

⁸ “El hijo del arriero.”

⁹ Kline, “From Rural to Urban Society,” 35.

primary force behind Betancur's massive popularity.¹⁰ Turbay's administration had implemented severe restrictions on civil rights, including the declaration of a nationwide state of siege in an attempt to control political violence by armed *guerrilla* groups. Use of the state of siege statute exacerbated the traditional political system's legacy of repression. Among other measures, it allowed the president to rule by decree and subjected civilians accused of political crimes to judgment by military tribunals.¹¹ Due to the restrictive measures of the statute, the state of siege became widely associated with a certain "psychological environment" of fear among the Colombian populace. Meanwhile, it never actually achieved the submission of the *guerrilla* groups. *Guerrilla* violence, in fact, increased during Turbay's presidency.¹² The failure of Turbay's policy combined with the growing strength of *guerrilla* groups ensured that the issue of peace would take a central role in the 1982 election. In contrast to both Turbay and the traditional Conservative stance on subversion, Betancur rejected military-focused programs. The *guerrillas'* concerns, he argued needed to be handled politically in order to achieve peace; further violence was not the solution to *guerrilla* violence. Instead, Betancur tied peace to his national program of political opening and to social programs, promising to bring peace with tangible improvements in the areas of affordable housing, university education, and cultural reforms of "morality and peace with social justice."¹³ For the Colombian public, Betancur's proposal of social policies of inclusion to confront "subversion" apparently

¹⁰ Deas, "The Troubled Course of Colombian Peacemaking," 645.

¹¹ See Martz's chapter, "Traditionalism and Repression: Turbay (1978-1982)" for a full description of Turbay's policies. Martz, *The Politics of Clientelism*, 185-208.

¹² "Muerte anunciada," *Semana*, June 4, 1984.

¹³ Socorro Ramírez V. and Luis Alberto Restrepo, *Actores en el conflicto por la paz: El proceso de paz durante el gobierno de Belisario Betancur (1982-1986)* (Bogotá: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1988), 54.

quelled the immediate issue of *guerrilla* violence and insecurity while rebuilding trust in Colombia's populist institutions.¹⁴

Most historiographical narratives attribute Betancur's electoral victory to a split in the Liberal Party between two candidates: former president López Michelsen representing the traditional Liberals and Galán, the New Liberalism candidate. Following this narrative, historians draw comparisons between the 1982 election and the elections of 1930 and 1946, when control shifted from one party to another because of a split ticket. But, this explanation implies that Betancur's victory represented a straightforward Conservative win. In fact, his *Movimiento Nacional* drew on support from voters of both parties, the first instance of a candidate appealing across party lines. An analysis of the electoral results supports this point. The election inspired the biggest voter turnout seen in years, "demolishing," as *Semana*, described, "the traditional myth of an apathetic and abstentionist Colombian electorate." Even more importantly, it upset historical voting patterns that reflected geographic party distribution. Liberal strongholds, such as the coastal region and urban areas broke with decades of traditional voting behaviors by voting for Betancur. To many Colombians' surprise, Betancur carried "bastion[s] of Liberalism," such as Barranquilla, which López Michelsen had dominated before the election; Bogotá, which teemed with Galán supporters; along with Cali, Medellín, and Cartagena.¹⁵ By comparing official vote totals reported by the periodical *Actualidad Colombiana*, it is clear that Betancur also succeeded in securing the unaffiliated vote. Though Liberals split the vote between López Michelsen and Galán, both candidates combined received only around 350,000 more votes than Betancur, even though Liberals

¹⁴ Augusto Ramirez Ocampo, "Si se puede, no se puede," *Semana*, April 6, 1982.

¹⁵ "Un domingo que cambió muchas cosas," *Semana*, June 28, 1982.

greatly outnumbered Conservatives among the electorate.¹⁶ An article published after Betancur's victory summarized the election succinctly: "it is the triumph of a man, not a party."¹⁷ Betancur offered an alternate explanation: "[this election] is not a triumph for any sectarian affiliation, but rather the triumph for the national flag."¹⁸

The election offered Colombians a new sense of hope. The Conservative press heralded Betancur as an agent of "national regeneration," despite his platform's distance from that of their party.¹⁹ The reference was significant, as it likened Betancur to the great, nineteenth-century leader Rafael Nuñez, whose "Regeneration" program aimed to unify Colombia under the Constitution of 1886—which remained in effect a hundred years later.²⁰ Indicative of the bipartisan nature of his support, Liberal opinion-makers also noted the significance of Betancur's victory, but for a different reason. Prominent journalist Enrique Santos Calderón noted that, "few times in the past has a president awoken such a national feeling of optimism."²¹ Betancur's election offered hope beyond what he offered as an individual, however. The peaceful transition from one party to another and the success of the electoral process inspired optimism for the future of Colombia's political system. As *Semana* noted, "the displacement of votes from one party to the other is a phenomenon of democracies more advanced than ours."²² Further,

¹⁶ Vote totals are: Betancur, 3,189,687; López Michelsen, 2,797,786; Galán, 746,024 "Política," *Actualidad Colombiana*, May 1982, 1.

¹⁷ "Un domingo que cambió muchas cosas."

¹⁸ Beatriz López de Barcha, "Betancur proclama la victoria," *El Tiempo*, May 31, 1982, sec. 1B.

¹⁹ "La regeneración nacional," *El Siglo*, August 22, 1982, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, August, 1982, 9.

²⁰ Palacios, *Between Legitimacy and Violence*, 27-28.

²¹ Enrique Santos Calderón, "Ojalá se pudiera," *El Tiempo*, August 22, 1982, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, August, 1982, 15-16.

²² "Un domingo que cambió muchas cosas."

in Betancur's words, the election not only served to confirm Colombia's democratic process to the Colombian people, but also to the international community. "Colombia has demonstrated to the world," he announced at his inauguration, "its truly democratic and republican government exists."²³ This point was significant, as truly democratic elections at the time were an anomaly in Latin America, a region beset by coups and military regimes and with four major countries—Brazil, Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay—still under military rule.

Betancur's political appointments in the month leading up to his inauguration buoyed the public's optimism, as Betancur passed his first test of toeing the line between appeasing his political opponents and accomplishing his campaign promises of reform. In keeping with political tradition from the National Front period, Betancur announced that his cabinet would comply with the controversial constitutional Article 120 by maintaining parity between Liberals and Conservatives in his cabinet.²⁴ In keeping with his reformist vision, however, his appointments favored the new, similarly minded generation of Liberals associated with Carlos Lleras Restrepo or New Liberalism. Notably, Betancur also acknowledged his campaign's promise to improve the status of Colombian women in society. Betancur appointed women to all vice-minister positions.²⁵ He appointed Liberals to the highest positions – Minister of Government, attorney general, and Minister of Justice – thus managing to appease both factions of the bitterly

²³ "Anuncia Betancur: Habrá un gabinete paritario," *El Tiempo*, July 15, 1982, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, July, 1982, 5.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Sanders, "Colombia, Betancur, and the Challenge of 1984," 3.

split Liberal Party.²⁶ For now, Betancur had seemingly cleared the hurdle of political compromise.

Despite the president elect's popular support, a thread of nervous anticipation remained in the background. Press coverage that celebrated Betancur's election simultaneously warned that Betancur's great triumph brought great risk with its accomplishment. The country's optimism and Betancur's promises set high expectations for his administration to make a significant impact on the lives of all Colombians. If Betancur succeeded, *Semana* declared, he would be "the spearhead of a new force that could alter our traditional political equation." On the other hand, his failure would relegate his election "to just a parenthesis" within Colombia's political history.²⁷ From his first few moments in office, Betancur made clear exactly what would determine the success of his legacy: whether he achieved national peace. Success in this arena, however, would depend on the cooperation of actors and political dynamics out of Betancur's control.

Redefining the *Guerrilla*

On August 7, 1982, Betancur arrived in the *Salón Elíptico* of the National Capitol building in central Bogotá to assume his place as the 26th president of the Republic of Colombia. Speaking in front of Congress, the president outlined his plan for peace as the guiding light for his presidency:

I raise a white flag of peace as an offering to all of my compatriots. I offer my hand to the rebels so they may fully exercise their rights within the comprehensive framework of the decisions made by this Congress. I propose

²⁶ Jesús Medina, "Asume Betancur y la 'rebelión azul,'" *El Tiempo*, August 8, 1982, sec. 4B.

²⁷ "Un domingo que cambió muchas cosas."

peace for all my fellow countrymen without distinction: I devote myself to this task because we need to nurture this Colombian peace as a tree, whose broad branches connect the entire national family.²⁸

Then, for the first time in Colombian history, the president walked outside to address the tens of thousand of people from all walks of life who had gathered in the Plaza de Bolívar to celebrate the inauguration. “This is a special and unforgettable moment,” Betancur boomed, “first of all because it constitutes the close of a victorious crusade to restore the *pueblo* as the rulers of their own destinies.” He asked explicitly for cooperation in realizing his campaign promises and called his address a manifestation of humility, reiterating the limits of his individual capacity in the face of the magnitude of the country’s problems. “I ask for the continued support of God and the *pueblo*, without whose vigilance and approval,” he warned, “I will be unable to realize the reforms I have committed myself to.”

The public listened with rapt attention to Betancur’s exhortations, but as he began to explicitly explain his vision of peace as his primary goal, it became clear that the president’s inaugural address would shatter more than just the struggling performance of politics in Colombia.²⁹ Echoing his presentation to Congress, Betancur emphasized his plans for peace as the primary building block of his administration’s reforms. As he had during his campaign, Betancur articulated that this peace relied on the reincorporation of *guerrillas* into the formal social system: “I have centered my national campaign and its

²⁸ “Progreso con equidad reclama B.B.,” *El Tiempo*, August 8, 1982, sec. 3B

²⁹ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine Betancur’s peace process in a comprehensive manner, but the historiography of peace during this period is replete with excellent studies. Socorro Ramírez and Luis Alberto Restrepo’s 1988 account of Betancur’s peace process offers a detailed and remarkably neutral account of Betancur’s administration. Alternatively, Steven Dudley, an U.S. journalist provides insights into the *guerrillas*’ perspective. Ramírez V. and Restrepo, *Actores en el conflicto por la paz*; Dudley, *Walking Ghosts*.

goal around [Colombia's] biggest anxiety: a peace without retaliations or revenge; a peace that incorporates all Colombians into civic activities and gives everyone the possibility to achieve economic and social fulfillment, to participate in the democratic life [of the country]..."³⁰

The language Betancur used to talk about the *guerrillas* in his inaugural address was not merely a rhetorical tool. Rather, it represented the president's thoughtful consideration of the failures of previous administrations to control the *guerrillas* through punitive measures. As he would describe later, his first action was to consider the motives of the Leftist groups' members rather than the manifestations of violence. "The first thing I did was ask—why are the *guerrillas* going to the mountains?" he recalled. "So many young people—from respectable families, universities, professors—went to join them. Why did they go?" He found that the international communist ideology formally promoted by many *guerilla* groups did not play a large role in the armed movements' appeal. Individual *guerrillas* were motivated almost exclusively by factors pertaining to the unequal political and social development within Colombia. "Objective issues," such as social inequality and the lack of social infrastructure like schools and hospitals or "subjective issues," the feeling of not having a voice to affect change in their communities, served to encourage Colombians to join armed rebel groups. With that in mind, Betancur explained:

I had the revelation that to adequately attend to the problem of subversion, I had to address these objective issues. Not with temporary decrees, but with legislative reform that would give the campesinos and students the unequivocal feeling that the government was not robbing their money, but applying it to serve them [...]

³⁰ "“El pueblo es mi fiador,”” *El Tiempo*, August 8, 1982, sec. 3B.

To address subjective issues, talk to them, give them back the power of their words [...] create commissions for real dialogue.³¹

This approach stood in stark contrast to the precedent Turbay had set. Turbay's invocation of the state of siege, mentioned earlier, reflected his adoption of a general "anti-subversive military ideology." Viewing the Colombian *guerrilla* movement as part of the international Cold War struggle against Communism, he equated *guerrilla* violence with terrorism, consequentially stripping the armed groups of any political legitimacy in order to justify his policy of militarization. "War zones, arbitrary and institutionalized torture, and a military obsession to annihilate the *guerrillas*," became the government's primary tactics to control the threat of *guerrilla* violence, John Martz describes.³² "Subversive elements," as the state of siege statute called them, were the excuse Turbay's government needed to try thousands of people accused of participating in or supporting political violence under military tribunal. A wide range of actions fell within the rubric of political violence, from murder and kidnappings to demonstrations and strikes.³³ Turbay's heavy-handed approach, however, coincided with a worsening of the *guerrilla* situation rather than the elimination of the armed threat.

According to Socorro Ramírez, a member of Betancur's peace commission, and Luis Alberto Restrepo, a professor of political studies at the National University, Betancur's approach represented a radical change in how the government framed the threat of armed *guerrilla* groups.³⁴ First, the identification of *guerrilla* claims with domestic issues of inequality and exclusion allowed for the separation of Colombia's

³¹ Belisario Betancur, interviewed by author, Bogotá, August 13, 2015.

³² Martz, *The Politics of Clientelism*, 194.

³³ Ibid., 190.

³⁴ Ramírez V. and Restrepo, *Actores en el conflicto por la paz*, 64.

guerrilla movements from the high stakes of the Cold War. This allowed Betancur more leeway in how he could approach *guerrilla* violence and precluded the escalation of the conflict through international involvement; one only had to look as far as El Salvador or Nicaragua to see how U.S involvement, in particular, escalated domestic conflicts in Latin America. Second, Betancur's answer to the *guerrillas*' objective motivations through social programming was significant in that it recognized the groups' political claims as legitimate.

However bringing the *guerrillas* in from the mountains and delivering these social programs required not just the recognition of the groups' claims as legitimate, but also the ability to negotiate. To do this, Betancur needed to reinstate the armed groups' status as political actors because Turbay's designation of them as terrorist groups had left no room for negotiation. Betancur did this by explicitly separating the *guerrillas*' political motivations from their resort to violence. He called for "a peace to serve as the foundation for our collective security, that would revive social harmony and justice, *that would allow us to draw a line between political confrontation diverted from its normal course and any of the forms of crime* [that deviation would cause its actors to commit]."³⁵ Betancur could more easily negotiate with political activists than with terrorist, and for this reason, the distinction was crucial.

Betancur's reorientation of the government's approach to *guerrilla* groups offered to change the tone of the groups' relationship with the government. In September, Dr. Ramiro Lucio Escobar, a representative of the M-19, arrived uninvited to a televised conference on the peace process that the Minister of Government had organized with

³⁵ Emphasis added "“El pueblo es mi fiador.”"

leaders from various mainstream political parties. In front of shocked government officials and bright camera lights, Lucio spoke not of the M-19's usual grievances with the government, but instead used his moment to express the group's satisfaction with Betancur. He applauded the president's commitment to a political solution for peace and further proclaimed, "we are convinced that the country will support these initiatives without the need for a miracle."³⁶ Lucio's declaration, however, would prove to be overly optimistic. The implementation of Betancur's plan for peace would face significant challenges, particularly as his distinction between political and criminal violence confronted the complicated relationships among the variety of Colombia's belligerent forces.

A New Violent Actor

Less than two weeks after Betancur's monumental inaugural address, the president faced his first challenge to establishing peace. Alberto Arturo Alava Montenegro, lawyer and professor at the National University in Bogotá, was assassinated outside the campus gates. The murder prompted a national discussion about the how the new president would respond to the act of brazen political violence. Specifically, the debate the assassination sparked over the definition of political crimes and amnesty illuminated the difficulty Betancur that faced in balancing opposing interests during the peace process.

Alava knew that he was a marked man. A prominent lawyer who defended *guerrillas* accused of political crimes, he had been arrested multiple times during

³⁶ It is important to note that not all *guerrilla* groups reacted in the same way, nor were opinions within each group unanimous. "¿Adios a las armas?," *Semana*, September 27, 1982.

Turbay's presidency under suspicion of membership in the National Liberation Army (ELN; *Ejército de Liberación Nacional*).³⁷ The professor, beloved by his students and colleagues at the National University's law school, received scores of death threats that eventually him to apply for a Canadian visa in order to flee the country with his family. On the morning of August 21, 1982, Alava was still awaiting word of the visa's approval. Following his daily routine, Alava embarked on his morning stroll around the University grounds. He had just crossed the street from his house, located adjacent to the University, to buy his usual newspaper and breakfast of *pan de leche* when a young man, about twenty-two years of age, approached him and fired two bullets into his body. Alava died instantly.

News of the assassination spread quickly across the country, with the professor's death immediately becoming a political issue. Horrified students dragged Alava's corpse into the University's auditorium for an impromptu memorial. There, they shrouded his body in flags representing the University, ELN, M-19, FARC, and the national tricolor, rendering his body a political symbol. A few days later, Alfredo Vásquez Carrizosa, the president of Colombia's Permanent Committee for the Defense of Human Rights (*Comité Permanente para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos*) led Alava's funeral procession with over 15,000 people in attendance.³⁸ The death threats Alava received prior to his murder left little doubt regarding who had orchestrated the violent act: Death to Kidnappers (MAS; *Muerte a Secuestradores*), a new armed actor in Colombian violence.

³⁷ "ELN mató al profesor Alava, dice el Ejército," *El Tiempo*, August 24, 1982, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, August 1982, 29.

³⁸ "Paramilitares: ejército en las sombras," *Semana*, September 27, 1982.

MAS emerged in late 1981 as a counter-threat to Colombian *guerrilla* violence. Its primary objective, which it announced by contracting a plane to drop hundreds of leaflets over a professional soccer match in Cali, was to address in a “direct form” the *guerrilla* groups’ use of kidnapping as a way to finance their operations. Specifically, MAS made its first mission to force the liberation of Marta Nieves Ochoa, the younger sister of the powerful drug smuggling Ochoa clan who had been kidnapped by the M-19.³⁹ MAS retaliated against the M-19 by targeting its members and their families with death threats and kidnappings, but MAS’s victim pool quickly expanded to include anyone with suspected ties to Leftist groups. The resulting rash of violence inspired a generalized sense of terror around the country, but was met by the Turbay administration with passive annoyance if not tacit acceptance.⁴⁰ The government commissioned studies to describe the actions of the paramilitary group, but neglected to propose or fund initiatives to dismantle it.⁴¹ This is perhaps unsurprising given that MAS’s violence against subversive groups complemented Turbay’s authorized military offensive.

The Colombian public, meanwhile, saw the rise of MAS as a threat not just to the *guerrillas*, but also to society in general. MAS’s attacks on Leftist groups signaled increasing “immorality” in the country, as Colombians who abandoned institutional justice in favor of vigilantism enjoyed impunity. A writer for one of Colombia’s leading newspapers, *El Espectador*, warned that “right-minded Colombians cannot accept

³⁹ It was common knowledge that MAS had been founded and financed by a group of Colombia's most prominent drug traffickers as a direct response to Marta Nieves's kidnapping. The link between the drug mafia and MAS, however, would not play a notable in the public discussion of MAS between 1982 and 1983. The reason for this will be explained in Chapter 2. “El gobierno, sólo espectador ante el MAS,” *El Mundo*, January 12, 1982, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, January, 1982, 14.

⁴⁰ Robin Kirk, *More Terrible than Death*, 106.

⁴¹ “El gobierno, sólo espectador ante el MAS.”

MAS—a disgrace for the country—without consequences. Colombia will become what it has [recently] been—a kingdom of impunity, cruelty, and shamelessness.”⁴² Aside from MAS’s violent tactics, the public also feared what the emergence of the paramilitary group signaled for the country’s future. The prospect of paramilitary groups with implicit government support generated anxiety for Colombians as they considered the developments in other Latin American countries. Death squads supported or created by the government terrorized the citizenry of countries such as Argentina, Chile, and El Salvador. Combined with Turbay’s reliance on the state of siege statute, MAS’s terror threatened to propel Colombia toward the fate of its Latin American neighbors. The government’s inability to subdue the *guerrilla* groups, however, complicated the public’s condemnation of MAS. While the public opposed MAS as an organization, many sympathized with its mission given the scale of kidnappings and extortion by *guerrilla* groups in the early 1980s.

As MAS attempted to address the issue of kidnappings through extrajudicial means, Betancur’s peace process brought the issue to the fore politically. In one of his first actions as president, Betancur proposed a general amnesty law to pardon *guerrillas* convicted of political crimes and kick-start the process of peace negotiations.⁴³ After Betancur’s announcement, Colombians wondered how far the president would go in reversing Turbay’s legacy. The president’s peace commission, which he had assembled immediately following his August inauguration, quickly agreed that protests, strikes, sedition and rebellion, actions criminalized under Turbay’s administration, would be

⁴² “El MAS o la vergüenza estéril,” *El Espectador*, January 19, 1982, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, January 1982, 16.

⁴³ Ramírez V. and Restrepo, *Actores en el conflicto por la paz*, 89.

included under the 1982 amnesty law, but it remained unclear how Betancur would treat *delitos conexos*—crimes like kidnapping or homicide that *guerrillas* had perpetrated in the name of their political cause.⁴⁴ Essentially, Colombians wondered how Betancur’s amnesty law would formalize his distinction between outright terrorism and political crimes.

In the meantime, MAS represented a direct threat to the proposed amnesty law. The M-19 representative Lucio’s televised declaration of support for Betancur did not negate the apprehension with which the *guerrilla* groups viewed the Colombian government. Irrespective of the president’s powerful rhetoric in his public addresses, the *guerrillas* still questioned the authenticity of Betancur’s vision of Colombian peace. As a representative from the M-19 explained in Arturo Alape’s 1985 collection of oral histories about Colombia’s history of political violence, Betancur had formulated his declaration of amnesty without either previous discussion with *guerrilla* leaders or proof that he had begun the process of implementing social reforms. Therefore, given Colombia’s history of failed negotiations, the amnesty law and its call for the *guerrillas*’ demobilization could have easily been disingenuous.⁴⁵ Furthermore, Turbay’s administration had made *guerrilla* groups particularly cautious in their dealings with the government. Turbay’s unwillingness to dismantle MAS and the paramilitary groups’ continued attacks on Leftist group-members precluded realistic consideration of *guerrilla* demobilization. A letter from the FARC to Betancur published by *El Espectador*

⁴⁴ Leonel Fierro T., “Dice el Gobierno sobre amnestía: Solo sedición, rebelión y asonada deben incluirse,” *El Tiempo*, September 29, 1982, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, September 1982, 8.

⁴⁵ Alape Arturo, *La paz, la violencia: Testigos de excepción* (Bogotá: Planeta Colombiana Editorial, S.A., 1985), 480.

explained that demobilization was not an option when groups like MAS continued to exist and to pose an existential threat to Leftist group members.⁴⁶ Alava's assassination by MAS was proof of that threat.

