

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: POLITICAL RHETORIC AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Liberal guerrillas were in the neighborhood, and the stoutly Conservative residents of San Pedro de Jagua [Department of Cundinamarca] knew well that their homes might be struck next...

“Surrender or die!” the bandits roared, and with one brief volley they dispersed the defenders. Two hundred more bandits [...] poured into the city, shouting “Long live the Liberal Party!” [...] Once the town was subdued, [the guerrilla leader] proceeded with the executions of leading Conservatives. Three young boys were included among the victims. “They are *Godos* [Conservatives] and will grow up,” a bandit growled in explanation.

“Death in the Countryside,” Time 6 Aug 1951: 31, 33.

“[P]eople who were lashed to a tree and made to witness the cruel scene told me that the policemen yelled, as they cut out his tongue: “You won’t be giving any more cheers for the Liberal Party, you bastard!” They cut the genitals off other men so that they wouldn’t procreate any more Liberals. [...] I know of men who were held bound while policemen and Conservative civilians took in turns to rape their wives and daughters. Everything was carried out according to a preconceived plan of extermination.”

Juan de Jesús Franco, Liberal guerrilla leader, letter to the governor of the Department of Antioquia, 1 Jul. 1953.<sup>1</sup>

People do not commit political violence without discourse. They need to talk themselves into it. What may begin as casual conversation may suddenly take a serious turn. Secret meetings add portent. On public platforms it becomes inflammatory. It results in texts, lectures. In short it engages people who suddenly are called upon to use their intelligence. Political violence then is not only interpretive, it engages the intelligences in ways out of the ordinary. It takes people out of themselves.

David E. Apter, “Political Violence in Analytical Perspective