Betancur's response to Alava's assassination clarified his stance on these issues. In an emotional statement, Betancur symbolically affirmed his commitment to peace with the Leftist groups by eulogizing Alava and announcing that, despite the late professor's demonstrated support for *guerrilla* groups, he would give one day's worth of his salary to help Alava's family pay for funeral costs.⁴⁷ Turning his attention to MAS, the president drew a firm line between his approach to violent acts by Leftist groups and other forms of violence. He characterized MAS's attack on Alava as an affront to "the respect for life, honor, and the well-being of our citizens" and the image of Colombia as a "civilized country." MAS and armed groups like it would be subject to a "war without quarter" that would begin with an investigation to "unmask" MAS's members.⁴⁸ Betancur's amnesty law, Law 35 of 1982, passed in November, consisted of a generous offer that gave amnesty to anyone who had raised arms against the government in the previous five years, excluding only those who had participated in extreme cruelty or non-combat-related homicide. Those convicted of kidnapping and extortion would be eligible for amnesty.⁴⁹ Betancur's announcement and the resulting persecution of MAS gave the president the opportunity to prove his commitment to the peace process. However, instead of resolving

⁴⁶ "Carta de las FARC al presidente Betancur," *El Espectador*, October 10, 1982, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, October 1982, 17.

⁴⁷ Many of Alava's friends and other prominent professors at the National University had already pledged one day's salary to support Alava's widow and children. "¿Adios a las armas?"

⁴⁸ "Esenmascarar al MAS ofrece Betancur," *El Espectador*, August 24, 1982, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, August 1982, 30.

⁴⁹ Martz, *The Politics of Clientelism*, 217.

the issue of extra-state paramilitary violence, its unintended consequences would eventually lead to confrontation with another critical actor: the military.

MAS and the Military

In contrast to many Latin American countries, Colombia's military did not participate directly in Colombian politics. In fact, as Deas explained in 1986, the military was "constitutionally debarred from uttering opinions" about government policy.⁵⁰ Despite this constitutional restriction, the years leading up to Betancur's presidency saw substantial increases in the military's influence on government policy. As political scientist Daniel Premo describes, the military's role in Colombia began to change during the National Front period. The emergence of Leftist groups in the 1960s and the threat they posed to the National Front's hegemonic rule encouraged the governing coalition to expand the military's mandate. In addition to protecting the country from foreign enemies, the military and National Police, recently integrated as a branch of the Armed Forces, took a central role in the planning and execution of counter-insurgency efforts against domestic threats to National Front rule.⁵¹ The military's power continued to grow through Turbay's administration, as his government's anti-subversive doctrine allowed for a growing sense of autonomy within the armed forces.⁵² Thus, Betancur inherited a military

⁵⁰ Deas, "The Troubled Course of Colombian Peacemaking," 654; In comparison, seven Latin American countries were ruled by military dictatorships in 1982: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, El Salvador, Panama, and Uruguay. Brian E. Loveman, "Military Government in Latin America," *Oxford Bibliographies*, October 28, 2011, <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199766581/obo-9780199766581-0015.xml>.

⁵¹ Daniel L. Premo, "Coping with Insurgency: The Politics of Pacification in Colombia and Venezuela," in *Democracy in Latin America: Colombia and Venezuela* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 229.

⁵² Martz, *The Politics of Clientelism*, 194.

accustomed to occupying a central, belligerent role in the government's interaction with the *guerrilla* groups, but whose cooperation would be crucial to establishing and enforcing peace.

Perhaps surprisingly, given Betancur's abrupt reversal of Turbay's policy of militarization, the military initially accepted Betancur's programs for peace. Betancur's minister of defense, General Fernando Landazábal Reyes, remained relatively quiet in regard to the new government's amnesty law in 1982 after giving it his weak approval.⁵³ The Colombian public, however, questioned the authenticity of the military's support. It was hard to believe, an editorial in *El Espectador* argued, that the armed force fully supported amnesty and its protection of armed Leftist groups. The author wrote, "the public remembers how during the course of earlier governments, but especially during the term that just ended, there were many accusations and repeated complaints about the mistreatment of those pursued as suspected threats to State security."⁵⁴ Columnist Enrique Santos Calderón, writing for the other major Colombian daily newspaper, *El Tiempo*, described the expectation that the military would truly support Betancur's amnesty as impossible. "For the military," he explained, amnesty "means, among other things, accepting that yesterday's relentless enemy could tomorrow be a senator of the Republic with presidential aspirations." He doubted that either the military or the government as a whole was ready to accept that drastic role reversal.⁵⁵ To the Colombian public, it seemed that the precedent set by Turbay and previous administrations meant

⁵³ Ramírez V. and Restrepo, *Actores en el conflicto por la paz*, 116.

⁵⁴ Editorial, "Amnestía y derechos humanos," *El Espectador*, October 10, 1982, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, October 1982, 19.

⁵⁵ Enrique Santos Calderón, "Contraescape: Amnistía: del dicho al hecho...", *El Tiempo*, November 17, 1982, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, November 1982, 30.

that the military's support for Betancur's peace as 1982 drew to a close was precarious, at best. Increased government attention to MAS at the start of the new year would confirm this impression.

Suspicious of military collusion with MAS surfaced almost as soon as the paramilitary group announced its existence. In January 1982, *Radio Caracol*, one of Colombia's main radio networks, reported that "trustworthy sources" had alerted its reporters to the incorporation of retired military and police officers into MAS's ranks in Antioquia.⁵⁶ Rumors of military involvement in MAS activities continued to circulate exactly a year later, when three farmers from the northeastern department of Santander who self-identified as members of MAS testified that the Army had provided their branch of the paramilitary group with funding, weapons, and training. They also named various officers, non-commissioned officers, and soldiers who they claimed had participated directly in MAS's operations.⁵⁷ Despite his public denunciation of the farmers' testimony, Landazábal was already aware of probable links between his men and MAS. In early January 1983, after a months-long investigation of MAS, political violence, and disappearances in the Magdalena Medio region of the country, Attorney General Carlos Jiménez Gómez presented his findings to Landazábal. The results were damning for the military. The report cited evidence that, in multiple instances across the country,

⁵⁶ "Militares retirados integrarían el MAS," *El Mundo*, January 8, 1982, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, January 1982, 16; These reports were almost certainly true at the local level given the overlap between the military's offensive against the *guerrillas* and MAS's counterinsurgency tactics. According to Robin Kirk, a human rights investigator in Colombia during the 1980s, the military regularly provided financial or tactical support to MAS. However, it is necessary to note that it is unclear how high up the military chain of command knowledge of this collaboration went, and if senior officers, like Landazábal, were complicit as well. Kirk, *More Terrible than Death*, 110.

⁵⁷ Francisco Pardo, "Presuntos miembros del MAS acusan al Ejército," *Cromos*, January 18, 1983.

individuals directly or indirectly associated with the military engaged in delinquent activity. More problematic for Landazábal, the report provided a list of 153 presumed members of MAS; fifty-nine of which were active members of the armed forces.⁵⁸ Knowing that Jiménez intended to publish his findings, Landazábal immediately went on the attack to try to discredit the attorney general's report. In a lengthy editorial in *Fuerzas Armadas* magazine Landázabal lambasted Jiménez, referring to the attorney general as "some unknown lawyer" whose report aimed to launch the country into a new phase of violence by dismantling its institutions.⁵⁹ In spite of Landazábal's attacks on his reputation, the attorney general released his report to the public in full on February 5, 1983.

Military officials reacted immediately to the published report. Landazábal brought a formal complaint to the State Council (*Consejo de Estado*), the body in charge of mediating disputes between the branches of government, arguing that the attorney general's publication of individual names in his report was tantamount to libel, as it subjected those accused to the court of public opinion before a formal trial could determine their guilt.⁶⁰ Meanwhile, in a clear challenge to the president's reaction to Alava's assassination, high-level military officials ordered all subordinates on active duty to donate one day's wages in order to pay for the accused soldiers' defense.⁶¹ While the military ostensibly directed their complaints directly at the attorney general, Ramírez and Restrepo note that the military's criticism indirectly jeopardized Betancur's credibility in

⁵⁸ Ramírez V. and Restrepo, *Actores en el conflicto por la paz*, 119.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 118.

⁶⁰ "Informe sobre MAS: Consejo de Estado estudia censura al Procurador," *El Tiempo*, February 23, 1983, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, February 1983, 26.

⁶¹ Ramírez V. and Restrepo, *Actores en el conflicto por la paz*, 119.

the context of the peace process. The investigation and subsequent implementation of sanctions against those involved in MAS's attacks against Leftist leaders served as an "essential condition for the peace process to continue." Betancur needed to prove his government's commitment to ensuring the safety and rights of the *guerrillas* if the Leftist groups were to demobilize. The president, however, could not afford to alienate the military. It was the only tool his government had to enforce any peace agreement. In an attempt to mitigate the escalation of conflict between the different branches of his government, Betancur opted for a half-compromise. He did not condemn the report, but he allowed the military to take over the investigation and prosecution of the accused soldiers within the military penal system.⁶²

Betancur's weak compromise represented one of his first significant political failures in the realm of the peace process. By quickly capitulating to the Landazábal's demands, Betancur ceded a crucial opportunity to define the limits of the military's role and jurisdiction in maintaining public order.⁶³ The president's concession also indicated a weakness that Landazábal was quick to capitalize on in order to promote the military's desire to continue its armed battle against the *guerrilla* groups. As the year progressed, Landazábal increasingly ignored the restrictions on political pronouncements by the military, openly criticizing Betancur's peace policies. In his criticisms, Landazábal countered Betancur's calls for political negotiation by continuing to refer to the country's struggle against subversion in the language of war. For example, he likened Colombia's conflict to the Vietnam War and warned that public opinion's lack of support for the armed forces would lead to a similar outcome. "Remember that VietNam [sic] was not

⁶² Ibid., 124.

⁶³ Ibid., 125.

lost in Viet Nam. It was lost in the streets of Washington and Nueva York through the press and television, who encouraged public opinion to abandon its support of its armed forces.”⁶⁴ These attacks on Betancur’s peace policies, nonetheless, took a mild tone in comparison to Landazábal’s later criticism of the president’s leadership. Landazábal attempted to undermine Betancur’s presidential authority by arguing that the military served as the true representatives of the nation:

We are the nation. Among our soldiers are all social classes. There are campesinos, there are laborers, there are workers. It is not a military made of a conglomerate that does not participate in the idiosyncrasies of our country. It is a national military. It is not the military fighting against the *guerrillas*, the military is supporting the Nation [sic].⁶⁵

Landazábal’s increasingly hostile attacks forced Betancur to dismiss him as minister of defense along with the army and air force commanders in January 1984, but not before the open hostility between the two branches of government revealed the wide rifts between actors within Betancur’s administration.

Meanwhile, increasing levels of violence accompanied Betancur’s lack of control over the armed forces. MAS, along with a proliferation of similar paramilitary groups, continued to operate with impunity. For example, a report in the popular magazine *Cromos* described portions of the Magdalena Medio region as completely under MAS’s control, forcing the displacement of hundreds of peasants and farmers in an exodus reminiscent of the 1950s *Violencia*.⁶⁶ MAS’s continued presence, in turn, weakened the amnesty law’s positive effect among the *guerrillas*. By September 1983, the

⁶⁴ Margarita Vidal, “General Landazábal: ‘Hay que encontrar el eslabon perdido de la paz,’” *Cromos*, March 1, 1983, 13.

⁶⁵ Arturo, *La Paz, La Violencia: Testigos de Excepción*, 475.

⁶⁶ Francisco Pardo, “El Magdalena Medio: ‘En manos de Dios y el MAS,’” *Cromos*, August 16, 1983, 20.

Conservative newspaper *El Siglo* reported that 1,500 *guerrillas* had turned in their arms and claimed amnesty.⁶⁷ However, a report submitted to Betancur by the Colombian High Commission of Peace (*Alto Comisionado de la Paz*) in August of that year documented a number of cases of recently amnestied *guerrilla* fighters in the Magdalena Medio taking up arms anew immediately after being released from jail.⁶⁸

Figure 3: Poem of Peace: “Our lives are the rivers that will flow into the sea that is death.... Beautiful poem about the Magdalena Medio.”⁶⁹

In his attempt to bolster the peace process by directly addressing MAS after Alava’s assassination, Betancur inadvertently created an enemy to peace within his own government. The resulting hostility between the president and the armed forces demonstrated the complex challenge of reorienting the entire country’s concept of how to

⁶⁷ “1.500 guerrilleros han despuesto ya las armas,” *El Siglo*, September 19, 1983, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, September 1983, 32.

⁶⁸ Alto Comisionado de la Paz, “Carta a Belisario Betancur: Informe Semestral,” August 31, 1983, 7, Box 51, Folder 3, Departamento Administrativo de la Presidencia de la República: Colección Belisario Betancur.

⁶⁹ “Recital de paz,” *Actualidad Colombiana*, February 1983.

solve Colombia's *guerrilla* conflict. Adding another layer of complication, however, was the fact that violence directly related to the *guerrilla* conflict only represented a fraction of Colombia's crisis of insecurity.

Searching for Security

"Not one more drop of our brothers' blood. Not one more drop!" Betancur proclaimed at his inaugural address. Bloodshed had already become a daily reality for most Colombians.⁷⁰ When Betancur assumed office in 1982, levels of generalized violence in the country had skyrocketed from the days of relative peace during the National Front period. A *Semana* article from early 1982 quoted a high-ranking National Police official who calculated a rate of one homicide every fifteen minutes during that year. That statistic amounted to an annual national total of 36,000 homicides.⁷¹ Political violence, defined as crimes perpetrated by *guerrilla* groups or government confrontations with those groups, represented only a small fraction of the violent deaths in Colombia. If we accept the government's official tally presented in the minister of defense's New Year report, only 200 members of the armed forces and 260 *guerrilla* fighters died in combat in 1981. Therefore, the rest of Colombia's violence, and the primary source of anxiety for the majority of the public was comprised of "the victims of everyday violence, of

⁷⁰ "'El pueblo es mi fiador'" Studies of Colombian violence are numerous enough to comprise their own scholarly field: violentology. For examples, see any of the multiple works entitled "Violence in Colombia." Most relevant to the subject of this thesis is: Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez, eds., *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1992).

⁷¹ "El impuesto del miedo," *Semana*, July 26, 1982. For comparison, Mexico had 18,000 homicides and the United States 9,600 in the year 1982 Carlos Resa Nestares, "El comercio de drogas ilegales en México: El asesinato en Baja California: las cifras" (Notas de Investigación, Madrid, 2005), 3, http://www.uam.es/personal_pdi/economicas/cresa/nota0405.pdf.

everyone against everyone else, which fill the pages of the press with blood and receives the generic and proper name, ‘insecurity’”⁷²

The scale of this violence was staggering. Broadcasts from the Medellín-based radio news program (*radioperiódico*) *El Clarín* provide a glimpse into the ubiquity of violence in every day life. Reporting from Colombia’s most insecure city, the station’s twice-daily news updates began with the same rote account of the Medellín’s most recent, grisly murders. “A new corpse was discovered, the second in less than twelve hours, strangled, stabbed, and burned...” began one broadcast.⁷³ “The bodies of a man, shot, and a young boy, strangled, were found today...The body of a baby approximately seven months of age was found in a plastic bag [...] in the municipal garbage dump...” the macabre announcements continued.⁷⁴ The explosion of crime did not only pertain to murder. Official statistics from the Ministry of Justice counted 50,752 assaults, 10,031 armed robberies, and 40,752 armed burglaries in 1981.⁷⁵ The numbers are even more impressive when one takes into account the reality that around 90 percent of crimes went unreported.⁷⁶

While Colombians feared becoming the next victim of an errant bullet or a knife-wielding robber, the real danger for Betancur and his administration lay in how this criminal violence bled into his approach to tackle the country’s ongoing internal conflict. In his analysis of urban violence in the city of Cali between 1980 and 1986, the notable

⁷² “El impuesto del miedo.”

⁷³ Radioperiódico Clarín, transcript, *Emisión Vespertina* (May 19, 1982), Archivo Histórico de Medellín.

⁷⁴ Radioperiódico Clarín, transcript, *Emisión Meridiana* (May 13, 1982), Archivo Histórico de Medellín.

⁷⁵ “El impuesto del miedo.”

⁷⁶ Martz, *The Politics of Clientelism*, 224.

Colombian sociologist Álvaro Camacho argued that the 1980s saw a dangerous intermingling of public (violence by extreme left or right-wing groups and state offensives) and private violence (interpersonal or individual crimes). The emergence of this “grey area,” where the two types of violence overlap, is a product of the public’s belief “that the state and its organs of protection and justice are contested, politicized, arbitrary or ineffectual.”⁷⁷ In other words, the public no longer trusted official institutions meant to provide justice and security and instead turned to private security or armed groups in order to obtain protection and settle personal disputes. Most notably, Camacho’s analysis explains the emergence of MAS, which can be considered as just one of many groups that comprised Colombia’s growing privatized security industry at the beginning of the 1980s. Therefore, in order to protect his peace process from frustrations related to the explosion of general violence, Betancur needed to complement his negotiations with an institutional reform of the justice system.

Of all the privatized security groups, MAS served as a particularly strong motivator for Betancur to consider changes to the justice system. The attorney general’s 1983 report on MAS, in addition to naming suspected members of the paramilitary group, also painted a description of the group in line with Camacho’s theory. The group had evolved since its foundation in 1981, Carlos Jiménez Gómez explained, and no longer represented a discrete organization. Rather, MAS represented “the diffused product of a social explosion [...] It is not a single organization but rather a *mentality of crisis* and

⁷⁷ Álvaro Camacho Guizado, “Private and Public Dimensions of Urban Violence in Cali,” in *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective*, ed. Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1992), 242.

crime that has become ‘death to everyone.’”⁷⁸ The best way to confront MAS, he suggested, was to address the conditions that allowed the emergence of the group—by instituting reforms in the civil and penal justice systems.

Increasing public pressure on the government to take action created an additional incentive for Betancur to heed Jiménez’s recommendations. A rash of kidnappings by both *guerrilla* groups and criminal gangs in March 1983 excited a collective panic among the Colombian public. Meanwhile, an increasing number of Colombians began to point to the previous year’s amnesty law as the cause of the country’s insecurity. Betancur’s democratic opening, some complained, created a “climate of tolerance that resulted in anarchy.”⁷⁹ The reimplementing of the state of siege, those people argued, was the government’s only hope to regain control of the country. Those against the state of siege noted that the implementation of the state of siege or security statute had not corresponded with lower levels of violence in the past. For example, both statutes were in effect in 1981 when the country saw a peak in its homicide rate.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, the public’s calls for drastic action forced Betancur to prove his commitment to reinstating Colombian justice without invoking a statute that ran counter to all of his previously articulated principles. Betancur’s commitment came in the form of one man: Rodrigo Lara Bonilla.

In August 1983, Betancur named Lara as his new minister of justice, replacing Bernardo Gaitán Mahecha. A stark contrast to Gaitán, a traditional Liberal, Lara had distinguished himself as a star of Colombia’s new generation of reformist politicians.

⁷⁸ Emphasis added. “Informe del Procurador: El MAS no es una organización,” *El Tiempo*, February 6, 1983, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, February 1983, 20.

⁷⁹ “La caldera del diablo,” *Semana*, March 7, 1983.

⁸⁰ “El impuesto del miedo.”

Only thirty-seven years old, the distinguished lawyer had risen quickly through the ranks of Colombian politics. He had become mayor of his hometown, Neiva, at age twenty-one, entered Congress soon after, and in 1983 occupied the second-in-command position in the New Liberalism movement. As a member of Betancur's original peace commission, Lara demonstrated concern for the state of insecurity in Colombia. He played a central role in Jiménez's investigation of MAS, traveling to the Magdalena Medio to conduct research. He also spoke openly and often about the need for judicial reform and argued that the government needed to attend to Colombia's problem of delinquency as a necessary complement to the formal peace process. For example, in a speech that he presented to the Senate on November 24, 1982, then-Senator Lara addressed Justice Minister Gaitán directly and questioned what Gaitán had done to address the country's insecurity:

Throughout the country, the issue of common crime is infinitely more serious than that of political crime, *señor* Minister of Justice. And the *señores Ministros* know how crime in this country has been increasing for the last few years [...]. But what happens is that political crime is spectacular; what happens is that political crime affects the interests of the class that controls, in its hands alone, the decisions of the State.⁸¹

Of the crimes committed in 1981, he continued, relatively few could be counted as the spectacular acts of political violence that so worried the state. He concluded by warning that Colombia's justice system was scandalously broken, and a political peace that neglected to fix that issue would be unable to save the country from eventual decay.⁸²

⁸¹ "Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, su vida y su obra," *Documentos Nuevo Liberalismo*, October 1984, 21, Folder 508, Fondo Luis Carlos Galán Sarmiento, Archivo Histórico Javeriano.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 22.

Given Lara's reputation, his appointment captured wide national attention. Colombians expected the young, determined politician to bring new life to the ministry.⁸³ The justice minister's aggressive approach to all types of crime, however, created powerful enemies. Colombia's business elite represented one of Lara's first targets. In response to the severe financial crisis that hit Colombia in 1982 and what the public saw as widespread, and widely tolerated, corruption, Lara launched a fierce assault on the financial sector. Lara's investigation into and eventual prosecution of white-collar crimes and risky behavior by the country's banking groups caused uproar. Fabio Echeverri Correa, president of the National Business Association of Colombia (ANDI; *Asociación Nacional de Industrias de Colombia*), argued that Lara's accusations were detrimental to Colombia, as they might endanger the country's political and economic security by discouraging foreign investment.⁸⁴ Meanwhile, *El Tiempo*'s editorial board worried that Lara's actions represented "an example of the dangerous animosity that has been created against Colombia's leading class and the threat of a justice system where judges are moved by their thirst for popularity." This movement, the author argued, would eventually be guaranteed to pose a "danger to the institutionalism and democratic system of Colombia."⁸⁵ In reality, the Ministry of Justice's investigations of prominent businessmen like Roberto Ordoñez, the vice president of the banking group Grancolombia accused of engaging in illegal loan practices, actually preceded Lara's appointment. But, Lara's affiliation with New Liberalism, a movement that openly

⁸³ "Se prendió la mecha," *Semana*, September 19, 1983.

⁸⁴ "Justicia pa' los de FRAC," *Semana*, April 9, 1984.

⁸⁵ "A comer gerentes..." *El Tiempo*, March 4, 1984.

criticized the traditional leading class (*clase dirigente*) made the new minister the primary target of the elite's contempt.

Lara's crusade against the leading class would not last long. Lara's plan for judicial reform had upset an even more powerful class of Colombian elites—the drug mafia. After fewer than eight months as minister of justice, at 7:30 on the night of April 30, 1984, Lara's white Mercedes sat in heavy traffic on Calle 127 in the north of Bogotá as the justice minister made his way home from work. While Lara's driver waited for the light to turn, two young men from the drug trade's epicenter of Medellín drove their motorbike alongside Lara's car, aimed a machine gun at the backseat, and fired fourteen bullets into the minister's body. The shots killed Lara instantly.⁸⁶ That moment would change the course of Colombian history. In order to fully understand the circumstance and significance of Lara's assassination, however, it is necessary to begin the story of Betancur's presidency again, with attention to the rise of another *paisa* now notorious in Colombian history—Pablo Emilio Escobar Gaviria.

⁸⁶ “Muerte anunciada” provides a detailed account of Lara's final day.

CHAPTER TWO FROM INDUSTRY TO NATIONAL SECURITY THREAT

As one of Colombia's most infamous figures, Escobar has been the subject of a plethora of studies.¹ These narratives tend to examine Escobar for what made him unique: his rise from a humble upbringing in near Medellín to enormous wealth, his spectacular violence against the state, or his lasting influence among generations of youth in Medellín's poorest neighborhoods, for example. However, in their discussion of Escobar's life, these biographical accounts often take for granted the trafficker's eventual fame. Every decision that Escobar made is presented as a step toward his achievement of the international notoriety he is remembered for today. Thus, these studies portray the events of the early 1980s, particularly the failure of Escobar's political career, as personal and logical motivations for the mafia's violent turn, which began with Lara's assassination in 1984.²

This chapter complicates this Escobar-centric narrative of the 1980s by contextualizing the trafficker's political career in the broader history of politics, reform, and violence during Betancur's administration. There were, of course, elements that made Escobar's foray into politics stand out among his contemporaries—namely his massive wealth and its illegal origins. But, an examination of how the trafficker used his uncle's *Medellín Cívico* to launch his political career shows that, at its core, Escobar's political ambitions resembled that of many others in a country where individuals often leveraged family networks to parlay economic power into political power (or vice versa). Therefore,

¹ See Aldona Bialowas Pobutsky, "Peddling Pablo: Escobar's Cultural Renaissance," *Hispania* 96, no. 4 (2013): 684–99, doi:10.1353/hpn.2013.0104.

² See chapter three of Salazar, *La parábola de Pablo*, 69–112.

Colombians recognized that the acceptance of Escobar's illicit wealth in mainstream politics was significant because of the sheer amount of it. However, it remained unclear until Lara's murder what the repercussions of this interaction between the mafia and the political system would be. While this chapter ultimately revolves around a violent act—Lara's assassination—it argues that the significance of Escobar's violence must be understood as product of a confluence of incidents related to Betancur's political reform and the Colombia's greater issue of insecurity, rather than a simple act of personal retribution.

To explain how Escobar and his associates in the drug trade acquired and consolidated their economic power in the years before Betancur's term, this chapter begins with an examination of the evolution of Latin American drug trafficking networks in the twentieth century. Next, it turns its attention to Escobar's rise in local Antioquian and national politics through an examination of *Medellín Cívico*. Finally, the chapter concludes with a description of Escobar's expulsion from national politics, Lara's assassination, and the murder's implications for Betancur's peace project. With its return to the issue of peace, this chapter orients its discussion of Betancur's response to Escobar's violence and the drug mafia more generally, toward Colombian domestic events rather than U.S. influence.

The Emergence of an Industry

A confluence of geographic advantages, revolutions and coups, and Colombian innovation provided the context for Colombian traffickers' rise to the top of the international cocaine trade in the 1980s. Despite Colombia's present-day reputation as the cocaine capital of the world, the origins of the 1980s cocaine are rooted elsewhere in

Latin America. As Gootenberg chronicles in his book *Andean Cocaine*, the modern cocaine trade was established systematically between 1945 and 1970 by a network of Peruvians and Bolivians working with Chilean and Cuban mediators.³ The first evidence of Latin American cocaine traffic to the United States dates to 1939, when New York City authorities nabbed a Chilean sailor for offering 250 grams of cocaine that he had smuggled from his home country to his Puerto Rican partner.⁴

By 1948, U.S. customs officials realized that the trade had evolved beyond individual smugglers into a “diaspora of ‘Latin’ cocaine smugglers,” primarily from Peru and Havana, who were feeding a steady supply of the drug into the New York market.⁵ In the 1950s and 1960s, the trade passed decisively from Peru into the hands of Chilean and Cuban traffickers. Chilean chemists headed the processing of coca raw paste from the Andean highlands into powdered cocaine.⁶ Meanwhile, Cuban traffickers leveraged their contacts within the growing Cuban emigrant communities in New York and Miami to control the distribution end of the trade.⁷ Colombian authorities discovered cocaine-processing laboratories in Medellín as early as the 1950s, but the early generations of Colombian cocaine traffickers operated on a vastly different scale from Escobar’s generation. In fact, Gootenberg notes that throughout the 1960s, cocaine trafficking in

³ Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine*, 301.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 254.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 261.

⁷ Eduardo Sáenz Rovner, “Las redes de cubanos, norteamericanos y colombianos en el narcotráfico en Miami durante los años sesenta,” *Innovar: Revista de ciencias administrativas y sociales* 18, no. 32 (2008): 115.

Colombia “barely merits mention as a transit point.” Smuggling operations in Colombia were mostly “episodic offshoots” of Cuban-controlled enterprises.⁸

Nevertheless, Colombia’s geography made the country well suited for the development of illegal trafficking networks. Colombia’s rugged geography and the resulting fragmented, decentralized state that Betancur tried so hard to unify with his presidential campaign created an ideal environment for smugglers to flourish. First, arduous overland travel meant that state institutions had a limited reach beyond Bogotá or regional capitals. As a result, vast swaths of the country remained virtually ungoverned with no state presence. Smuggling networks, like those historically used for illegal emerald mining and later cocaine, could easily be established with little chance of government interdiction.⁹ Dense and isolated jungle regions provided the perfect cover for massive scale cocaine processing operations. Most of these areas were inaccessible to government agents, especially since many labs were located deep in *guerrilla*-controlled territory.¹⁰

Second, the proliferation of smuggling networks in regions with little state oversight encouraged the development of regional identities that embraced illegal activities. An expert on Latin American organized crime, Juan Carlos Garzón, describes how state absence can lead to societal dependency on illegal activities. In the absence of

⁸ Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine*, 273.

⁹ Andrés López-Restrepo and Alvaro Camacho Guizado, “From Smugglers to Drug-Lords to ‘Traquetos’: Changes in the Colombian Illicit Drugs Organizations” 2005, 3, <http://kellogg.nd.edu/faculty/research/pdfs/LopeCama.pdf>.

¹⁰ Gugliotta and Leen's description of the government's 1984 raid on a mafia processing lab in the Llanos Orientales illustrates the challenges Colombia's anti-narcotics force faced trying to reach these labs. Even though the police possessed the exact coordinates of the lab, they had no outposts anywhere near the lab, making the raid a logistical nightmare. Gugliotta and Leen, *Kings of Cocaine*, 128–130.

legal, state-provided alternatives, these illegal activities, like drug smuggling, create social cohesion by providing employment and establishing social order.¹¹ In the Magdalena Medio, Guajira, and other remote regions, strong illegal networks supplanted the state as trade in contraband became an entrenched element of the social system.¹² In relation to international markets, Colombia's location made it an ideal epicenter for the drug trade. As the most northerly country in the Andean corridor, Colombia is sufficiently close to enjoy easy access to the North American market. However, it is not too close to the United States to seem a direct threat, like Mexico. Thus, U.S. authorities overlooked developments in Colombia for a sufficiently long time to allow traffickers to grow and strengthen their networks before facing persecution.¹³

Colombia's first drug boom took place in the 1970s (centered on the export of marijuana, not cocaine). During this period, the "*bonanza marimbera*" took the country's Atlantic coastal regions by storm.¹⁴ While the peak in marijuana cultivation and trafficking lasted only a short duration in the mid-1970s, it created infrastructure onto which the cocaine trade would later graft. The cocaine traffickers of the late 1970s and 1980s, for example, appropriated the coastal smuggling routes, clandestine jungle

¹¹ Juan Carlos Garzón Vergara, "The Rebellion of Criminal Networks: Organized Crime in Latin America and the Dynamics of Change," *Woodrow Wilson Center Update on the Americas*, March 2012, 5, <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/rebellion>.

¹² Britto, "Hurricane Winds," 82.

¹³ U.S. concern about drug trafficking in Chile during the 1950s seems to undermine this last part of Camacho's argument, since Chile is certainly farther from the United States than Colombia. U.S. State Department documents also indicate that Washington was aware of drug traffic in Colombia from a fairly early stage. Nevertheless, the distance between Colombia and the United States likely made it difficult for the United States to impose its drug policy on Colombia in the same way that it could through border policy with Mexico. López-Restrepo and Camacho Guizado, "From Smugglers to Drug-Lords to 'Traquetos,'" 10.

¹⁴ Britto, "Hurricane Winds," 83.

airplane landing strips, and agricultural infrastructure of the marijuana boom.¹⁵

Concurrently, a 1973 military coup in Chile catalyzed a shift northward in the cocaine trade. Eager to please his allies in the U.S. government, Pinochet cracked down on Chilean cocaine processors, forcing chemists to either shut down their businesses or relocate to the other Andean countries. This shift, combined with a rising number of Colombian networks in the United States that started to displace the Cubans' when Castro's revolutionary government cracked on the Cuban trade, led to the consolidation of the Colombian cocaine industry.¹⁶

Despite similar roots, Henderson argues that the consolidation of the cocaine industry had significantly different social consequences in Colombia than the *bonanza marimbera*. The marijuana production model, he explains, resembled a typical "third world model" of raw goods export. Colombian growers supplied North American intermediaries with the raw material of marijuana at fairly low prices, and U.S. distributors pocketed the majority of the profits after breaking the marijuana into consumable amounts and selling the final product at a significant markup value in U.S. markets. In contrast, the transfer of both Chilean and Cuban roles in the cocaine market to the Colombian network meant that Colombians eventually controlled all of the most lucrative steps of the industry, from the processing of cheap, raw Peruvian paste into expensive cocaine powder for distribution by Colombian communities in U.S. cities. The Colombian cocaine network effectively achieved full vertical integration. For this reason, Colombian cocaine barons achieved profits and influence far beyond their predecessors

¹⁵ Fabio Castillo, *Los jinetes de la cocaína* (Bogotá, Colombia: Editorial Documentos Periodísticos, 1987), 20–21.

¹⁶ Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine*, 304.

in the marijuana trade.¹⁷ The unprecedented profits of the cocaine trade created an “emerging class” in Colombia that possessed wealth to rival the country’s traditional elites. The consolidation of this new class’s business and power, however, relied on both government ambivalence and cultural acceptance. The U.S. doctrine of the War Against Drugs in the 1970s and 1980s would seem to have precluded such acceptance, as presidents Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan argued that the drug trade represented a national security threat in itself.¹⁸ But, government policy within Colombia before Lara’s murder reflected a different attitude toward the drug trade.

Accommodating the Emerging Class

Colombia’s history that supported a robust informal economy also worked in the drug traffickers’ favor. The country’s legal system made it nearly impossible to distinguish between the formal and informal economy, allowing traffickers to launder their profits through a simple, socially acceptable process. As Francisco Thoumi describes in his 1994 economic study of Colombia’s illegal drug trade, by the time Colombia’s cocaine trade took off, the country’s underground economy had grown “to the point that it can be stated there [was] virtually no Colombian resident who [did] not break a law associated with economic behavior.”¹⁹ The pervasiveness of illegal economic behavior can be attributed, at least in part, to government policies that, intentionally or unintentionally, encouraged this behavior. For example, Thoumi reports that Colombians

¹⁷ Henderson, *Víctima de la globalización*, 74.

¹⁸ See David F. Musto and Pamela Korsmeyer, *Quest for Drug Control: Politics and Federal Policy in a Period of Increasing Substance Abuse, 1963-1981* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); and Bruce Michael Bagley, “US Foreign Policy and the War on Drugs: Analysis of a Policy Failure,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 30, no. 2/3 (July 1988): 189–212, doi:10.2307/165986.

¹⁹ Thoumi, *Political Economy and Illegal Drugs in Colombia*, 99.

have engaged in widespread tax evasion for much of the latter half of the twentieth century. Contrary to logical economic policy, the government has tried to solve this issue by periodically offering tax amnesties rather than implementing stronger tax enforcement. The government justifies these amnesties by arguing that they increase the tax base, but the reality is that they only encourage further illegal behavior.²⁰ Drug traffickers exploited these weaknesses in the economic system, using tax amnesties and holidays to launder their profits.²¹ As a result, Colombia's underground economy had grown to a size of around US\$ 1 billion by 1987 according to an estimate by the National Federation of Commerce (FENALCO; *Federación Nacional de Comerciantes*).²²

Rather than attracting government regulation, the drug-fueled boom in Colombia's underground economy seemed to be a possible solution to the economic stagnation of the mid-1970s. For the government, scarcity of foreign exchange represented one of the most significant constraints on the country's economic growth. The government acknowledged it would be incredibly difficult to mobilize support to shut down an industry that had become one of Colombia's most important sources of foreign exchange.²³ In fact, López Michelsen's administration did exactly the opposite. In 1974, López Michelsen ordered the Central Bank to create its "sinister window," a mechanism for Colombians to exchange dollars for pesos, without investigation into the legality of the money's origins.²⁴ Eight years later, a U.S. State Department document

²⁰ Ibid., 101.

²¹ Ibid., 161.

²² Ibid., 101.

²³ Ibid., 204.

²⁴ It is worth noting that López Michelsen conceived of his sinister window as a reaction to the influx of wealth related to marijuana, not cocaine. At the time, public perception of marijuana was fairly permissive, particularly given the legalization of marijuana in some

evaluating the 1982 election's potential effect on the drug trade indicated that Betancur would likely follow López Michelsen's precedent with regard to the "sinister window." "The decreasing demand for most of Colombia's legal exports in the short term makes it difficult for the Betancur administration to consider any program that would radically affect foreign exchange," officials reported.²⁵

The general Colombian policy of tacit acceptance of the drug trade likely also reflected the government's recognition of its own weakness. The ongoing domestic conflict between the state and armed Leftist groups demanded significant resources and precluded the funding of a strong anti-narcotics force. State acceptance of the trade protected the government from retributive violence by trafficking groups. As Garzón details, most criminal organizations actively try to avoid confrontation with the state since violence is costly and disrupts their normal flow of business. As long as state actions do not impede the functioning of the illegal economy, it is in a criminal's interest to tolerate the state.²⁶ In Colombia's case, where government economic policy benefited the illegal trade, the traffickers became some of the regime's most ardent defenders.²⁷

U.S. states. Therefore, the legalization of profits from marijuana was not overly controversial in the same way that cocaine profits may have been. The evolution of public perception regarding illegal substances will be discussed in the next chapter. Ibid., 208.

²⁵ U.S. Department of State, "Colombian Anti-Narcotics Policies: Domestic Problems and Prospects for Change," November 3, 1982, 5, Digital National Security Archive, http://search.proquest.com/dnsa_cd/docview/1679050221/fulltextPDF/4D23B843E2CF45D2PQ/34?accountid=13314.

²⁶ Garzón Vergara, "The Rebellion of Criminal Networks," 12.

²⁷ Luis Alberto Restrepo, "The Crisis of the Political Regime and Its Possible Outcomes," in *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective*, ed. Bergquist, Charles, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1992), 289.

This is not to say that the Colombian government did nothing to address the burgeoning drug trade. For example, Turbay's close relationship with the United States forced his administration make an attempt to control the flow of drugs to the United States. Operation Fulminant, launched in 1978, deployed 10,000 army personnel to the Guajira Peninsula and Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta mountain range to manually eradicate marijuana plantings.²⁸ It is important to note, however, that the operation only targeted cultivations. It did nothing to dismantle trafficking networks or to attack the drug barons that headed them. Turbay's signing of the 1979 Treaty of Mutual Legal Assistance with the United States introduced extradition of Colombian nationals as a tool for both countries to prosecute major traffickers. But, the treaty's implementation required the Colombian government's cooperation, which would prove difficult to secure.²⁹

The Colombian government's tacit acceptance of the drug trade allowed Escobar's generation of traffickers to consolidate their business and power. Gugliotta and Leen's *Kings of Cocaine* describes a summit between the country's rising drug lords on April 18, 1981 at the Ochoa family ranch near Barranquilla. According to Gugliotta and Leen, the summit marked the beginning of the drug mafia, when Colombia's most powerful traffickers—the Ochoa clan, Escobar, and Carlos Lehder—laid out plans for expansion through cooperation.³⁰ It is difficult to independently verify if this summit occurred. Nevertheless, it is clear from the December 3, 1983 announcement of MAS's creation and its concern for Marta Nieves Ochoa in particular, that Colombia's powerful traffickers were, by that point, in communication with each other and collaborating to

²⁸ Thoumi, *Political Economy and Illegal Drugs in Colombia*, 210.

²⁹ "Extradición de colombianos," *Semana*, May 16, 1983.

³⁰ Gugliotta and Leen, *Kings of Cocaine*, 82–83.

pursue common interests. Indeed, the two-year period 1982-1983 saw a peak in international cocaine prices and revenues.³¹

Working together, the drug mafia accumulated wealth that was unprecedented in Colombia. Mary Roldán, a historian who watched the region change firsthand, describes how the cocaine elite's wealth overshadowed that of the traditional elites. "It became a common place saying that no one knew how poor Medellín's rich really were until the arrival of the cocaine mafia," she writes.³² Sprawling *fincas*, or ranches, boasting exhibitions of imported exotic animals, luxury apartment buildings inhabited by a single family, and extravagant parties—Colombia's emerging class was not shy about flaunting its wealth, despite its illegal origins. The traditional elite may have been annoyed by the nouveau riche's ostentatious style, but they did little to voice their complaints on the national stage. Their legal enterprises benefited from the influx of foreign capital. Even the journalists who occasionally spoke out against the proliferation of the drug trade, like *El Tiempo*'s Enrique Santos Calderón, neglected to name the major barons in their pieces. Because the United States was the traffickers' primary market, certain Colombians felt that the U.S. government's responsibility to take action to control its populations' voracious appetite for cocaine.³³ But to Colombia's poor and some members of the middle class, these concerns barely registered. For them, the drug lords were modern folk heroes as employers, benefactors, and examples of how to rise from poverty to unfathomable wealth. Even this wealth and adoration, however, were not enough fro

³¹ Thoumi, *Political Economy and Illegal Drugs in Colombia*, 242.

³² Roldán, "Colombia: Cocaine and the Miracle of Modernity in Medellín," 170.

³³ See Enrique Santos Calderón, "Contraescape: Coca y soberanía," *El Tiempo*, April 21, 1983, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, April 1983, 48.

Escobar. His ambition drove him to seek something that his illegal wealth could not buy: acceptance into the exclusive, traditional political class.

Making an “Honest” Man

Luckily for Escobar, his uncle, Hernando Gaviria, provided him with a platform from which to launch his political career. Escobar spent his youth honing his skills as one of Envigado’s wildest criminals, moving from stealing gravestones to hotwiring cars, to moving drugs for his mentor, “*El Padrino*” Alfredo Gómez López.³⁴ While Escobar built his reputation in the criminal world, his uncle had garnered respect from both traditional politicians and Medellín’s disenfranchised population. Gaviria was a staunch member of the Liberal Party and had been a dedicated supporter of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán Ayala, the leader of one of Colombia’s only real populist movements. Gaitán’s assassination in 1948 set off chaos in Colombia. His followers responded to his death with massive riots, known as the *Bogotazo*, which destroyed downtown Bogotá and marked the beginning of *La Violencia*. But where other Gaitán supporters picked up their arms, Gaviria picked up his pen. Inspired by Gaitán’s death and what he saw as increasing moral corruption among Colombia’s leading class, Gaviria published and circulated numerous periodicals in his home department of Antioquia that he filled with scathing criticisms of the political establishment.

His most successful project, *Medellín Cívico*, remained in circulation from 1957 until 1989. Starting from its first issue that featured a response to the leading class’s ouster of Rojas Pinilla on May 10, 1957, Gaviria held nothing back as he berated the political elite. A later issue describes:

³⁴ See Salazar J., *La parábola de Pablo* for more on Escobar’s upbringing.

On the first page and in full color was an image of Military Governor Coronel Gustavo Quintero Santofimio: drunkard, loud-mouthed, affable at times, and at times impressive, of very small stature and famous for his actions during the explosive, popular riot on May 10 [of 1957, the day the civilian elite overthrew the Rojas Pinilla dictatorship], when he was among the first to abandon his leader, General Rojas, and spent the afternoon hiding in terror, when in the morning he had been giving repressive orders for his *genízaros* to patrol the streets and shoot at will.³⁵

Medellín Cívico's objective was to bring attention to Antioquia's marginalized classes: the type of people abandoned by the formal political system. "of the people, by the people, and for the people," read the paper's motto.³⁶ The monthly paper initially circulated among a small subscriber base limited to the city of Medellín, but it quickly grew in reach. By 1975, *Medellín Cívico* had opened a second office in Bogotá. Its influence grew with its audience. That year, Hector Abad Gómez, a prominent professor and politician from the University of Antioquia praised the media source for its coverage of the poor state of social security in Medellín.³⁷

Escobar first appeared in *Medellín Cívico*'s December 1978 issue. The article, a history of auto-racing in Antioquia heralded Escobar as a patron of the sport with his generous contributions of U.S.-imported racecars and of the construction of a new racetrack in Medellín. Escobar's civic investment, the article praised, would resurrect the pastime in the city for the benefit of all its citizens.³⁸ By 1981, Escobar and his cousin

³⁵ "Un tranvia llamado Hernando," *Medellín Cívico*, January 1983. The term *genízaro* in Spanish refers either to janissaries or indigenous slaves and servants in Spanish-conquered territory in Mexico. In this context, the term is most likely used as a derogatory reference to Quintero Santofimio's soldiers.

³⁶ "Este periódico en 1978," *Medellín Cívico*, November 1977.

³⁷ Hector Abad Gómez, "Nueva Mentalidad en los seguros sociales," *Medellín Cívico*, May 1975

³⁸ "Resurge el automovilismo en Antioquia," *Medellín Cívico*, December 1978.

Gustavo Gaviria, also his partner in the drug trade, had become significant investors in the paper.³⁹ But *Medellín Cívico*'s social commentary seemed to run counter to everything Pablo Escobar's wealth represented. For example, a 1977 article bemoaned the drug trade's invasion of Medellín. "It is sad to see how a city like ours, which was always distinguished itself nationally for the purity of its habits," it lamented, "has now become the central market of traffic of the aforementioned *yerba* [marijuana]."⁴⁰ Therefore, it seems ironic that the paper and its readership would serve as the foundation of Escobar's politics. Nonetheless, the paper offered Escobar the opportunity to graft onto an established political program that would legitimize his entrance into Medellín politics.

Medellín Cívico's commitment to reformist Liberalism defined the path that Escobar would follow for his foray into politics. The publication featured extensive coverage throughout 1981 of Jairo Ortega's Liberal Renewal Movement (MRL; *Movimiento Renovación Liberal*), a reform movement within the Liberal Party. When Ortega announced his 1982 campaign for one of Antioquia's seats in the Chamber of Representatives via *Medellín Cívico*, it seemed like the right opportunity for Escobar to officially enter politics as Ortega's congressional alternate (*suplente*). The fact that Ortega had previously served as crime-boss Alfredo Gómez's lawyer made Escobar's role as alternate even more natural.⁴¹ Escobar adopted his uncle's and the MRL's political views wholeheartedly. Escobar's massive wealth allowed him to bring the MRL's promises of civic projects to life. He planned the construction of soccer fields and

³⁹ Hernando Gaviria gives both "special thanks" for their support at the paper's twenty-fifth anniversary celebration Hernando Gaviria Berrío, "Agradecimiento," *Medellín Cívico*, December 1981.

⁴⁰ "Así marcha el municipio de Medellín," *Medellín Cívico*, August 1977.

⁴¹ Salazar J., *La parábola de Pablo*, 110.

housing projects under his program, “*Civismo en Marcha*,” actions that made him loved amongst Medellín’s poorest residents.⁴² He even sponsored events aimed to address the problem of drug addiction in Medellín—doubly ironic since he himself was an avid user of marijuana.⁴³

Not everyone, however, was swayed by Escobar’s public works. In his first denouncement of Escobar, Lara Bonilla accompanied Galán at a rally in 1982, when they publically expelled Escobar and Ortega’s MRL from the New Liberalism movement. The expulsion did not slow down Escobar’s campaign. He and Ortega responded by allying themselves with Galán’s political rival, Senator Alberto Santofimio Botero. Escobar became one of Santofimio’s biggest supporters, providing the senator with private planes and catering for various events around Colombia.⁴⁴

After Ortega and Escobar’s election in 1982, Escobar began to assert a more prominent voice in *Medellín Cívico* as he set his sights on greater political recognition. The election as president of Betancur, a fellow *paisa*, provided the newspaper with an opportunity to demonstrate its importance in national politics. After Gaviria publicized his support for Betancur’s *Movimiento Nacional*, Betancur responded with a personal letter to Gaviria, which Gaviria published on *Medellín Cívico*’s front page.⁴⁵ Escobar penned the editorial of that issue, one of his few written contributions to the paper and pronouncements on government policy. Evoking Betancur’s campaign slogan, “*sí se*

⁴² “*Civismo en Marcha*” translates roughly to “Community Spirit in Action.”

⁴³ Ibid., 77.

⁴⁴ This was a shrewd political decision by Escobar, as it allowed him to couch his personal frustrations and political attacks against Lara and Galán in the context of Galán and Santofimio’s longstanding rivalry. “Un Robin Hood paisa,” *Semana*, May 16, 1983.

⁴⁵ “Belisario Betancur, presidente electo de los colombianos, exhorta a rodear sus gobierno en carta a ‘Medellín Cívico,’” *Medellín Cívico*, July 1982.

puede” or “it can be done,” Escobar advocated for government investment in reforestation programs in Medellín, which would become one the central components of his civic works.⁴⁶

Escobar and his civic acts occupied an increasingly central role in *Medellín Cívico*. In January 1983, he used the paper to announce the launch of his weekly radio program, “*Civismo en Marcha*,” which he established to trumpet his public works projects.⁴⁷ Escobar and Gustavo Gaviria were listed as “consultants” on *Medellín Cívico*’s masthead by August that year, an addition that changed the tone of the paper. The August issue reads almost as an homage to Escobar, featuring multiple spreads on his radio program, his low-cost housing project entitled “Medellín without Slums” (*Medellín sin tugurios*), and a full page article dedicated to “Pablo Escobar Gaviria: Hope for the Colombian people.” Escobar was poised to take the national political scene by storm, the article read: “the mere call for a Medellín without slums can be seen as an emblem of change and motto for a government of the people and of a revolution; this call resonates in the fields, in the villages, in the cities as a Colombia without slums, without hunger, without vulnerability.”⁴⁸

Semana’s long profile on Escobar in April 1983 constituted his first step toward national recognition. The popular magazine introduced Escobar, “an unknown to most of

⁴⁶ Escobar's choice to write about environmental issues is ironic given the massive damage that illegal cocaine processing labs wreak on the environment. It also could have been a genius political maneuver. Escobar later used his platform as an "environmentalist" to protest the United State's plan to use aerial spraying of paraquat, a general herbicide, to eradicate coca and marijuana cultivations in Colombia. Pablo Escobar Gaviria, “Reforestar en pequeño...sí se puede,” *Medellín Cívico*, July 1982.

⁴⁷ “*Civismo en Marcha*...!,” *Medellín Cívico*, January 1983.

⁴⁸ “Pablo Escobar Gaviria: Esperanza para el Pueblo Colombiano,” *Medellín Cívico*, August 1983.

the county,” as a “*Paisa* Robin Hood” and established boss in Antioquia. Nothing in the Department of Antioquia occurred without his influence, direct or indirect. “Don Pablo,” the article continued, presided over his beneficiaries like a god. The article, while mostly filled with praise for Escobar’s public works, also foreshadowed the disruptive force Escobar would have on national politics. Escobar was already controversial in his home department, *Semana* noted. The “mention of his name produces all sorts of reactions, from explosive joy to profound terror [...] For no one is the name Pablo Escobar indifferent.” Regardless of one’s personal feelings toward Escobar, the article concluded, the unknown source and massive scale of Escobar’s wealth was sure to impact national politics: “Pablo Escobar’s rise on the national stage is an important development, the implications of which remain to be seen. There is no precedent of financial support in politics of this nature, nor civic works of this magnitude, undertaken by one individual.” It would not take long for Escobar’s influence to be felt.

Hot Money

Unfortunately for Escobar, he was not the only trafficker looking to make a name for himself in Colombian politics. A year after Ortega and Escobar’s election to Congress, Carlos Lehder, one of Escobar’s trafficking business partners, decided to dabble in politics. Lehder was a central figure in Colombia’s cocaine smuggling network; in the 1970s, he had bought an island in the Caribbean that he turned into the waypoint for traffickers transporting their product to the United States. He also served as a critical middleman when the Colombian cocaine network first looked to establish itself in the United States, as he introduced his Colombian associates to U.S. distribution networks in

New York and Los Angeles.⁴⁹ Back home in the central coffee zone of Quindio in 1983, Lehder looked to gain the kind of regional influence that Escobar had achieved in Antioquia. He founded his own political movement, the *Movimiento Cívico Latino Nacional*, whose vaguely neo-Nazi, anti-United States, and ultra-nationalist ideology confused more than it inspired. More problematic than Lehder's lack of cohesive political thought, however, was his lack of discretion. While Escobar consciously attempted to conceal the illicit origins of his wealth whenever publicly asked, Lehder made no effort to deny his involvement in the drug trade. In an interview with *Radio Caracol*, Lehder readily acknowledged his trafficking exploits. "I do not deny that I have been involved in the great, Colombian *bonanza* [*marimbera*]," he bragged. But Lehder took his brashness a step too far in the interview when he called unwelcome attention to the government's complicity in the trade. "Nor do I deny that we continue to benefit from tax amnesties today, which have practically "cooled" the dollars that people call "hot".... Like, today, more than ever, hot money (*dineros calientes*) is being legalized."⁵⁰

Lehder's comments about hot money came at an inopportune time for Escobar and his associates. In anticipation of the peace process's incorporation of *guerrilla* groups into the political system, Betancur had recently announced a plan to reform the electoral system. The reforms would give *guerrillas* a way to participate in formal politics and to address accusations of corruption by legalizing the creation of new political parties and implementing legislation to increase transparency in the finances of political parties.

⁴⁹ See Gugliotta and Leen, *Kings of Cocaine*.

⁵⁰ "Hot money" is the term that Colombians used to describe money acquired through illegal means (i.e. drug trafficking). "Lehder cuenta cómo se hizo millonario con bonanza de la droga," *El Espectador*, June 29, 1983, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, June 1983, 20-23.

Increased accountability regarding the source of campaign funds immediately became a salient topic during discussions of the president's announcement.

Lehder's comments, combined with increasing publicity about his illicitly funded movement and Betancur's plan for electoral reform, thus invited intense scrutiny of all of Colombia's politicians. The Colombian public was often willing to ignore the drug trade's wealth in order to reap its benefits, but such an obvious connection between the mafia and the country's national-level politicians was an embarrassment.⁵¹ Escobar, with his wealth of questionable origin, was one of the first targets in the hot money witch-hunt. In response, Escobar quickly went on the offensive. His strategy to defend his name consisted primarily of counter-accusations meant to discredit his opponents. For example, he responded to Senator and former Justice Minister Hugo Escobar Sierra's speculations about his mafia ties with a quarter-page article in *Medellín Cívico*; Escobar Sierra, or the "king of modern hypocrisy" as Escobar Gaviria called him, was in no position to launch accusations. Escobar Gaviria alleged that the senator had not only accepted hot money for his senatorial reelection campaign, but was also heavily involved in both the drug mafia and electoral fraud schemes.⁵²

Meanwhile, Escobar Gaviria's ally, Santofimio, was one of the first nationally prominent politicians to be fingered for his questionable associates. Following the publication of an *El Tiempo* column that accused him of harboring close ties with the drug mafia, the senator responded with a scathing letter to the newspaper's director. Santofimio called the accusation a personal attack on his dignity and categorically denied

⁵¹ D'artagnan, "Coca y política: a deslindar posiciones," *El Tiempo*, July 10, 1983, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, July 1983, 18.

⁵² "Exministro Hugo Escobar Sierra: El Rey de los fariseos modernos," *Medellín Cívico*, August 1983.

any link between his movement and the drug trade. He also denied any association between his party and Lehder's National Latino Movement, but he did not yet disassociate himself from Escobar Gaviria—"I, as a politician, do not have the ability to investigate the origins [of my associates' wealth] or individual donations," he argued. "Representative Escobar Gaviria has given responses for his actions and does not need to justify to others his personal conduct, which is not, I can attest, under investigation by the authorities or the government."⁵³ In closing, Santofimio welcomed further discussion around hot money to take place during the upcoming congressional debate on electoral reform.

On August 16, 1983, Jairo Ortega took the floor of the congressional debate on hot money. He began his speech cautiously, enunciating every carefully chosen word. "[Congress] has tried to provide clarity regarding who is truly involved in this grave problem that has invaded the sphere of national politics," he began. "I enter this debate no personal grudge against anyone." Ortega then turned to address Lara, sitting across the room. He asked Lara if he was familiar with a man named "Evaristo Porras". The minister answered "no." Ortega then proceeded to play an audiotape, but its content was rendered inaudible in the large room. The tape, Ortega explained, was a recording of a meeting between Lara and Porras during the run-up to Lara's 1978 electoral campaign in Leticia. Porras, Ortega continued, was in a Peruvian prison on charges of drug trafficking. Ortega let the weight of his accusation sink in before he concluded, "but far be it from me to claim that this behavior should detain the minister of justice's brilliant political career. I just want the minister to tell us what kind of morals he expects from the rest of us. Rest

⁵³ "Santofimio habla sobre 'dineros calinetes' en las campañas políticas," *El Tiempo*, July 16, 1983, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, July 1983, 15-16.

easy, minister, but let the country know your morality cannot be different from that of Jairo Ortega and the rest of us.”⁵⁴ Although Ortega intended his accusation to deflect attention away from Escobar, his speech actually hastened the end of the trafficker’s political career.

Lara and his allies launched an aggressive offensive against Escobar. In one of the first direct, public denunciations against the drug mafia, Lara stood in front of the Congress to accuse the representative from Antioquia of running Colombia’s cocaine smuggling network and MAS.⁵⁵ Escobar challenged the minister to provide evidence proving his claims, but the blows to Escobar’s image continued. A few days later, the U.S. television network ABC aired a documentary on U.S. cocaine consumption that named Escobar as one of Colombia’s twelve major “cocaine *capos*.”⁵⁶ In September, *El Espectador* confirmed Escobar’s involvement in the trade when its editors dug up the representative’s mug shot from a 1976 trafficking arrest in Itagüí and published the image as a front-page story. Moreover, Escobar had in fact inadvertently outted himself by releasing the Lara-Porras tape. Porras can be heard referencing “*señor* Pablo Escobar, whose contacts are making themselves rich with money from drug trafficking,” multiple times during his conversation with Lara.⁵⁷ In mid-September, Santofimio severed public ties with the trafficker. He asked Escobar to distance himself from his political movement and encouraged the representative to resign from his elected position, and thus relinquish

⁵⁴ “Debate en la Cámara: Acusan a Minjusticia de recibir ‘dineros calientes,’” *El Tiempo*, August 17, 1983, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, August 1983, 36.

⁵⁵ “Soy víctima de una celada: Minjusticia,” *El Tiempo*, August 18, 1983, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, August 1983, 37.

⁵⁶ Rodrigo Pardo, “12 colombianos, ‘capos’ de la mafia en E.U.,” *El Tiempo*, August 20, 1983.

⁵⁷ “En el debate caliente: A Pablo Escobar y Evaristo Porras, los sindicaron como narcotraficantes,” *El Tiempo*, August 28, 1983.

his parliamentary immunity from prosecution. A little more than a week later, a judge in Medellín signed a warrant for Escobar's arrest, citing evidence that Escobar had participated in the 1977 murder of two agents from the city's Department of Public Security (*Departamento de Seguridad y Control*).⁵⁸ Escobar continued his attacks on Lara in *Medellín Cívico* through 1984, but the damage to the trafficker's reputation was permanent. His foray into mainstream politics and society was over.⁵⁹

Figure 4: Doodle of Rodrigo Lara Bonilla in *Medellín Cívico*: “Attack! I already have a million [dollars] in my pocket.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ “Dictan auto de detención a Pablo Escobar,” *El Tiempo*, September 24, 1983, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, September 1983, 20.

⁵⁹ “El ministro caliente,” *Medellín Cívico*, January 1984.

⁶⁰ “Cartoon of Rodrigo Lara Bonilla,” *Medellín Cívico*, January 1984, Biblioteca

The long shadow of the Porras scandal forced Lara to prioritize dismantling the drug mafia as justice minister. This would prove to be a frustrating battle. The debate about hot money had succeeded in unmasking the drug mafia's leaders, but the sorry state of the Colombian justice system in combination with the mafia's bribes and death threats against judges left little hope for the mafia's prosecution. Colombia's most powerful potential tool against the mafia came in the 1979 Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty, as extradition to the United States was one of the few things traffickers feared. Lara advocated fiercely for the treaty's implementation, but the extradition provision was controversial. Many Colombians viewed the extradition of Colombian nationals to the United States as an infringement on national sovereignty. Furthermore, Colombians worried that the document's broad language would allow the government to abuse the treaty's power and apply extradition to Leftist political prisoners wanted by the Cold-War-focused United States.⁶¹

Lara was sensitive to fears regarding overreach of the treaty, but warned the public not to underestimate the danger of the mafia's growing wealth and influence. The mafia's involvement in the international drug trade, he argued, put their crimes on a different level from those of common criminals or even the domestic conflict. He explained in an interview with *El Tiempo*:

There exists a certain type of crime to which we must respond by joining forces and putting aside for a moment our idea of nationality. Those who

Nacional.

⁶¹ My Junior Paper, "Ningún país entrega a sus hijos": Extradition, Nationalism, and Presidential Legitimacy in Belisario Betancur's Colombia," discusses the public debate over extradition in detail.

commit these crimes give no regard to their nationality or their nation, and in doing so they have caused their society and Colombia much harm. In cases where the country's system of justice does not work, our coordinated fight should include extradition."⁶²

Lara, however, found himself alone in his position. Betancur, concerned with the impact extradition might have on his peace process, rejected the United States' first extradition request in December 1983. In the explanation for his decision, Betancur declared that extradition would endanger Colombians' constitutional rights and further insinuated that the treaty would invite unwelcome U.S. influence. Colombia, the president decided, would invest in building its own justice system instead of exporting its criminals to the United States.⁶³ Lara would have to figure out how to fight the drug mafia without the U.S. justice system.

Unable to attack the mafia's *capos* directly, Lara set out to dismantle their enterprise in a piecemeal approach. For example, in order to hinder the mafia's money laundering operations, Lara struck at corporations suspected of collaborating with the mafia as part of his investigation into the Colombia's business elite. Most famously, he went after the country's professional soccer teams, which had flourished with the support of a steady stream of drug money.⁶⁴ The Ministry of Justice's preexisting investigations into the financial sector provided Lara with readily available tools to address money launder. However, the minister quickly realized that Colombia's lack of anti-narcotics

⁶² Lucy Nieto de Samper, "Habla el ministro de Justicia: 'Conmigo se ha moralizado más que con los demás,'" *El Tiempo*, November 22, 1983, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, November 1983, 5.

⁶³ See "GOC Decision on Mejía Extradition," U.S. Embassy, Bogotá to Secretary of State, Department of Justice, November 15, 1983, Digital National Security Archive.

⁶⁴ "La columna que tiene indignados a los hinchas de Nacional," *El Tiempo*, March 12, 2014, <http://www.eltiempo.com/deportes/futbol/columna-de-ezequiel-fernandez-moores-sobre-atletico-nacional/14925619>.

resources meant that he would need to cooperate with U.S. agencies in order to target the production side of the mafia's business. This collaboration proved fruitful in March 1984, when a team of Colombia's military Special Forces (GOES; *Grupo de Operaciones Especiales*), seized *Tranquilandia*, a lab in the remote northeastern *Llanos Orientales* region owned by Escobar and his associates from Medellín. The *Tranquilandia* bust was the Colombian government's biggest score against the mafia. The lab was the largest cocaine-processing site in Latin America with a stock of US\$ 1 billion worth of cocaine.⁶⁵ The amount of cocaine found at *Tranquilandia* surprised even those who had accepted that drug trafficking had become Colombia's largest industry.⁶⁶ Taking advantage of the publicity of the *Tranquilandia* raid, Lara proposed a "statute against drug trafficking" to Congress as an "integral" part of his reform of the justice system. The statute, Lara explained, would allow the government to employ large numbers of anti-narcotics forces to manually eradicate coca and marijuana plantings.⁶⁷

Despite his successes against the mafia, Lara found himself increasingly isolated. Ortega's stunt in front of Congress cost not only Escobar, but also dealt a blow to the justice minister's reputation. Ortega's accusation caught Lara off guard. Directly following the representative's speech, the minister rose to defend himself, but it was clear he was struggling to formulate a coherent response. The longer he spoke, the more muddled his explanation became, and when the transcript of Ortega's tape was released a few days later, it revealed that Lara had indeed met with Porras. The public was outraged.

⁶⁵ "Implicado en el Yará élite del narcotráfico," *El Espectador*, March 22, 1984, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, March 1984, 56.

⁶⁶ "Narcoguerrilla ¿otra embuchado?," *Semana*, April 30, 1984.

⁶⁷ "Anuncia Minjusticia: Estatuto contra el narcotráfico," *El Mundo*, April 6, 1984, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, April 1984, 28.

Lara, whose promises to restore the justice system had inspired the Colombia people, seemed no more trustworthy than the rest of the country's corrupt politicians.⁶⁸

As hard as he tried to resurrect his image in the following months, the Porras scandal continued to cast a shadow on Lara's work. A letter Lara had written to the judge investigating the scandal was leaked to the press in early 1984. In the letter, the minister heaped insults on the judge, repeatedly calling him a "coward" for not ordering Porras's immediate detention. Lara quickly issued a public apology, but the gaffe further soured the public's opinion of the minister.⁶⁹ Additionally, Lara found scant political support from within his own party. Galán had distanced Lara from the New Liberalism movement by ordering an internal ethical tribunal to investigate the Porras scandal, effectively suspending Lara's position in the party.⁷⁰ Betancur, who had resisted the leading class's calls to fire Lara during the height of the Porras scandal, was silent on the issue of the drug trade through 1984. Instead, the president was focused on secret negotiations between the FARC and the government to hammer out a peace agreement in April 1984.⁷¹ The M-19's daytime assault on the provincial capital, Florencia, in March created further distraction for the president.⁷² The peace process's simultaneous successes and

⁶⁸ "Se prendió la mecha."

⁶⁹ "Justicia pa' los de FRAC."

⁷⁰ "Rompen Lara y Galán," *El Tiempo*, September 16, 1983, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, September 1983, 5.

⁷¹ "Nuevas coincidencias," *El Pueblo*, April 5, 1984, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, April 1984, 23.

⁷² "Estado de sitio," *El Mundo*, March 15, 1984, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, March 1984, 43.

failures pushed the mafia toward the bottom of Betancur's policy agenda.⁷³ That would change on April 30, 1984—the day of Lara's assassination.

A "War Without Quarter"

The circumstances of Lara's murder evoked the "*muerte anunciada*," or death foretold, of Gabriel García Márquez's famous novel published one year earlier. Lara knew that his campaign against the drug mafia made him a marked man. "I am a minister dangerous to those working outside the law," he once admitted. "[M]y life has been threatened," he said later, but added that this would not stop his battle against the drug industry. "There are risks in life that you have to assume, and for that reason I feel stronger than ever."⁷⁴ Like Alava, however, Lara had recently decided to heed the threats' warnings. At the end of April 1984, he quietly prepared to leave Colombia as ambassador to Czechoslovakia. In the meantime, Betancur ordered that Lara's entourage take certain precautions. The minister frequently changed his daily routine and traveled with a security detail provided by the Administrative Department of Security (DAS; *Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad*), Colombia's equivalent of the Federal Bureau of Investigations. None of those measures protected Lara from two young men riding a Yamaha on April 30, 1984. While one of Lara's DAS escorts set off on a high-speed chase down Calle 127 to capture the minister's assassins, another car rushed his

⁷³ In fact, an *El Tiempo* columnist noted that just hours before Lara's murder, Betancur had met with a member of Congress with known ties to the drug mafia and whose intervention in Congress had impeded Lara's investigation into the drug mafia's influence in politics. The purpose of the meeting was to gain political support for Betancur's peace process. Daniel Samper Pizano, "¿Qué tan solo dejamos a Lara?," *El Tiempo*, May 3, 1984.

⁷⁴ "Había dicho Lara B.: 'Le tengo terror a que me sorprendan'," *El Tiempo*, May 1, 1984.

body to the Clínica Shaio, ten minutes away. Doctors pronounced the minister dead upon arrival.

Betancur arrived at the hospital at exactly nine o'clock that night.⁷⁵ Looking down at Lara's lifeless body, the president came face to face with the mafia's unchecked power. The death threats that the minister had received left little doubt that the mafia had ordered the hit. The interrogation of the surviving assassin gave further evidence for that theory; he and his partner received their orders from Medellín.⁷⁶ At 2:24 in the morning, Betancur announced the news of Lara's death to the nation in a televised address. Holding back tears, the president outlined his plan of retribution against the mafia. The minister, he said, was the "victim of the accomplishment of his duty and the fight that he advanced against the organized crime, which was trying to take over the country." Lara's death, the president promised, would not be in vain. Betancur urged the country to consider the "profound pain overwhelming us" a lesson. The time had come to accept the minister's unheeded warnings and confront the damage that the drug trade had wrought on Colombian society.

⁷⁵ *El Tiempo's* May 1 coverage of Lara's assassination provides extensive details of the night's events. "Asesinado ministro de justicia Lara Bonilla," *El Tiempo*, May 1, 1984.

⁷⁶ Lara's murder remains an open investigation. In February 2016, investigators ordered that Lara's remains be exhumed to look for evidence supporting a theory that the minister's DAS bodyguards had been complicit in the assassination. "Las dudas que apuntan al DAS en el crimen de Lara Bonilla," *El Tiempo*, February 23, 2016, <http://www.eltiempo.com/politica/justicia/rodrigo-lara-bonilla-sera-exhumado-por-dudas-de-participacion-del-das/16518127>.

Figure 5: Cartoon of Lady Justice: “With the [death of] Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, Lady Justice opened her eyes.”⁷⁷

Referring to the assassination as a “challenge” more than a tragedy, Betancur concluded that his administration would respond accordingly with a total war against the drug trade.⁷⁸ Seven hours after Lara was pronounced dead, Betancur invoked Article 121 of the Constitution and placed the entire country under the state of siege. The decree enacted the typical restrictions on public gatherings and protests, but was also specially tailored to address the drug trade and its related violence. For example, it mandated a

⁷⁷ “Con el ministro Rodrigo Lara Bonilla la Justicia abrió los ojos,” *El Tiempo*, May 2, 1984.

⁷⁸ “Aceptamos desafío a narcotraficantes,” *El Tiempo*, May 1, 1984.

one-year jail sentence for anyone found carrying gasoline, explosives, or precursor chemicals for the production of cocaine (acetone, ether, hydrochloric acid, solvents, or “other analogues used in the production of substances that cause psychological or physical dependency).”⁷⁹ Betancur added to these provisions the next day with Decree 1042 of 1984, which stipulated that individuals accused of drug trafficking would be tried in military courts.⁸⁰

Three days after Lara’s murder, Betancur reaffirmed his war against the mafia. From the steps of the central cathedral in Lara’s hometown, Neiva, the president addressed the hundreds attending the minister’s funeral while the rest of the country tuned in to the televised broadcast. In an emotional yet upbeat speech, the president drew a clear line between his war against the mafia and his approach to *guerrilla* violence. Whereas dialogue served as the foundation of his interactions with the *guerrillas*, the drug trade’s destruction of Colombia’s moral fabric left no room for negotiation with the mafia. “In the face of this scourge on our society,” he boomed, “there is no possible truce and there never will be.” His administration would use all means necessary to wipe out the mafia, including extradition. The president was careful in how he framed the reversal of his stance on the controversial measure:

Now is a time for reflection about what we mean by the *patria*, what we mean by the nation, about what it means to say the word ‘citizen.’ And these concepts are being trampled by those who have created an empire without borders, with a black flag as their banner and indignity and death as their only goals. Stop, enemies of all humanity! Colombia will hand over those criminals wanted for the perpetration of crimes in other

⁷⁹ “Decretos del Estado de Sitio,” *El Caribe*, May 30, 1984, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, May 1984, 5.

⁸⁰ “Narcotáfico pasa a la justicia penal militar,” *El Tiempo*, May 3, 1984.

countries so that they may be punished as examples in this universal operation against an attack that is also universal.⁸¹

By invoking nationhood and citizenship and then explicitly presenting the mafia as an affront to those concepts, Betancur asserted that the state no longer had a moral obligation to protect the mafia as it would law-abiding Colombian citizens. Furthermore, his description of the drug mafia as an “empire without borders” transformed the mafia from actors in a domestic industry to a national security threat. This allowed the argument for extradition to take on a patriotic tone. Extradition was perceived as a necessary tool “to recover the national dignity that the drug trade had stolen.”⁸²

Both the leading class and general public responded to Betancur’s declaration of war with overwhelming support. As *Semana* would describe a month after Lara’s murder, “If the death of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán thirty-six years earlier had unleashed the repressed fury of a class conflict, the death of Rodrigo Lara has just unleashed an unexpected reaction of ‘Enough already!’ against the power of organized crime.”⁸³ The first assassination of a sitting government minister in the country’s history, Lara’s murder horrified Colombians. No longer willing to turn a blind eye to the mafia’s influence, many raised a call for the country to adopt Lara’s crusade against the drug trade. “Sitting down to cry over the body of a man who offered his life for a just cause,” an *El Tiempo* editorial argued, “would be the worst response to his sacrifice.” Politicians like Galán echoed these calls. The New Liberalism leader announced, “we must bow in reverence to his example and his memory to express our decision to continue his noble fight.”⁸⁴

⁸¹ “Colombia extraditará a criminales,” *El Tiempo*, May 3, 1984.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ “Garrote a la mafia,” *Semana*, June 11, 1984.

⁸⁴ “Consternación por el asesinato de Lara,” *El Tiempo*, May 1, 1982.

Specifically regarding extradition, an *El Tiempo* survey conducted on May 1 found widespread support for the treaty, while the paper's editorial called for the reversal of the "falsely nationalist and anti-American position of denying extradition."⁸⁵ After Betancur's speech in Neiva, the public was impressed at the speed of the government's war against the mafia. In only ten days, the military conducted 408 raids, resulting in 152 captures of suspected drug traffickers. Daily front-page headlines in Colombia's major newspapers broadcast the war's successes: the arrest of Fabio Ochoa; seizures of dozens of cocaine processing labs, plants, and ranches; and the initiation of a country-wide manhunt for Escobar and Lehder.⁸⁶ Despite this strong public support, the "war without quarter" against the drug trade introduced serious complications to Betancur's presidency. By launching a military attack on the mafia, the president created a domestic conflict with two fronts and vastly different goals.

The peace process was never far from Betancur's mind. On the day of Lara's murder, the M-19 and ELN launched a wave of attacks across the country. The M-19 attacked public buses in Colombia's three largest cities—Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali—setting a total of twenty-one vehicles on fire. Meanwhile, members of the ELN ambushed and killed four policemen in Antioquia and Cauca.⁸⁷ Conscious of the fragility of his peace process, Betancur worked to reassure the *guerrillas* that his war against the mafia would not affect his commitment to political peace. "Our state will never allow the destruction of our society" by the mafia, Betancur promised on the night of Lara's death,

⁸⁵ "Hora de decisiones," *El Tiempo*, May 2, 1984.

⁸⁶ For many, the methodical raids also confirmed their suspicions of previous government complicity in the trade. There was no other way, they argued, that the government could locate the mafia's members and properties so quickly. "Garrote a la mafia."

⁸⁷ "Audaz escalada terrorista," *El Tiempo*, May 1, 1984.

but “we will act with respect to human rights and the community. The state can provide protection without committing excesses.”⁸⁸ Betancur was particularly careful when invoking the state of siege. While earlier presidents had enforced the state of siege statute as a broad mandate against any form of dissent, the president explicitly called for a more limited use. The state of siege would not represent a reversion to Turbay’s policy of repression. Echoing his inaugural address during his speech in Neiva, he explained, “our duty and the duty of all society is to separate the two fields” of *guerrilla* violence and the drug mafia.⁸⁹ Given recent events, however, it would prove difficult to maintain this distinction.

Following the *Tranquilandia* raid in March, rumors had begun to circulate about a possible mafia-*guerrilla* connection. Defense minister, General Gustavo Matamoros, first posited the idea of the “*narcoguerrilla*” during a radio announcement, a few days after the *Tranquilandia* discovery. The military, Matamoros announced, had uncovered evidence of collaboration between the drug mafia and the country’s *guerrilla* groups, creating a *narco-guerrilla* hybrid threat to the state. A *Semana* article described the rumor’s proliferation: “From that moment on, the word began to spread from mouth to mouth and the phenomenon it described was commented on by senior military officers, government officials, trade union leaders, and the U.S. ambassador. It even merited an illustrated page in one of the most prestigious North American magazines.”⁹⁰ The authenticity of Matamoros’ statement was dubious. Supporters of the *narcoguerrilla* theory pointed to *Tranquilandia*’s location deep in FARC-controlled territory as evidence

⁸⁸ “Aceptamos desafío a narcotraficantes.”

⁸⁹ “Colombia extraditará a criminales.”

⁹⁰ “Narcoguerrilla ¿otra embuchado?”

of the *guerrillas*' cooperation in the trade. The GOES team that led the raid feared as much when they approached the jungle lab; worried that the lack of enemy fire indicated that the lab's security forces were busy mobilizing for a counter-attack, the general commanding the operation called the military to send back up. He mentioned the possibility of FARC involvement, *Semana* notes mostly because he knew "that was the only way to ensure immediate military support."⁹¹ Such precautions proved unnecessary. As the Army sifted through the massive amounts of drugs, planes, and cars left at the site, soldiers found no concrete evidence of *guerrilla* involvement. Declarations by high-ranking military officials, however, painted a different picture. They assured the public that they possessed evidence that the FARC had provided protection for the lab, with no further explanation.

The public found the military and the U.S. government's support for the *narcoguerrilla* theory unsurprising. The U.S. government had been convinced of a *narcoguerrilla* connection since Turbay's presidency. U.S. intelligence memoranda from 1982 cite evidence that both the M-19 and the FARC were actively engaged in trafficking.⁹² The U.S. Ambassador to Colombia at the time, Lewis Tambs, was vocal about his belief in a link between the FARC and the drug trade. He often exhorted

⁹¹It is worth noting here *Semana's* attitude toward the FARC. Given the centrality of the armed conflict in Colombian politics, each Colombian news source had developed a distinct bias in relation to the *guerrilla*. Penagos-Carreño's work provides an analysis of each of the most important news sources' attitudes toward the FARC in 1984. He specifically looks at representations of the FARC as either "*narcoguerrilla*" or political *guerrilla*. According to his analysis, *Semana's* coverage was fairly neutral, referring to the *guerrillas* as both political actors and criminals depending on the circumstance. See Julián Penagos-Carreño, "1984 Representaciones de las Farc en la prensa: guerrilla comunista o narcoguerrilla," *Palabra - Clave* 18, no. 1 (March 2015): 12–40.

⁹² Directorate of Intelligence, "Colombian Presidential Election: Impact on U.S. Narcotics Policy," May 1982, 2, Digital National Security Archive.

Colombian government officials to address what he saw as a growing threat (much to the chagrin of the Colombian public, who began to refer to him as “Viceroy Tambs”).⁹³

Further proof of this connection would have been convenient for Washington. As part of its Cold War battle against communism, the United States actively promoted a theory of global communist trafficking networks.

In the meantime, the Colombian military consistently showed its reluctance to give up on its fight against the *guerrillas*. Proof of *guerrilla* involvement in the drug trade would have undermined Betancur’s conception of the armed groups as politically motivated actors. As *Semana* explained, “[the *guerrillas*] would no longer be the noble fighters guided by a set of ideals, but rather partners and accomplices in an activity that was believed to be morally unacceptable. “Colombians were in shock, however, when Betancur’s second-in-command, government minister Alfonso Gómez Gómez, mentioned drug trafficking in his justification of the establishment of the state of siege after the M-19 attack on Florencia. *Semana* conceded that the military’s theory seemed to make sense: both organizations had a common enemy in the state security agency. Collaboration between the mafia and the *guerrillas* would be mutually beneficial: the mafia could supply money for arms, while the *guerrillas* protected the mafia’s growing and processing facilities. But, there were also various reasons why an alliance between the two groups seemed impossible. The war between MAS and the *guerrillas* represented the most obvious barrier, and aside from the mafia’s support of the paramilitary group, General Luis Enrique Rodríguez Botiva confirmed that the FARC and the mafia regularly

⁹³ “Los lios de Mr. Tambs,” *Semana*, May 14, 1984

clashed over *guerrilla* raids on mafia labs.⁹⁴ Both the FARC and the members of the mafia vehemently denied any connection. In one interview, Escobar expressed his indignation at the rumor. “If they accuse me of being a drug trafficker, fine, whatever,” he said. “But if they try to present me as an associate of the *guerrilla*, that I will not accept. That is an affront to my personal dignity.”⁹⁵

It is important to note that not all government officials accepted the *narcoguerrilla* theory. *Semana* cites a high government official who asserted that the military had no concrete proof that supported a link between the mafia and the *guerrillas*.⁹⁶ Recent scholars of the drug trade in Colombia are similarly divided on the origins of *guerrilla* involvement in the drug trade. Thoumi, for example, contends that the mafia and *guerrillas* frequently collaborated as early as 1980, but Camacho is more skeptical about the extent of the two groups’ relationship.⁹⁷ Nonetheless, rumors about the mafia-*guerrilla* connection put Betancur in a delicate position. A generalized belief in the *narcoguerrilla* theory would jeopardize his already delicate negotiations with the *guerrilla*. So, careful not to directly accuse Matamoros, Tambs, or anyone else of being dishonest, the president energetically denounced the theory in a televised speech. The *guerrilla* and the drug traffickers, he affirmed, were entirely distinct entities.⁹⁸

Betancur’s speech did not convince everyone, and lingering suspicion of a mafia-*guerrilla* entanglement continued to compromise the president’s distinction between his drug war and peace policy. The designation of a “war without quarter” gave the military a

⁹⁴ “Narcoguerrilla ¿otra embuchado?”

⁹⁵ “Dignidad del narco,” *Cromos*, May 2, 1984.

⁹⁶ “Narcoguerrilla ¿otra embuchado?”

⁹⁷ Thoumi, *Political Economy and Illegal Drugs in Colombia*, 159; Camacho Guizado, *El narcotráfico en la sociedad colombiana*, 4:151.

⁹⁸ “Los lios de Mr. Tambs.”

green light to use a free hand (*mano libre*) to attack suspected members of the mafia. Despite Betancur's repeated assurances that the war against the mafia would not jeopardize his peace process, the militarization of his antinarcotics policy combined with his embrace of tactics like the State of Siege and extradition invited the possibility that the military might overstep its bounds. The State of Siege was particularly disorienting for members of the military who, even more than the general public, associated the statute almost exclusively with the fight against subversion. Betancur's 1984 decrees provided little instruction for how to ensure Betancur's strict segregation between political violence and the drug trade. Its language was simultaneously specific and broad. For example, to target the drug mafia's army of hired killers, the decree mandated the arrest of anyone who used masks, hoods, or any other method of hiding or obscuring their identity.⁹⁹ Conditions like one gave officials considerable leeway in determining who was or was not a potential suspect. An article published in the popular magazine *Cromos* provided evidence for this point. Citing a bulletin from the Permanent Committee for the Defense of Human Rights, the magazine reported numerous rights violations by military officers on anti-narcotics raids. The murder of eleven men by thirty men dressed in anti-narcotics police uniforms was particularly disturbing.¹⁰⁰ The individual officers could easily use the war against the mafia as a guise to target anyone that they suspected was involved with any type of crime, including subversion.

Furthermore, the total war against drug created an opportunity for military commanders wary of Betancur's peace process to pursue their own goals. The military

⁹⁹ "Decretos del Estado de Sitio."

¹⁰⁰ Manuel Uribe S.J., "La violencia es algo más que apretar un gatillo," *Cromos*, June 5, 1984, 21.

high command's relationship with the president never fully recovered after the MAS debacle in early 1983. Betancur's secret negotiations with *guerrilla* leaders in Madrid fostered an even deeper sense of betrayal among the military. Journalist Steven Dudley writes in his account of the Colombian domestic conflict that the military could not believe that the president would abandon their war against subversion. The president, high commanders believed, was naïve to agree to submit to the *guerrillas'* demands for a ceasefire. According to them, the break in armed confrontations would simply allow the *guerrillas* to consolidate their power and strike back even harder against an unprepared State.¹⁰¹ The military also hoped that their continued insistence on the existence of *narcoguerrilla*-hybrid would, after Betancur's decision not to negotiate with the mafia, force the civilian government to reconsider any plans to sign a treaty with the *guerrillas*. In this context, the timing of the state of siege's implementation to coincide with the beginning of Betancur's ceasefire with the FARC provided the armed forces with a cover for their continued assaults against the *guerrillas*.

While Colombia's leading newspapers published successes from the army's attacks on suspected traffickers, documents from Betancur's peace commission hint at a dirty war that was waged by the military against suspected *guerrillas*. The president of the Northern Santander Workers' Federation begged Betancur to order an investigation into and an end to paramilitary attacks on the regions' peasants. "As much as we are filled with indignation at the assassination of *señor* Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, were are equally disconcerted by the crime committed against the citizens Jesús Eduardo

¹⁰¹ Dudley, *Walking Ghosts*, 33.

Vasco and his wife,” peasants murdered by MAS on May 26.¹⁰² Another letter from Manuel Vidal Noguera, an advisor for the government’s National Program for Rehabilitation, Amnesty, and Zones Affected by Violence, to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees indicated the danger faced by amnestied *guerrillas*. Writing on behalf of a former M-19 fighter, Vidal asked the Commission to arrange safe passage for the former *guerrilla* and his family out of Colombia. Threats from MAS had made it impossible for the government program to ensure their safety.¹⁰³ In the complicated web of Colombian violence, Betancur had no way of ensuring that his two fights—against the mafia and against the armed *guerrilla* threat—would remain truly separate.

Thus, close analysis of Lara’s murder proves essential for both an understanding of Colombian sentiment toward and treatment of the drug trade, and a correction of the historiography of the subject. Lara’s murder served as the catalyst for the transformation of Colombians’ perception of the drug trade from a valuable source of foreign exchange to a threat to state security. This shift had deep repercussions for Betancur’s other programs, most significantly his peace process. Looking at history this way and from this perspective debunks the U.S.-centric historiographical narrative of a Colombian drug policy drafted by Washington’s leaders in the War on Drugs. Betancur’s shift in Colombian policy after April 1984 illustrated how domestic attitudes and political dynamics, not U.S. influence, played a central role in the development of Colombian

¹⁰² Juan Bautista Patiño O. and Luis Enrique Jaines, Federación Nortesantandereana de Trabajadores, “Carta a Belisario Betancur,” June 5, 1984, Box 52, Folder 2, Departamento Administrativo de la Presidencia de la República: Colección Belisario Betancur.

¹⁰³ Manuel Vidal Noguera, “Carta a Ulrich Von Blumenthal, Asesor Jurídico del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Refugiados,” June 21, 1984, Box 58, Folder 7, Departamento Administrativo de la Presidencia de la República: Colección Belisario Betancur.

drug policy in the early 1980s. The complications related to this shift in policy—for example, the State of Siege’s effect on Betancur’s peace process—also highlight the importance of these uniquely Colombian concerns.

Establishing these historiographical accounts as myths thereby invites us to question other theories produced by the United States’ War on Drugs narrative. Most studies of the Colombian cocaine trade focus their discussion about drug consumption on U.S. habits. This is understandable, because the United States represented, and continues to represent, Colombian traffickers’ largest market.¹⁰⁴ This narrative, believed by both Colombian and U.S. writers, propagates the idea that Colombians neglected to address the drug trade because Colombia was not a “consuming nation;” drug consumption was the United States’ problem. Although true that powdered cocaine consumption was primarily a U.S. habit, the Colombian public had a more complicated relationship with drugs than the prevailing War on Drugs narratives suggest. Colombians formed opinions on drug consumption in response to domestic social and political dynamics, and a process in which Lara’s murder played a significant role.

¹⁰⁴ See Henderson, *Víctima de la globalización*; Gaviria Uribe and Mejía Londoño, *Políticas antidroga en Colombia*; and Thoumi, *Political Economy and Illegal Drugs in Colombia*.

CHAPTER THREE DRUGS: HEALTH, MORALITY, AND CRIME

The last two chapters of this thesis focused on how different sets of actors contributed to state insecurity during Betancur's administration, complicating the president's ability to fulfill his campaign promise of national peace. This chapter, in contrast, examines Lara's murder as a turning point in the evolution of public attitudes and government legislation regarding a set of substances and behaviors: illegal drugs and individual drug consumption.¹ Like chapter two, this chapter revolves around the domestic context for the formulation of Colombian drug policy with the goal of asserting Colombian agency in a historiographical field that privileges United States-centric accounts. In doing so, this chapter also aims to fill a significant gap in the historiography of Latin American drug policy. Due to the myth of Colombia being a "non-consuming nation" and scholars' tendency to focus on the activities of cocaine *traffickers* during the 1980s, the story of Colombian consumption and addiction during this period has received little attention.

In order to explain the significance of Lara's assassination for Colombian drug policy, this chapter begins by examining the longer history of drug regulation in Colombia. As the country's drug habits shifted from coca to *chicha* to marijuana, the general public's attitudes oscillated between alarmist calls for prohibition and open

*This chapter fulfills the Princeton Global Health Program's senior thesis requirement.

¹ In this thesis, I use the term "drugs" to mean "psychoactive drugs, and often, more specifically, to illicit drugs, of which there is medical use in addition to nonmedical use," as defined by the World Health Organization's 1994 Lexicon of Alcohol and Drugs. Examples of these substances include tobacco, caffeine, and alcohol, along with cocaine and marijuana. "WHO Lexicon of Alcohol and Drug Terms" (Geneva: World Health Organization, 1994), http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/39461/1/9241544686_eng.pdf.

acceptance of consumption. Drug-related legislation, meanwhile, evolved slowly and prioritized prevention and treatment programs over prohibition or strict criminalization. By examining the Betancur administration's response to the emergence of a new drug—*bazuco*—this chapter illustrates how Betancur maintained this public health-driven approach to drug policy during the first two years of his presidency in spite of U.S. pressure to enforce prohibition. Finally, this chapter argues that the president's declaration of war on the mafia in the aftermath of Lara's death also called for a war on the drugs themselves. In doing so, Betancur fundamentally altered Colombia's approach to drug policy, ultimately shifting it to align with U.S. prohibition.

Early Drug Policy

Attempts to control the consumption and distribution of drugs in Colombia date back to the colonial period, when coca and *chicha* served as the primary targets of colonial legislation. Coca consumption was not as widespread in Colombia as in other Andean regions, but the plant nonetheless played an important role in indigenous Colombian life.² Indigenous groups chewed a mixture of raw coca leaves and fine ash as a means for both physical and spiritual fortification.³ The leaf's alkaloids, released by the combination of saliva and ash, neutralized the symptoms of altitude, cold, and fatigue that characterized life in the Andean highlands. Indigenous peoples also considered the coca plant to be a central object in traditional rituals. Spiritual leaders chewed coca leaves as preparation to interact with the gods. As Salazar's interviews with contemporary

² Thoumi, *Political Economy and Illegal Drugs in Colombia*, 124.

³ Salazar provides in depth descriptions of the rituals of indigenous coca use. Alonso Salazar J., *Drogas y narcotráfico en Colombia* (Bogotá: Planeta Colombiana Editorial, S.A., 2001), 21–40.

indigenous leaders reveal, “The coca leaf is so sacred to [the] Huitoto [an indigenous group] elders that for them, selling coca would be equivalent to Christians selling the Eucharist. It would be like selling one’s soul.”⁴ The centrality of coca to indigenous life prompted Spanish Colonial officials to regulate its consumption as part of a broader program to control indigenous way of life. Spanish Catholic missionaries viewed coca consumption as symbol of “ancient superstitions” that posed an obstacle to their “Christianization” of the indigenous population.⁵ Even so, many Spanish Colonists and creole elite not only tolerated coca consumption by their indigenous workers, but actually required their workers to chew coca, as it allowed them to work long hours without food.⁶

Legislation regarding drug production and consumption developed slowly in the post-independence period, but increased over the course of the twentieth century *chicha* replaced coca as the state’s primary concern in the nineteenth century. The government blamed *chicha*, an alcoholic beverage made from fermented maize, for the moral degradation of Colombia’s indigenous and lower-class workers. Public health officials in Bogotá, for example, referred to *pulperías*, or bars that served *chicha*, as hotbeds of violence and immorality. The country’s minister of hygiene in the 1840s expressed similar worry when he confirmed that the National Police’s Clínica de Urgencias, responded annually to 6,000 violent incidents or injuries related to *chicha* consumption.⁷

Around the turn of the twentieth century, the global rise in cocaine and morphine consumption motivated Colombian officials to turn their attention to these newly

⁴ Ibid., 24.

⁵ For more on Colonial regulation of coca, see Anthony Henman, *Mama Coca*, trans. Gabriel Iriarte, 3a ed. (Bogotá: El Ancora Editores, 1981).

⁶ Salazar J., *Drogas y narcotráfico en Colombia*, 28.

⁷ Ibid., 36.

synthesized drugs. Law 11 of 1920 established Colombia's first national legislation regulating the production and sale of drugs. Written to establish tight controls on the production of psychoactive substances for patent medicines marketed by North American entrepreneurs and quack doctors as "cure-alls," the law restricted the production of opium, cocaine, heroin, cannabis, and any of those substances' derivatives to licensed doctors and pharmacies.⁸ The process of regulation continued through the first half of the twentieth century. Law 118 of 1928 introduced the first measures specifically targeting drug consumption by formalizing the concept of drug "misuse." Later, a law passed in 1936 deemed drug misuse a "crime against public health" and ordered consumers to undergo medical care for their habit. It is interesting to note that these early rounds of legislation were intended mainly to control the *import* of drugs into Colombia, rather than monitor the export trade for which Colombia later became famous.⁹

Between 1930 and the 1970s, Colombian legislators intended their drug laws to address the increasing prevalence of marijuana consumption among the population. Colombian authorities discovered a proliferation of marijuana cultivations in 1925, long before the drug made the country famous during the *bonanza marimbera* of the 1970s. These early users of marijuana, however, represented a small subset of Colombian society. Consumption was localized to port cities of Buenaventura and Barranquilla and the lower class sailors and prostitutes who worked there. Even though only a small sector of the population engaged with the drug, the perceived "immorality" of this group

⁸ Camacho Guizado, *El narcotráfico en la sociedad colombiana*, 4:237; For an excellent history of drug consumption, production, and regulation in the United States, see David F. Musto, *The American Disease: Origins of Narcotic Control*, 3 edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁹ Salazar J., *Drogas y narcotráfico en Colombia*, 38, 41.

nonetheless worried health officials. Furthermore, the historian Eduardo Sáenz Rovner argues that U.S. public health studies and popular discourse linking marijuana use to criminality played an important role in shaping Colombian perceptions of the drug. Marijuana, U.S. studies purported to show, caused a type of psychosis that lead users to commit horrific acts of violence.¹⁰ Thus, in 1951, inspired by U.S. legislation, Colombia passed its first law criminalizing drug consumption. The law specifically targeted marijuana.¹¹ This legislation, however, did little to stem the drug's rising popularity in the decades that followed. Marijuana use, particularly among the younger sector of the population, exploded in the 1960s.

Attitudes toward marijuana in the 1960s and 1970s reflected a generational divide both specific to Colombia and reflective of global trends. Colombian youth embraced marijuana, LSD, and other psychedelics as tools of rebellion against the “traditional establishment” of their parents’ generation. These drugs and the “free love” culture they evoked provided a stark contrast to both the rigid politics of the National Front and the ongoing domestic conflict between the government and *guerrilla* groups. Festival Ancón, Colombia’s answer to Woodstock, best exemplified this attitude, as thousands of *hippies* descended onto a field near Medellín in 1971 to smoke, dance, and celebrate free love and peace.¹² Meanwhile, the invasion of this youthful drug culture scandalized older

¹⁰ Eduardo Sáenz Rovner, “Antecedentes de la marihuana en Colombia entre los años 30 y 60,” in *Para reescribir el siglo XX: Memoria, insurgencia, paramilitarismo y narcotráfico*, ed. Javier Guerrero Barón and Olga Yanet Acuña Rodríguez (Bogotá: Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia/La Carreta Editores E.U., 2011), 255. “Reefer Madness,” an educational movie featuring a highly exaggerated depiction of marijuana's effects on U.S. youth was released in 1936 and serves as a good example of U.S. fears regarding the drug during this period.

¹¹ Salazar J., *Drogas y narcotráfico en Colombia*, 41.

¹² Henderson, *Víctima de la globalización*, 63.

residents of Medellín and the country in general. “Parents in Medellín and around the country filed kidnapping charges against the boys that brought their daughters to the concert, while the police rounded up and deported foreign hippies who had entered the country illegally to attend,” writes Henderson.¹³ Guillermo Cano Puerta, a doctor at the University of Antioquia, warned that marijuana use was quickly becoming one of the biggest threats to Colombian society and called for a “fight to the death” against drug consumption.¹⁴

Political attitudes toward marijuana use during this period also reflected this divide between reformists and conservative traditionalists. In 1968, President Carlos Lleras Restrepo, who would later serve as a leading proponent of reformist Liberalism, reduced penalties for the production and consumption of illicit drugs. Instead of promoting criminal penalties, Lleras advocated for investment in prevention campaigns and the rehabilitation of users. The position of Lleras’s successor, the Conservative Misael Pastrana Borrero, represented a shift back toward prohibition. As one of his final acts in office, Pastrana introduced Colombia’s first comprehensive statutes on narcotics, Decree 1188 of 1974. The decree clearly laid out restrictions, penalties, and conditions for the import, production, and consumption of a range of drugs. It also created a National Commission of Narcotics, headed by the Ministries of Health and Justice, to enforce and improve on drug-related legislation. The law, however, did not completely abandon Lleras’s commitment to prevention and rehabilitation. It included significant

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Salazar J., *Drogas y narcotráfico en Colombia*, 42.

sections dedicated to the establishment of educational programs for prevention and treatment programs for addicts.¹⁵

Undeterred by Pastrana's legislation, marijuana use quickly spread to mainstream Colombian society. As Salazar describes, by the late 1970s, the smell of marijuana became a common feature of the streets of Colombia's major cities. "Marijuana smoke had taken over the streets. Consumers of the herb [were] varied in their origin and habits of consumption; they [are] different in age, profession, and socioeconomic class."¹⁶ This increasing societal acceptance of marijuana encouraged politicians to reconsider Pastrana's restrictions. In 1979, Ernesto Samper, then president of the National Association of Financial Institutions (ANIF; *Asociación Nacional de Instituciones Financieras*), organized a symposium entitled "Marijuana, Myth-Reality." Speakers from Colombia and abroad representing various fields including medicine, law, and economics, gathered to discuss the drug.¹⁷ After the conference, Samper began to advocate for the legalization of marijuana, a view he explained in detail in a book he published in 1980.

Samper found inspiration for his argument in the wave of marijuana decriminalization laws passed in the United States during the 1970s. His reasoning, however, took on a definitively nationalist and anti-U.S. tone. The United States, he observed, seemed to have adopted the ancient Roman tradition of customary law in its march toward full legal acceptance of marijuana use.¹⁸ Meanwhile, U.S. policy toward Colombia represented a "law of contrasts" with its domestic attitude. U.S. politicians

¹⁵ See chapters two and eight, Misael Pastrana Borrero, *Estatuto de Estupefacientes*, 1974, ftp://ftp.camara.gov.co/camara/basedoc/decreto/1974/decreto_1188_1974.html.

¹⁶ Salazar J., *Drogas y narcotráfico en Colombia*, 46.

¹⁷ Camacho Guizado, *El narcotráfico en la sociedad colombiana*, 4:145.

¹⁸ Ernesto Samper Pizano, *Legalización de la marihuana* (Bogotá: ANIF, Fondo Editorial, 1980), 9.

proved willing to modify their laws in order to appease their marijuana-smoking constituents, Samper noted with indignation. But, they continued to push their Colombian counterparts toward extreme prohibitionist measures, such as aerial herbicide spraying to destroy marijuana cultivations, “because, as far as anyone knows, no president of the United States has been elected with votes from the peasants of the Sierra Nevada.”¹⁹ Why, he asked, should the United States expect Colombia to destroy its peasants’ lands and suffer from its reputation as the marijuana capital of the world when U.S. politicians allowed their people to consume freely? The legalization of marijuana in Colombia, Samper concluded, would allow the Colombian government to reap the financial benefits of the marijuana trade and respond to the United States’ hypocritical policy.²⁰

Samper’s argument did not gain the momentum it needed for consideration as official government policy, but it did attract the public’s attention. A 1982 article from the magazine *Revista Javeriana* illustrates the degree to which the legalization debate became mainstream. The article, which weighed the pros and cons of legalization, ultimately decided against Samper’s argument. What is important, however, is the neutral tone that the conservative, Catholic magazine employed in its evaluation. In contrast with the traditional Catholic prohibitionist stance on drug use, the magazine attempted to present each argument with equal weight. Lifting some restrictions on marijuana and regulating profits from the trade, the article conceded, could present a viable option for the government as it looked to offset the effects of the 1980s financial crisis. Even when

¹⁹ Ibid., 16.

²⁰ Ibid., 19. It is worth noting that Samper's presidential administration (1994-1998) was marred by accusations that Samper harbored close ties with the cocaine mafia based in Cali. It is unlikely, however, that this relationship played a factor in Samper's push for legalization of marijuana in 1980.

arguing against legalization, *Revista Javeriana* avoided moralizing against drug use, instead worrying about the difficulty of changing the existing legislation.²¹

While the public debated the relative merits of prohibitionism and legalization, the issue of marijuana use did not register in the 1982 presidential election; none of the candidates spoke in depth about their plans for drug policy. U.S. State Department interest in the election's impact on its antinarcotic program, however, generated reports that offered surprisingly astute predictions for Betancur's position. As an extremely religious Conservative, one report noted, Betancur was likely to oppose drug consumption and trafficking as a moral issue.²² Nevertheless, the president's desire to facilitate peace talks with *guerrilla* groups indicated that the president would be unwilling to introduce radical policies to tackle the marijuana market. Marijuana cultivations, another report read, were typically located in remote areas and tended to be the type of poor, indigenous peasants that *guerrilla* groups, like the FARC, often appealed to. The destruction of these farmers' livelihoods could encourage them to join the FARC or ELN. Thus, it was unlikely that Betancur would be willing to take that risk. Instead, the report argued, U.S. officials should encourage the president to tackle coca eradication, since fewer peasants were involved in that trade and the U.S. government was increasingly concerned by its populace's rising cocaine consumption.²³ The breadth of Betancur's anti-narcotics policy would ultimately the U.S. State Department's

²¹ Benjamin Losada P., "Colapso Marimbero? De la 'Cocoba' a la supermarihuana," *Revista Javeriana*, October 1982, 324–326.

²² Directorate of Intelligence, "Colombian Presidential Election: Impact on U.S. Narcotics Policy," 3.

²³ U.S. Department of State, "Colombian Anti-Narcotics Policies: Domestic Problems and Prospects for Change," 2, 5.

predictions, as he would pursue campaigns against both marijuana and coca. The president's motivations, nevertheless, had little to do with U.S. influence.

Invasion of the *Zuqueros*

As Betancur settled into his presidency, a new drug had begun to replace marijuana as Colombia's most significant vice. Around the end of the 1970s, hard-partying urbanites noticed a new substance being offered alongside their usual options of marijuana, powdered cocaine, and LSD. Where cocaine used to rule in Colombian bars and clubs, by early 1983 *Cromos* reported that "*bazuco*," as the drug was known, had become king.²⁴ *Bazuco*, or coca paste, is not significantly different, pharmacologically, from cocaine. It is created as an intermediary product in the synthesis of cocaine from coca leaves and can contain between 40 to 91 percent cocaine alkaloids. Users typically smoke *bazuco* in a dried form, sometimes in cigarettes rolled with marijuana or tobacco. It can also be smoked in its pure form when heated in a metal spoon or similar container.²⁵ Whichever way its users chose to consume it, *bazuco*'s growing popularity raised alarm among the Colombian public.

Bazuco, a two-part investigation by *Cromos* reported, "has taken hold, not only in the form of crystals in the lungs of its addicts, but in Colombian society more broadly, among all social classes, in the countryside and in the city." Whereas drugs like marijuana or cocaine had been confined to specific social groups for most of history, *bazuco* addicts could be found anywhere. In Bogotá, it was unsurprising to find users

²⁴ Alternative spellings of the drug include "*basuco*" or "*bazuko*." Antonio Morales, "Muerte por bazuco (I)," *Cromos*, March 15, 1983, 26.

²⁵ F. R. Jeri, "Coca-Paste Smoking in Some Latin American Countries: A Severe and Unabated Form of Addiction," *Bulletin on Narcotics* 36, no. 2 (June 1984): 1.

loitering in the streets of poorer districts like *Ciudad Kennedy*, where unemployment and boredom created an environment that fostered the escapism of drug abuse. But the drug's equal appeal to middle and upper class Colombians was more striking, as "night after night, dozens of elegant cars idle in front of [*bazuco* dealers'] doors, as businessmen and people of good incomes buy an abundance of *bazuco* for their parties." Affluent addicts frequented "Addict Clubs" tucked away on northern Bogotá streets where they could indulge in their habit in secrecy, evoking the Chinese opium dens of the nineteenth century. Meanwhile, the growing class of users created their own underground subculture of "*zucolocos*" with a particular "*zucostumbre*" threw "*zucorumbas*" and hoped to avoid "*zucoparanoia*."²⁶

The strange rituals and growing number of *bazuco* consumers were not the only aspects of the drug that worried Colombians. According to *Cromos*, *bazuco* posed a threat to Colombian's physical health and moral character that far surpassed any drug the country had encountered previously. *Cromos*'s reporter quoted panicked psychiatrists, who said they did not have the skills to treat the growing number of *zuqueros*, as the drug's users came to be known. Psychiatrists found that the particular psychosis that *bazuco* overuse caused did not respond to traditional treatment methods, and even those who eventually quit their habit never truly returned to their normal selves.²⁷ The drug's popularity among adolescents was particularly troubling. At the time, *bazuco* ranked among the most expensive drugs on the Colombian market, particularly in wealthier neighborhoods where dealers bumped up prices in accordance with their clientele. While upper-class businessmen had little problem sustaining their habit, *Cromos* warned that

²⁶ Morales, "Muerte por *bazuco* (I)."

²⁷ Antonio Moralaes, "Muerte por *Bazuco* (II)," *Cromos*, March 22, 1983, 60.

“the adolescent addict loses what little status he might have had,” as he became increasingly dependent on the drug. Eventually, the addict would be willing to do anything to get his next fix. “A *bazuquero* in need of a fix is capable of killing a man, of robbing his parents, and, as has been recorded in multiple locations... selling himself to homosexuals.”²⁸ *Bazuco*, *Cromos*’s investigation concluded, stood poised to destroy Colombian society.

Articles published regularly by *Cromos* from 1983 through 1984 recounted the drug’s introduction and rise in Colombia. The story began in the late 1970s. The economic crises of the period hit Colombian peasants particularly hard. Farmers in isolated areas such as the southern frontier department of Caquetá found that they could no longer sustain their families on the diminishing profits they received for their produce at local markets. Meanwhile, Colombian drug traffickers looked to increase their own earnings by investing in coca plantations. Regardless of their personal feelings toward drug use, peasants readily welcomed the coca business because it offered returns significantly higher than the meager income they earned from legal crops. As one grower described, “look, I am illiterate because poverty meant that I could not go to school. I have eight children and I do not want them to be uneducated like their father. So when they would not buy my crops, I decided to come here and grow [coca].”²⁹ Traffickers, however, quickly noticed that the U.S. market was not receptive to Colombian-grown cocaine. North American users considered high produced by Colombian-grown cocaine to be low in quality and favored cocaine produced from Peruvian or Bolivian coca leaves. Resistant to abandon their investments in Colombian coca, traffickers looked for

²⁸ Morales, “Muerte por bazuco (I),” 29.

²⁹ Ligia Riveros, “Aquí nace el bazuco,” *Cromos*, August 23, 1983, 45–47.

alternative markets. A small number of Colombian consumers had already looked to Peru for coca paste, indicating a possible market for a domestic Colombian *bazuco* trade.³⁰ By mid-1984, the public feared that *bazuco* consumption had reached epidemic proportions. *Revista Javeriana*'s previously tempered attitude toward drug use had disappeared when it devoted its April issue to a discussion about drugs. *Bazuco*, it warned, had become "the evil of the century," and it was time for Colombia to address "the cancer that is drugs."³¹

Pastrana's 1974 narcotics legislation had left Colombian public health officials unprepared to properly assess the scale of *bazuco* use. The government did not have the resources or infrastructure necessary to conduct a nation-wide epidemiological survey of drug use.³² Without a national surveillance system, the Ministry of Health consulted studies of *bazuco* from similarly affected countries to inform its approach to Colombia's epidemic. Peruvian physicians had alerted researchers as early as 1972 about a rise in hospital visits by patients presenting severe physical and psychological complications from coca paste consumption. Between 1972 and 1984, researchers conducted numerous studies to determine the indicators of coca paste abuse, the drug's side effects, and the demographics of its users. The results of these studies alarmed Colombian officials. An observational study of 348 coca paste users in Lima found that the majority of users began their drug use when very young—between ten and twenty years of age.³³ The

³⁰ Rafael Baena, "La droga devoro a Colombia," *Cromos*, April 10, 1984, 19.

³¹ Editorial, "Basuco: El mal del siglo," *Revista Javeriana*, April 1984, 163-164.

³² Colombia conducted its first nation-wide survey of drug use in 1987. Thoumi, *Political Economy and Illegal Drugs in Colombia*, 268.

³³ It is important to note that results of this study were likely skewed toward a more extreme version of coca paste use. Researchers found their subjects through records of patients admitted for medical care as a result of their drug use. Therefore, by definition, all subjects had engaged in high levels of use. Jeri, "Coca-Paste Smoking in Some Latin American Countries," 2.

majority of the subjects sampled had been secondary school or university students when they began their drug use, but had dropped out because their coca paste habit had negatively affected their health and social wellbeing. 23 percent of subjects reported experiencing hallucinations while high, and 11.2 percent experienced paranoia and/or depression, with symptoms often lasting for days after consumption.³⁴

Another study found that the subjects' strong physical reaction to *bazuco* were the result of a spike in blood levels of cocaine alkaloids that immediately followed coca paste consumption. Researchers drew blood samples at fifteen-minute intervals during a smoking session. The results verified a rise in plasma-cocaine levels within five minutes of smoking 0.5 grams of coca paste comparable to levels seen in users who injected powdered cocaine—a rare and extreme form of cocaine consumption. *Bazuco*'s short high forced users to continue smoking in order to delay the onset of withdrawal symptoms, eventually causing the user to consume significantly more cocaine in one sitting than the average powdered cocaine user.³⁵ Thus, Colombian officials concluded, *bazuco* was more addictive than cocaine or marijuana and posed a far greater danger to Colombian health.³⁶ Meanwhile, local-level, domestic studies indicated that *bazuco* consumption among the population had indeed increased during the early 1980s. In 1981, 25 percent of drug-related hospital visits were related to *bazuco* consumption. The next year, the percentage had doubled to 50 percent and by 1983, 57 percent of visits were

³⁴ Ibid., 4.

³⁵ Ibid., 7.

³⁶ Luis Carlos Gómez, "Colombia: En la crucijada," *Revista Javeriana*, April 1984, 184.

bazuco-related.³⁷ By 1984, drug abuse represented the seventh leading cause of psychiatric morbidity in Colombia, fueled by the proliferation of *zuqueros*.³⁸

Figure 6: Screen grabs from a 1983 Banco Cafetero television advertisement. Voiceover reads: “Drugs destroy your brain. Do not take drugs, for the dignity of mankind.”³⁹

The public outcry and clear health threat posed by *bazuco* spurred Betancur’s government to act quickly. The Ministry of Health created a nation-wide series of drug-use prevention campaigns, launching its first program in 1983 in Quindío. In order to provide drug users with treatment options, the ministry opened ten rehabilitation centers in the hard-hit cities of Bogotá, Manizales, Ibagué, Armero, Cartagena, Villavivencio,

³⁷ Baena, “La droga devoro a Colombia,” 20.

³⁸ Statistics of *bazuco* use likely are an underestimate. The possession and consumption of cocaine derivatives was criminalized under the 1974 legislation, so it is unlikely that users would have actively reported their use to health authorities. Gómez, “Colombia: En la crucijada,” 186.

³⁹ Banco Cafetero - “La Droga destruye tu cerebro,” 1983, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHubxKRLx4g>.

and Medellín. A number of private and non-profit organizations also contributed to the prevention effort, buying anti-drug use advertisements and organizing conferences with international and domestic experts on drugs to formulate a solution to the scourge of drug addiction.⁴⁰ Betancur's wife, Doña Rosa Elena Álvarez de Betancur even participated in a series of prevention campaigns in the vein of Nancy Reagan's "just say no" movement.⁴¹

Meanwhile, the U.S. government saw Colombia's distress over *basuco* as an opportunity to push its own drug policy agenda. In a speech at an international forum on narcotics held at Bogotá's *Club de Comercio* in March 1984, U.S. Ambassador Tambs encouraged the Colombian government to fortify its programs of coca eradication and drug interdiction as crucial tools to combat the *basuco* epidemic.⁴² Colombians, however, remained unconvinced of the efficacy of U.S. supply-side tactics for controlling the drug trade. A February 1984 column in *El Tiempo* by Enrique Santos Calderón noted that U.S. tactics of herbicide spraying of marijuana cultivations had proved unsuccessful in curbing either U.S. marijuana imports or patterns of drug use. In the face of that policy failure, he recommended the United States to look beyond legal sanctions and to invest in educational and rehabilitation programs.⁴³ Colombia's ambassador to the United States, Rodrigo Hernán Lloreda Caicedo, echoed Santos's evaluation weeks later, when he encouraged the United States to change its approach to narcotics. "An educational campaign that dissuades potential consumers would be more effective than customs

⁴⁰ Patricio Abello Uribe, "Hay que repetirlo: El basuco 'Carcome,'" *Revista Javeriana*, April 1984, 180.

⁴¹ Lewis Tambs, "Consenso para atacar el problema de las Drogas," *Revista Javeriana*, April 1984, 164.

⁴² Tambs, "Consenso para atacar el problema de las Drogas."

⁴³ Enrique Santos Calderón, "Droga, chequera y consciencia," *El Tiempo*, February 5, 1984.

controls that often disrupt the normal flow of legal trade,” he explained.⁴⁴ The Colombian government did adopt some measures encouraged by the United States, such as Lara’s raids on drug labs and interdiction campaigns. These supply-side programs nevertheless received little attention in comparison to the government’s push for drug education and treatment. Lara’s murder would precipitate a radical shift in that balance.

Wars on Drugs Converge

When Betancur stood in the pre-dawn chill of May 1, 1984 and declared war against the drug mafia, he introduced a policy shift that would radically change Colombia’s approach to drugs. The drug mafia had brought shame to Colombia, tarnishing the country’s image abroad and sowing terror at home. But the traffickers, Betancur argued, were not Colombia’s biggest problem:

The biggest problem that Colombia has had in its history is that of drugs. Its sinister effect on our people, on their health, on their morals—dramatically encapsulates everything from our poverty, to our unemployment, the abandonment of our physical courage, of our moral values. In other words, it is the main thing about our society, from a great many things that made its people feel alien, strange, almost inexistent [...] our biggest challenge must become our newest battle, unstoppable, unrelenting, and fueled by moral peace.⁴⁵

The damage that drug consumption wrought on Colombian health and morals had created a national environment that allowed the mafia and other criminals to thrive. Previous policy approaches had done nothing to slow drugs’ corruption of Colombia’s moral fabric. For Betancur, Lara’s assassination signaled that the time had come to address not only the mafia—but also drugs themselves. In doing so, Betancur conflated the war on drugs

⁴⁴ “Sugiere el canciller Lloreda: Estados Unidos debe cambiar su estrategia antinarcóticos,” *El Tiempo*, March 10, 1984, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, March 1984, 54.

⁴⁵ “Aceptamos desafío a narcotraficantes.”

with the war on drug traffickers, applying the same militarized approach to both battles by shifting Colombian drug policy away from the previous decades' approach of "harm reduction" toward "vigorous enforcement."⁴⁶ The president's new plan consisted of two primary strategies evocative of U.S. drug policy: the immediate implementation of supply-side tactics of marijuana and coca eradication, and the strict criminalization of drug consumption through changes in legislation.

Whereas the public reacted to Betancur's war against the mafia with resounding support, the president's plan for aerial fumigation of coca and marijuana plantings was immediately controversial. Santos already had pointed out months earlier that U.S. tactics of fumigation of marijuana cultivations barely had an effect on the drug trade; traffickers were always able to supplement their losses with supplies from another clandestine operation. Attempting to stem drug supply through interdiction, historian Jeremy Adelman describes, "was like smashing a ball of mercury with a hammer."⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Lara had suggested a plan in early April to pursue fumigation of the mafia's marijuana plantings in the Sierra Nevada region with paraquat, an herbicide. Colombia's Ministry of Health, however, had been hesitant to adopt Lara's fumigation program.⁴⁸ Earlier fumigation campaigns in the Sierra Nevada under the Turbay administration had generated outrage from local peasants and indigenous groups. The government, leaders of those groups argued, had not properly evaluated the health effects of herbicide exposure,

⁴⁶ Juan Gabriel Tokatlian, *Drogas, dilemas y dogmas: Estados Unidos y la narcocriminalidad organizada en Colombia* (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo Editores, 1995), 70.

⁴⁷ Jeremy Adelman, "Andean Impasses," *New Left Review* 18 (November 1, 2002): 54.

⁴⁸ Baena, "La droga devoro a Colombia," 18.

and people exposed to the aerial spray had suffered serious consequences.⁴⁹ Betancur's resumption of Turbay's program reopened these wounds.

Indigenous groups responded to Betancur's announcement with desperate pleas for the government to reconsider its plan. Those had been exposed to paraquat during fumigation campaigns in Vallepadur petitioned that they continued to suffer from their earlier exposure. "Everything hurts," explained one farmer. "We have every type of problem, not just regarding human health, but also with our animals that have been dying." Furthermore, peasants argued that the producer of glyphosate, the U.S. company, Monsanto, expressly warned that the herbicide should not be applied to large areas through aerial spraying. The government's program amounted to reckless endangerment.⁵⁰ The Arhuacos, an indigenous tribe concentrated in the Sierra Nevada, had more extreme pleas. They warned that fumigation and its devastation of the area's flora and fauna was a matter of life and death for the tribe. "If [spraying] destroys the conditions [the Arhuacos] need to conduct their rites, they will lose their motivation to live, and it could create a situation that induces individual or collective suicide."⁵¹

Lara's successor, Enrique Parejo González, dismissed some of these concerns offhand. Traffickers had already destroyed the land when they made room for their marijuana plantings by applying paraquat to the existing foliage, he argued.⁵² Regarding the herbicide's effect on health, the justice minister promised to approach spraying operations with caution. His plan would begin with an "experimental phase:" only a small

⁴⁹ Rafael Baena, "Comenzó la fumigación con glisofato: ¿Van los arhuacos hacia el suicidio colectivo?," *Cromos*, July 10, 1984, 20.

⁵⁰ Rafael Baena, "Pedimos una respuesta y nos dan veneno," *Cromos*, July 31, 1984, 1.

⁵¹ Baena, "Comenzó la fumigación con glisofato: ¿Van los arhuacos hacia el suicidio colectivo?," 19.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 20.

number of cultivations would be targeted, and health experts would diligently monitor the nearby population for deleterious side effects. But, once fumigations began in late July, community leaders in the Sierra Nevada filed reports that conflicted with the Parejo's statements. Without advanced warning, military helicopters had arrived and dumped glyphosate on over 700 hectares of marijuana cultivations, far more than the government originally promised. More problematic for the justice minister, a lab study by the *Universidad Tecnológica del Magdalena* found glyphosate acted as a neurotoxin by inhibiting the body's acetylcholine reuptake mechanism, thus impairing proper neuromuscular function. The findings prompted Parejo to temporarily suspend the government's fumigation campaign.⁵³ The study prompted the government to halt aerial spraying while it evaluated the report's validity, but the respite in the Sierra Nevada was short lived. Tokatlian calculates that between 1984 and 1985, 5,546 hectares of marijuana were sprayed with 11,418 gallons of glyphosate. But the government's "great victory" over marijuana was a farce. Marijuana cultivations increased in 1986, when traffickers moved their operations from the Sierra Nevada across the country to Cauca.⁵⁴

Betancur's eradication campaign was accompanied by a shift in legislative policy. During his last year in office, the president introduced legislation that would update Pastrana's 1974 Statute on Narcotics for Colombia's current war on drugs. Pastrana's

⁵³ Baena, "Pedimos una respuesta y nos dan veneno," 18. Aerial spraying of glyphosate for coca eradication remains controversial today. Both the Colombian and U.S. governments maintained through the 2000s that glyphosate poses no threat to human health. In March 2015, the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer classified the herbicide as "probably carcinogenic," prompting President Juan Manuel Santos to halt all aerial coca eradication operations. The U.S. government, nonetheless, contends that the WHO's evidence for its decision is shaky, at best. See "Colombia se prepará para decirle 'adios' al glifosato," *Semana*, April 27, 2015.

⁵⁴ Tokatlian, *Drogas, dilemas y dogmas*, 70–71.

decree had preserved a degree of flexibility for later administrations to apply the statute as they saw fit for the country's attitudes. For example, the law assigned lesser penalties to individuals caught in possession of an amount of drugs equivalent to a "personal dose," or "the amount of drug or medicine that a person ordinarily ingests, by any means, at any one time; a 'therapeutic dose' that a doctor would normally prescribe for a patient." The decree, however, did not assign exact quantities to this definition.⁵⁵ Betancur's law erased the 1974 law's ambiguities. It assigned maximum quantities for possession of five commonly consumed drugs, including marijuana, cocaine, and *bazuco*. The new law also restricted the application of the personal dose penalties to a smaller number of cases. If officials suspected that an individual intended to sell or distribute any quantity of drugs, including a quantity below the personal dose limit, he or she would face tougher penalties.⁵⁶

While Betancur's administration updated the narcotics law's sections on crimes and regulations, it essentially ignored Pastrana's education and rehabilitation programs. As Jorge Larreamendy-Joerns and María Fernanda Vence describe in their evaluation of the 1986 law, the law "is particularly prolific in contraventions and typification of offenses, but quite lacking, to the point of being almost perfunctory, in matters of rehabilitation and treatment."⁵⁷ Part of this shift was practical. Betancur's war on the supply-side of the mafia's business funneled resources away from prevention campaigns

⁵⁵ Article 6, Pastrana Borrero, *Estatuto de Estupefacientes*, Decree 1188 of 1974.

⁵⁶ Article 2, Belisario Betancur Cuartas, *Estatuto Nacional de Estupefacientes*, Law 30 of 1986, http://www.icbf.gov.co/cargues/avance/docs/ley_0030_1986.htm.

⁵⁷ Jorge Larreamendy-Joerns and María Fernanda Vence, "La demanda como drama: La prevención y el tratamiento del uso de drogas en Colombia," in *Políticas antidroga en Colombia: Éxitos, fracasos y extravíos*, ed. Alejandro Gaviria Uribe and Daniel Mejía Londoño (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2011), 125.

and treatment programs.⁵⁸ However, the law's emphasis on the criminalization of drug use in place of rehabilitation reflected the philosophy of Betancur's war on drugs more generally. There would be no truce or negotiation with the drug mafia, and there would be no tolerance for drugs themselves.

Other scholars have flagged Betancur's reaction to Lara's assassination as if it marked the commencement of Colombian drug policy. The respected sociologist Juan Gabriel Tokatlian, for example, argues that the Colombian president's 1984 declaration of a war on drugs "narcoticized" U.S.-Colombian relations.⁵⁹ Such a view discounts both Colombia's earlier efforts at drug control and regulation and the dialogue that Colombian and U.S. government and public health officials maintained throughout the twentieth century. Colombia's shift in drug policy after Lara's assassination could be more aptly characterized as an "Americanization" of Colombia's existing narcotics policy with its increased emphasis on supply-side interdiction. Moreover, Betancur's war on drugs served as a response to the domestic situation following Lara's death rather than a conscious shift to align Colombian policy with existing U.S. interests. Either way, Colombia's new approach to drugs created both immediate frustration for certain sectors of the Colombian public and a lasting legacy of drug policy that privileged punishment over treatment and prevention.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 124.

⁵⁹ Tokatlian, *Drogas, dilemas y dogmas*, 64.

EPILOGUE

The end of Lara's life marked the beginning of one of the grimmest periods of Colombia's recent history. His death was only the first of what journalist Ana Carrigan describes as a generation of *muertes anunciadas*—"assassinations waiting to happen"—for Colombian politicians, community leaders, and anyone who dared to "step onto the public stage to offer a glimmer of hope."¹ Confrontations between the state and the drug mafia, combined with the raging dirty war between the *guerrillas*, paramilitaries, and Armed Forces, transformed Colombia into a cauldron of violence during the last two decades of the twentieth century.

Many works have described this later period of Colombian history.² But Gabriel García Márquez, whose 1983 novel *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* inspired Colombians' poetic description of violence, provides inspiration for how to truly grasp the significance of its origins. When interviewed about the unconventional structure of his narrative, Colombia's most celebrated intellectual and Betancur's close friend explained his decision to begin the novel with the death of its protagonist, Santiago Naser. After writing the first chapter, he said, "I realized that the reader was going to do what I would do—flip to the end to see if [Naser's murderers] killed him or not. So, at the end of that first chapter I wrote that they had killed him.... Now, instead of turning to the last page to see if they killed him [the reader] has to read line by line to understand exactly

¹ Ana Carrigan, *The Palace of Justice : A Colombian Tragedy*, 1st ed. (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1993), 21.

² See, for instance, journalist Alma Guillermoprieto's essays in *The Heart That Bleeds: Latin America Now* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1994).

how it happened.”³ Only by examining Lara’s death, the first *muerte anunciada*, can we begin to understand the conscious decisions made by a variety of actors that led to this period of bloodshed.

Even before Lara’s murder, Colombians in 1984 already believed that their country was rapidly deteriorating. The economic crisis had worsened since its onset in 1982, and rule of law seemed to have become a mere suggestion. However, Betancur remained surprisingly popular among the general public. Colombians were reluctant to abandon their president and the hope that his election had represented. Either the government bureaucracy or an uncooperative Congress was to blame for the country’s lack of progress. Betancur, the man from humble origins who had risen to the top of Colombian politics and promised to bring the rest of the country with him, was trying his best.⁴ This perception shifted rapidly in the wake of Lara’s assassination. When the minister’s death was fresh in their minds, Colombians were willing to endure the president’s invocation of repressive measures, such as the state of siege. But, this support was contingent on an understanding that these restrictions would ultimately bring success in the war against the mafia. As the war continued, it became clear that the optimism inspired by the first weeks of arrests and raids had been premature. Two months after Lara’s death, Colombians began to take stock of what the war had accomplished thus far. The results were disheartening. Of the 1,139 arrests made between May 1 and the beginning of July, only 124 individuals could be definitively linked to the drug mafia.

³ ricardofanta, *Gabriel García Márquez (Crónica de Una Muerte Anunciada)*, 2006, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Oh_sR3bKG4.

⁴ Alfredo Vásquez Carrizosa, “El presidente bien y el país mal,” *El Espectador*, February 17, 1984, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, February 1984, 1-2.

Moreover, with the exception of two or three cases, nearly all of those detained represented the “peons” of the drug trade.⁵

While officials busied themselves with these low-level mafia affiliates, the *capos* seemed to be consolidating their power as they “enjoyed their vacations in Colombia’s border countries.”⁶ From his exile in Panama City, Escobar coordinated a meeting between the mafia’s leaders, Betancur’s attorney general, and former president López Michelsen to discuss a possible truce between the government and the mafia. In exchange for the government’s promise of amnesty and the renunciation of the extradition treaty with the United States, Escobar and his associates offered to dismantle their international cocaine distribution network, collaborate with the government to eradicate domestic drug production and consumption, and abandon all illegal activity.⁷ Betancur refused the mafia’s proposition after members of both the leading class and the public denounced the clandestine meeting.⁸ Nevertheless, the mafia’s ability to access the highest levels of government in the middle of a “total war” against their organization served as a powerful demonstration of the traffickers’ continued power. As the weaknesses of the government’s war against the mafia became apparent, an increasing number of Colombians began to wonder, “Did Minister Lara Bonilla die in vain?”⁹

Betancur’s peace process proved similarly unsuccessful. The president’s peace commission negotiated a ceasefire with the M-19, Popular Liberation Army (EPL;

⁵ Ligia Riveros, “¿Sólo un show?,” *Cromos*, July 3, 1984, 12.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷ “Propuesta de narcotraficantes al gobierno colombiano,” *El Mundo*, July 8, 1984, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, July 1984, 43.

⁸ “El procurador Jiménez explica su posición,” *El Espectador*, July 9, 1984, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, July 1984, 46.

⁹ Riveros, “¿Sólo un show?,” 17.

Ejército de Liberación Popular) and Marxist-Leninist Communist Party of Colombia (M-L; *Partido Comunista de Colombia Marxista-Leninista*) in August 1984, complementing the ceasefire with the FARC that began in April that year. With a formal break in hostilities in place, Betancur's administration began planning for a national dialogue that would pave the way for a more comprehensive and lasting peace agreement.¹⁰ But while the president and his peace commission had developed rapport with representatives from these armed groups, Betancur's relationships with political leaders within his government had become strained. The divide between the president and the rest of his government, which had been crucial in maintaining his popularity in early 1984, became his biggest obstacle. Colombian society became increasingly polarized as the peace process progressed. For many, the cost of peace—pardons for *guerrilla* leaders, controversial political reforms—was too high. Betancur, busy appealing to the revolutionary leaders, had neglected to build effective alliances within the political class to confront the growing resistance to his peace policy.¹¹ As a result, Betancur's promised economic and social reforms, which had served as the foundation of his appeal to both the *guerrillas* and the Colombian public, languished and died in political limbo.

By mid-1985, the public's admiration of the president had transformed into resentment. Summarizing Colombians' frustrations, *Cromos* published an article detailing Betancur's failures. "In five speeches during his presidential campaign," *Cromos* wrote, "Belisario Betancur made 143 promises, from giving every poor schoolchild a glass of milk to ending unemployment, to instituting tax breaks. He has accomplished none of

¹⁰ "¡Nuestra firma lo confirma! Acuerdo de cese del fuego y dialogo nacional," *El Espectador*, August 29, 1984, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, August 1984, 53.

¹¹ Carrigan, *The Palace of Justice*, 56.

these. The president was elected on a fallacy.”¹² All the country could do, the article concluded, was to demand more from its candidates in 1986. Few could have predicted that the president’s image would sink even lower.

As disillusioned as the Colombian public was by Betancur’s failures, the M-19 was even more so. Ten months after its leaders signed the ceasefire agreement, the *guerrilla* group broke the pact and declared the resumption of “total war” against the government. The group justified its decision by echoing the complaints of the *Cromos* article. Betancur, they said, had neglected to fulfill his side of the ceasefire agreement when his social reforms failed. Looking to reinvigorate popular support for their movement, the M-19 planned what Carrigan calls a “revolutionary spectacle:” an armed operation that would serve as a “publicity coup.” They designed the operation to defend their renunciation of the government’s peace process and “project themselves into power on the wave of support that must follow.”¹³ Their spectacle would provide the defining image of Betancur’s presidency. It also marked the moment when Betancur allowed his war on drugs to destroy whatever positive legacy his peace process might have had.

On the morning of November 6, 1985, four groups of M-19 fighters invaded the Palace of Justice—the house of Colombia’s Supreme Court and State Council, located in the *Plaza de Bolívar* in Bogotá, just up the street from the Presidential Palace. The *guerrillas’* plan was to occupy the building and take the justices of the Supreme Court hostage. “Once in control of the court,” an M-19 member later explained, “the revolutionaries would demand the presence of President Betancur, to face charges of

¹² Juan Mosca, “¡Sí se puede! ¿Sí se puede? ¡No se pudo!,” *Cromos*, September 16, 1985, 34.

¹³ Carrigan, *The Palace of Justice*, 34.

betrayal of the publicly expressed will of the Colombian people for peace, and for breaching the provisions of the truce accords signed by his government with the M-19.”¹⁴ The M-19’s operation did not go as planned. Betancur’s government, in stark contrast to the president’s emphasis on dialogue as the foundation of Colombian peace, refused to negotiate with the *guerrillas*. For the next twenty-eight hours, the M-19 fighters struggled to fend off the military offensive to retake the palace. By 2:20 in the afternoon the next day, the building had been reduced to a smoldering shell, destroyed by fire and explosives. Around one hundred *guerrillas* and hostages lay dead, among them nearly half of Colombia’s Supreme Court justices.¹⁵

Figure 7: The Army prepares to retake the Palace of Justice.¹⁶

The siege was a traumatic moment for the Colombian public, as they watched Betancur’s government and the justice system quite literally explode in real time. Before

¹⁴ Ibid., 83.

¹⁵ Numerous writers have provided accounts, often contradictory of what exactly happened during the siege of the Palace of Justice. To this day, there remains an open investigation of what occurred during the siege and its immediate aftermath. See: Carrigan, *The Palace of Justice*; Ramón Jimeno, *Noche de lobos* (Bogotá: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1989); Luis Alfonso Plazas Vega, *La batalla del Palacio de Justicia* (Bogotá: Intermedio, 2000).

¹⁶ Especial: 30 años después de la toma del Palacio de Justicia,” *El Tiempo*, November 6, 2015.

the president's director of communications could intervene, Colombians listened to the president of the Supreme Court, Alfonso Reyes Echandía plead, live on *Radio Caracol*, for the civilian government to halt the military's counterattack and prevent a massacre. Residents of the capital city felt the earth shake beneath them as the military ignored Reyes's pleas and blasted through the roof and fortified concrete walls of the Palace to reach the *guerrillas* inside. They watched the night sky light up above Bogotá's historic district as the building was engulfed in flames. They vividly imagined the horror the hostages faced inside. Once the flames died down and the *guerrillas*' guns were silenced, what Colombians wanted most of all was an explanation: what decisions did the president make to allow the siege to end in such bloodshed?¹⁷

The government's official account of the siege relied on Betancur's war on drugs as justification for its actions.¹⁸ On the day the M-19 launched its assault, the Supreme Court was set to debate the constitutionality of Colombia's extradition treaty with the United States. Five of the justices on the case had received numerous death threats in the months leading up to the decision. Members of the drug mafia hoped to intimidate the justices into ruling against the controversial treaty, thus removing the government's most

¹⁷ Alfredo Vásquez Carrizosa, "Una tragedia ante la historia," *El Espectador*, November 12, 1985, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, November 1985, 26.

¹⁸ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to evaluate the numerous theories that attempt to explain the government's action (or inaction, depending on the theory) during the siege. See Vega, *La batalla del Palacio de Justicia* for the government's official version of the siege; Carrigan meticulously reconstructs the events inside the presidential palace and the Palace of Justice from witness testimony and evidence from the Bogotá city morgue to refute the official government story. She argues that the military's handling of the siege represented a de facto military coup. The military purposefully fed the civilian government false information about the battle and status of the hostages, while the president made little effort to verify these facts. The official story, she argues, served as an attempt for the Colombian government to save face and preserve the myth of Colombia's uninterrupted democracy. Carrigan, *The Palace of Justice*.

powerful weapon against the mafia's leaders.¹⁹ This coincidence provided the government with a ready explanation for the Betancur's refusal to negotiate with the M-19. In his hundred-page defense of the government's actions, published in 2009, Betancur's minister of the interior, Jaime Castro, synthesizes the government's official account of the siege. He claimed that the drug mafia funded and directed the M-19's operation in the Palace in hopes of forcing an end to the extradition treaty. He argued that the M-19 had purposely set the fire that eventually devastated the building, hoping to destroy any papers related to the mafia's criminal record.²⁰ "As soon as the first developments of the cruel attack were made known," he writes, "it was clear to the government that the drug traffickers—specifically 'the Extraditables' [the name Escobar and his associates had given themselves]—were behind the operation."²¹ Thus, in keeping with Betancur's total war against the mafia, the government decided from the very first moments of the siege that negotiation did not represent a possible option. "With whom would we negotiate?" Castro asks. "With the traffickers' intermediaries? With those who stupidly let themselves become, even for a moment, the armed forces of the Extraditables?"²²

¹⁹ Carrigan, *The Palace of Justice*, 93.

²⁰ Jaime Castro, "Ultimátum terrorista al Estado y sus instituciones," in *La penitencia de poder: Lecciones de la administración del presidente Belisario Betancur, 1982-1986*, ed. Diego Pizano (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2009), 142.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 145.

²² *Ibid.*, 173; A 2009 report by the Palace of Justice Truth Commission affirms that the mafia did provide some funding for the M-19's operation. The report, however, rejects the theory that the M-19 was operating on the mafia's orders. Group's motivation for the assault, it concludes, had nothing to do with the mafia's interests. "Los Mitos de La Toma Del Palacio de Justicia. El Informe de La Comisión de La Verdad," *La Silla Vacía*, accessed October 23, 2015, <http://lasillavacia.com/historia/5649>.

Many rejected the government's explanation. Liberal representative Álvaro Uribe Rueda, for example, argued in Congress that the government's insistence on a mafia-*guerrilla* alliance served as a false excuse for the bloody ending of the M-19 siege.²³ But by that point, the veracity of the government's assertion was inconsequential for the fate of Betancur's peace process. As military officers patrolled Bogotá in search of M-19 sympathizers for "interrogation" during the weeks that followed the siege, Betancur's peace commission announced the suspension of dialogue with any M-19 representatives in response to the group's "criminal attack."²⁴ The commission stated that its decision regarding the M-19 would not affect its negotiation with the other *guerrilla* groups, but the government's actions during and after the siege made its position clear: Betancur's favoring of pardons and amnesties over military operations had ended. Betancur's presidency never fully recovered after the siege ended. He later referred to that period as the worst week of his life. It seemed even nature had turned against him when the Nevado de Ruiz volcano, eighty-eight miles west of Bogotá, erupted on November 13, killing over 23,000 residents of the town beneath it in the worst natural disaster in Colombian history.²⁵

The administrations that succeeded Betancur's did not fair much better in their dealings with either the drug mafia or *guerrilla* groups. As the 1980s progressed, the drug mafia became increasingly brazen in their attacks against the state. With Escobar's

²³ "Conexión con narcotráfico, excusa para justificar muerte de rehenes," *El Espectador*, December 11, 1985, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, December 1985, 22.

²⁴ "No habrá diálogo con el M-19," *El Colombiano*, November 9, 1985, in *Actualidad Colombiana*, November 1985, 35.

²⁵ "No creo que haya sido el mejor presidente, pero sí el mejor expresidente," *Semana*, February 9, 2013, <http://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/no-creo-haya-sido-mejor-presidente-pero-si-mejor-expresidente/332478-3>.

famous preference for a “grave in Colombia” over a prison cell in the United States as their slogan, “the Extraditables” (*Los Extraditables*) employed an army of young assassins from Medellín’s slums to carry out attacks against both the government and civilians. They hoped the public outrage at their ruthless violence would eventually pressure Colombia’s politicians into abandoning the extradition treaty.²⁶ The government eventually won its war against Escobar’s generation of *capos*. A special search team killed Escobar in 1993. The dismantling of the mafia’s leadership, however, did nothing to end drug-related violence in Colombia. Violence in fact increased after Escobar’s death. Without its leader to provide structure and discipline, Escobar’s mafia disintegrated into many small bands of criminals. Lower-level leaders battled each other for power and territory, littering Colombian cities, particularly Medellín, with corpses.²⁷

While drug-related violence increased, politicians began to realize that the drug policy Betancur instituted in 1986 was failing. The harsh penalties levied on individual consumers were causing more trouble than good. This issue came to the fore in May 1993, when officials stopped Carlos Ossa Escobar, a Colombian politician and co-director of the National Bank, at Bogotá’s El Dorado airport after finding a small packet of marijuana cigarettes in his bag. The episode sparked a national debate, as half the country called for Ossa’s resignation and the other half argued that the politician represented just another occasional user unfairly punished by draconian narcotics restrictions. A year after the Ossa episode, Carlos Gaviria, a magistrate in Colombia’s Constitutional Court began to speak out against the country’s anti-drug laws. He argued that the 1986 law’s harsh

²⁶ Guillermprieto, *The Heart That Bleeds*, 5.

²⁷ See Juan Carlos Garzón Vergara, *Mafia & co.* (Bogotá: Planeta Colombiana Editorial, S.A., 2008) for a description of this process.

restrictions on the personal dose, specifically, violated Colombian's constitutional right to "free development of an individual's personality." Four of his colleagues agreed. In May of 1994, the Constitutional Court ruled five votes to four that police could no longer detain individuals caught with drug quantities below the personal dose.²⁸

Since then, a growing number of Colombian politicians have advocated a shift away from Betancur's war on drugs. Former President César Gaviria Trujillo, who occupied the presidency during both Escobar's death and the Ossa incident, has become the movement's de facto spokesperson. Since leaving the presidency, he has made it his mission to shift Colombia's policy away from supply-side drug interdiction tactics in favor of a public-health approach to drug policy.²⁹ Among Gaviria's supporters are members of the current presidential administration, including President Juan Manuel Santos. In fact, Santos sparked headlines during a 2012 summit of hemispheric leaders in Cartagena, when he challenged U.S. President Barack Obama to rethink the U.S. War on Drugs.³⁰ Meanwhile, a number of Supreme Court victories have buoyed this movement in Colombia. The most recent court decision, in March 2016, determined that law enforcement could not prosecute any individual for drug possession or consumption, even if the quantity exceeded the personal dose limits, unless authorities could prove that the

²⁸ "¿Se legalizó la droga por la puerta de atrás?" *Semana*, March 15, 2016, <http://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/dosis-minima-de-droga-sectores-politicos-reaccionan-ante-el-fallo-de-la-corte/465544>.

²⁹ See César Gaviria Trujillo, "Prólogo," in *Políticas antidroga en Colombia: Éxitos, fracasos y extravíos*, ed. Daniel Mejía Londoño and Alejandro Gaviria Uribe (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2011).

³⁰ Alma Guillermoprieto, "Drugs: The Rebellion in Cartagena," *The New York Review of Books*, June 7, 2012, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2012/06/07/drugs-rebellion-cartagena/>.

individual intended to sell or distribute those drugs.³¹ The decision especially benefits hard-core addicts, whose daily consumption might exceed the personal dose minimum. If stopped, authorities would now presumably funnel these addicts into treatment, rather than the prison system.³² Despite such steps, drug policy in Colombia remains a controversial topic. Many influential politicians, including former president Álvaro Uribe Vélez, have argued that the decriminalization of the personal dose has promoted drug trafficking operations and encouraged youth drug consumption.³³

The issue of political peace with *guerrilla* groups also remains as relevant today in Colombia as it was during Betancur's presidency. After decades of failed peace talks, Santos's current negotiations with the FARC in Havana represent the closest Colombia has come to peace since the conflict began in the 1960s. Just as they were in the early 1980s, the drug trade and its related violence have emerged as complications to Colombian peace. The relationship between the two, however, has changed dramatically. After the original mafia's control over the drug trade declined during the late 1990s, the FARC emerged as one of the major players in Colombia's cocaine trafficking network. Drug trafficking quickly became the *guerrilla* group's main financing mechanism. Therefore, whereas Betancur's peace program depended on his ability to distinguish between political crimes and violence by drug traffickers, Santos has been forced to

³¹ “‘Dosis mínima de droga es la que la persona necesite,’” *El Tiempo*, March 14, 2016, <http://www.eltiempo.com/politica/justicia/fallo-de-la-corte-suprema-de-justicia-sobre-dosis-minima/16536569>.

³² It is unclear how this ruling will translate to police practices. See Ripoll LeMaitre and Mauricio Albarracín, “Patrullando la dosis personal: la represión cotidiana y los debates de políticas públicas sobre el consumo de drogas ilícitas en Colombia,” in *Políticas antidroga en Colombia: éxitos, fracasos, y extravíos*, ed. Daniel Mejía Londoño and Alejandro Gaviria (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2011), 237–59.

³³ “¿Se legalizó la droga por la puerta de atrás?”

reverse that distinction as a key component of his negotiations.³⁴ In September 2015, Colombia's Supreme Court formally reversed Betancur's distinction when it ruled that drug trafficking constituted a *delito conexo*, or political crime, when committed to finance *guerrilla* operations. FARC members guilty of drug trafficking would be eligible to apply for political amnesty.³⁵ This decision represents one of the most controversial elements of Santos's negotiations, as most Colombians harbor emotional memories of how they or their families were touched by drug-related violence.³⁶

Meanwhile, Betancur has remained largely absent from Colombia's domestic political scene—a fact of which he is exceedingly proud.³⁷ The former president, however, is never far from his countrymen's minds. The arc of his presidency serves as a cautionary tale against excessive hope in Colombian politics. In summer 2015, Bogotá's Museum of Modern Art (MAMBO) featured a special exposition entitled “Bogotá: Beauty and Horror.” Taking a break from my research, I found myself wandering around that museum tucked in the shadows of the Andes. In one corner of the room I came upon a television set from the 1980s.

On November 6, 1985, when the Armed Forces launched their assault to retake the Palace of Justice from the M-19, Betancur's minister of communications had interrupted all live reporting from the *Plaza de Bolívar* to announce important news: the

³⁴ Uriel Ortiz Soto, “¿Delito Político Conexo Con El Narcotráfico?,” *Semana*, September 24, 2015, <http://www.semana.com/opinion/articulo/uriel-ortiz-soto-delito-politico-conexo-con-el-narcotrafico/443706-3>.

³⁵ “Narcotráfico es un delito conexo con rebelión,” *El Tiempo*, September 24, 2015, <http://www.eltiempo.com/politica/justicia/corte-suprema-asegura-que-narcotrafico-es-delito-conexo-con-rebelion/16385971>.

³⁶ Ortiz Soto, “¿Delito Político Conexo Con El Narcotráfico?”

³⁷ The title of this *Semana* article is a direct reference to Betancur's lack of involvement in contemporary Colombian politics. “No creo que haya sido el mejor presidente, pero sí el mejor expresidente.”

soccer matches planned for that night would take place as scheduled. So, while the government teetered on the verge of collapse, the Palace erupted in flames, and a hundred of their countrymen faced their deaths, Colombians were treated to the match between Bogotá's *Millionarios* and the visiting *Unión Magdalena* as their nightly programming.³⁸ Thirty years later, I watched Nohemí Pérez's installation in the MAMBO flash snippets of the match spliced with footage from the army's assault on the Palace of Justice.³⁹ In an endless loop, the television screen alternated between Colombia's national pastime and the most powerful images of the country's destruction—between beauty and horror, hope and despair. The legacy of Betancur's presidency lies in that contrast.

³⁸ Carrigan, *The Palace of Justice*, 143.

³⁹ Nohemí Pérez, *8 1/2*, Video Installation, 2014, Exposición: Bogotá: belleza y horror, Museo de Arte Moderno Bogotá (MAMBO).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

Archives

Archivo Histórico Javeriano, Bogotá
Fondo Luis Carlos Galán Sarmiento

Archivo Histórico de Medellín

Archivo Histórico de la Universidad de Antioquia, Medellín
Colección Héctor Abad Gómez

Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, Bogotá

Biblioteca Nacional, Bogotá

Departamento Administrativo de la Presidencia de la República, Bogotá
Colección Belisario Betancur Cuartas

Digital National Security Archive

Artwork

Pérez, Nohemí. *8 1/2*. Video Installation, 2014. Exposición: Bogotá: belleza y horror.
Museo de Arte Moderno Bogotá (MAMBO).

Interviews

Belisario Betancur, interview by author, Bogotá, August 13, 2015.

Legislation

Decreto 1188 de 1974; Pastrana Borrero, Misael. *Estatuto de Estupefacientes*, 1974.
ftp://ftp.camara.gov.co/camara/basedoc/decreto/1974/decreto_1188_1974.html.

Ley 30 de 1986; Betancur Cuartas, Belisario. *Estatuto Nacional de Estupefacientes*, 1986. http://www.icbf.gov.co/cargues/avance/docs/ley_0030_1986.htm.

Periodicals

In *Actualidad Colombiana* (1982-1985), Princeton University Library

El Mundo

El Colombiano

El Tiempo

El Espectador

El Caribe

El Siglo

El Pueblo

Cromos (1982-1984), Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango

Documentos Nuevo Liberalismo (1984), Archivo Histórico Javeriano, Bogotá

Medellín Cívico (1966-1984), Biblioteca Nacional

Revista Javeriana (1982-1984), Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango

Semana (1981-2016). *Semana Online*.

El Tiempo (1980-2016). Google News Archive.

Published Primary Sources

Arturo, Alape. *La Paz, La Violencia: Testigos de Excepción*. Bogotá: Planeta Colombiana Editorial, S.A., 1985.

Betancur, Belisario, and Gustavo Gómez Ardila. *Belisario Betancur, la voluntad de un pueblo!: el pueblo interroga a Belisario*. Producciones Catatumbo, 1981.

Jeri, F. R. "Coca-Paste Smoking in Some Latin American Countries: A Severe and Unabated Form of Addiction." *Bulletin on Narcotics* 36, no. 2 (June 1984): 15–31.

Pizano, Ernesto Samper. *Legalización de la marihuana*. Bogotá: ANIF, Fondo Editorial, 1980.

Sanders, Thomas G. "Colombia, Betancur, and the Challenge of 1984." *UFSI Reports, South America*, no. 24 (1983).

SECONDARY SOURCES

Adelman, Jeremy. "Andean Impasses." *New Left Review* 18 (November 2002): 41–72.

Arango Jaramillo, Mario, and Jorge Child Velez. *Narcotráfico imperio de la cocaína*. Colección La Herejía. Medellín, Colombia: Editorial Percepción, 1984.

Bagley, Bruce Michael. "U.S. Foreign Policy and the War on Drugs: Analysis of a Policy Failure." *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 30, no. 2/3 (July 1988): 189–212. doi:10.2307/165986.

Bergquist, Charles, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez, eds. *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective*. Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1992.

- Buitrago, Francisco Leal, ed. *En busca de la estabilidad perdida*. Bogotá: Tercer Mundo Editores, 1995.
- Camacho Guizado, Álvaro. *El narcotráfico en la sociedad colombiana*. Vol. 4. 4 vols. Obra Selecta. Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2014.
- — —. “Mafia: los usos de un concepto polisémico y su aplicabilidad al caso colombiano.” *Historia Crítica No.40*, no. 41 (August 2010): 208–21. doi:10.7440/histcrit41.2010.12.
- — —. “Private and Public Dimensions of Urban Violence in Cali.” In *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective*, edited by Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez, 241–72. Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1992.
- Carrigan, Ana. *The Palace of Justice: A Colombian Tragedy*. New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1993.
- Castillo, Fabio. *Los jinetes de la cocaína*. Bogotá, Colombia: Editorial Documentos Periodísticos, 1987.
- Castro, Jaime. “Ultimátum terrorista al Estado y sus instituciones.” In *La penitencia de poder: Lecciones de la administración del presidente Belisario Betancur, 1982-1986*, edited by Diego Pizano. Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2009.
- Centeno, Miguel Angel, Jose Miguel Cruz, Rene Flores, and Gustavo Silva Cano. “Internal Wars and Latin American Nationalism.” In *Nationalism and War*, edited by John A. Hall and Sinisa Malesevic, 279–305. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Chernick, Mark W., and Michael F. Jiménez. “Popular Liberalism, Radical Democracy, and Marxism: Leftist Politics in Contemporary Colombia, 1974-1991.” In *The Latin American Left: From the Fall of Allende to Perestroika*, edited by Barry Carr and Steve Ellner. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993.
- Deas, Malcolm. “The Troubled Course of Colombian Peacemaking.” *Third World Quarterly* 8, no. 2 (1986): 639–57.
- Dix, Robert H. *The Politics of Colombia*. New York: Praeger, 1987.
- Dudley, Steven. *Walking Ghosts: Murder and Guerrilla Politics in Colombia*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Duncán, Gustavo. *Más que plata o plomo: el poder político del narcotráfico en Colombia y México*. Bogotá: Debate, 2014.

- Garzón Vergara, Juan Carlos. *Mafia & co.* Bogotá: Planeta Colombiana Editorial, S.A., 2008.
- — —. “The Rebellion of Criminal Networks: Organized Crime in Latin America and the Dynamics of Change.” *Woodrow Wilson Center Update on the Americas*, March 2012. <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/rebellion>.
- Gaviria Uribe, Alejandro, and Daniel Mejía Londoño. *Políticas antidroga en Colombia: Éxitos, fracasos y extravíos*. Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2011.
- Gaviria Trujillo, César. “Prólogo.” In *Políticas antidroga en Colombia: Éxitos, fracasos y extravíos*, edited by Daniel Mejía Londoño and Alejandro Gaviria Uribe. Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2011.
- Gootenberg, Paul. *Andean Cocaine: The Making of a Global Drug*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008.
- Gootenberg, Paul, and Isaac Campos. “Toward a New Drug History of Latin America: A Research Frontier at the Center of Debates.” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 95, no. 1 (February 1, 2015): 1–35. doi:10.1215/00182168-2836796.
- Gugliotta, Guy, and Jeff Leen. *Kings of Cocaine*. New York: Harper and Row, 1990.
- Guillermoprieto, Alma. “Drugs: The Rebellion in Cartagena.” *The New York Review of Books*, June 7, 2012. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2012/06/07/drugs-rebellion-cartagena/>.
- — —. *The Heart That Bleeds: Latin America Now*. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1994.
- Henderson, James. *Víctima de la globalización: La historia de cómo el narcotráfico destruyó la paz en Colombia*. Translated by Magdalena Holguín. Bogotá: Siglo del Hombre Editores, 2012.
- Henman, Anthony. *Mama Coca*. Translated by Gabriel Iriarte. Bogotá: El Ancora Editores, 1981.
- Hoskin, Gary. “Colombian Political Parties and Electoral Behavior During the Post-National Front Period.” In *Democracy in Latin America: Colombia and Venezuela*, edited by Donald Herman. New York: Praeger, 1988.
- Jaramillo Marín, Jefferson. *Pasados y presentes de la violencia en Colombia: Estudio sobre las comisiones de investigación (1958-2011)*. Bogotá: Editorial Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2014.
- Jimeno, Ramón. *Noche de lobos*. Bogotá: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1989.

- Kirk, Robin. *More Terrible than Death: Massacres, Drugs, and America's War in Colombia*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2003.
- Kline, Harvey F. "From Rural to Urban Society: The Transformation of Colombian Democracy." In *Democracy in Latin America: Colombia and Venezuela*, edited by Donald Herman. New York: Praeger, 1988.
- Larreamendy-Joerns, Jorge, and María Fernanda Vence. "La demanda como drama: la prevención y el tratamiento del uso de drogas en Colombia." In *Políticas antidroga en Colombia: Éxitos, fracasos y extravíos*, edited by Alejandro Gaviria Uribe and Daniel Mejía Londoño, 121–46. Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2011.
- Lee III, Rensselaer W., and Francisco E. Thoumi. "Drugs and Democracy in Colombia." In *Menace to Society: Political-Criminal Collaboration Around the World*, edited by Roy Godson. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2003.
- LeMaitre, Ripoll, and Mauricio Albarracín. "Patrullando la dosis personal: la represión cotidiana y los debates de políticas públicas sobre el consumo de drogas ilícitas en Colombia." In *Políticas antidroga en Colombia: Éxitos, fracasos, y extravíos*, edited by Daniel Mejía Londoño and Alejandro Gaviria, 237–59. Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2011.
- López-Restrepo, Andrés, and Alvaro Camacho Guizado. "From Smugglers to Drug-Lords to 'Traquetos': Changes in the Colombian Illicit Drugs Organizations," 2005. <http://kellogg.nd.edu/faculty/research/pdfs/LopeCama.pdf>.
- Los mitos de la toma del Palacio de Justicia. El Informe de La Comisión de La Verdad." *La Silla Vacía*. Accessed October 23, 2015. <http://lasillavacia.com/historia/5649>.
- Martz, John D. *The Politics of Clientelism: Democracy and the State in Colombia*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1996.
- Musto, David F. *The American Disease: Origins of Narcotic Control*. 3 edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Musto, David F., and Pamela Korsmeyer. *Quest for Drug Control: Politics and Federal Policy in a Period of Increasing Substance Abuse, 1963-1981*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.
- Osterling, Jorge P. *Democracy in Colombia: Clientelist Politics and Guerrilla Warfare*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1989.
- Palacios, Marco. *Between Legitimacy and Violence: A History of Colombia, 1875-2002*. Translated by Richard Stoller. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

- Penagos-Carreño, Julián. "1984 Representaciones de las Farc en la prensa: guerrilla comunista o narcoguerrilla." *Palabra - Clave* 18, no. 1 (March 2015): 12–40.
- Pizarro, Eduardo. "Revolutionary Guerrilla Groups in Colombia." In *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective*, edited by Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez. Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1992.
- Plazas Vega, Luis Alfonso. *La batalla del Palacio de Justicia*. Bogotá: Intermedio, 2000.
- Pobutsky, Aldona Bialowas. "Peddling Pablo: Escobar's Cultural Renaissance." *Hispania* 96, no. 4 (2013): 684–99. doi:10.1353/hpn.2013.0104.
- Premo, Daniel L. "Coping with Insurgency: The Politics of Pacification in Colombia and Venezuela." In *Democracy in Latin America: Colombia and Venezuela*. New York: Praeger, 1988.
- Ramírez V., Socorro, and Luis Alberto Restrepo. *Actores en el conflicto por la paz: El proceso de paz durante el gobierno de Belisario Betancur (1982-1986)*. Bogotá: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1988.
- Resa Nestares, Carlos. "El comercio de drogas ilegales en México: El asesinato en Baja California: las cifras." Notas de Investigación. Madrid, 2005.
http://www.uam.es/personal_pdi/economicas/cresa/nota0405.pdf.
- Restrepo, Luis Alberto. "The Crisis of the Political Regime and Its Possible Outcomes." In *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective*, edited by Bergquist, Charles, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez. Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1992.
- Ricardofanta. *Gabriel García Márquez (Crónica de Una Muerte Anunciada)*, 2006.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Oh_sR3bKG4.
- Roldán, Mary. "Colombia: Cocaine and the "Miracle of Modernity in Medellín." In *Cocaine: Global Histories*, edited by Paul Gootenberg, 165–83. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Rovner, Eduardo Sáenz. "Las redes de cubanos, norteamericanos y colombianos en el narcotráfico en Miami durante los años sesenta." *Innovar: Revista de ciencias administrativas y sociales* 18, no. 32 (2008): 111–25.
- Sáenz Rovner, Eduardo. "Antecedentes de la marihuana en Colombia entre los años 30 y 60." In *Para reescribir el siglo XX: Memoria, insurgencia, paramilitarismo y narcotráfico*, edited by Javier Guerrero Barón and Olga Yanet Acuña Rodríguez, 253–68. Bogotá: Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia/La Carreta Editores E.U., 2011.

- Salazar J., Alonso. *Born to Die in Medellín*. Translated by Nick Caistor. London: Latin America Bureau, 1992.
- — —. *Drogas y narcotráfico en Colombia*. Bogotá: Planeta Colombiana Editorial, S.A., 2001.
- — —. *La parábola de Pablo: Auge y caída de un gran capo del narcotráfico*. Bogotá: Planeta Colombiana Editorial, S.A., 2001.
- Thoumi, Francisco E. *Political Economy and Illegal Drugs in Colombia*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 1995.
- Tokatlian, Juan Gabriel. *Drogas, dilemas y dogmas: Estados Unidos y la narcocriminalidad organizada en Colombia*. Bogotá: Tercer Mundo Editores, 1995.
- Vásquez, Juan Gabriel. *The Sound of Things Falling*. Translated by McLean. New York: Penguin Group LLC, 2011.
- Vom Hau, Matthias. “Nationalism and War Commemoration – a Latin American Exceptionalism?” *Nations and Nationalism* 19, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 146–66. doi:10.1111/j.1469-8129.2012.00559.x.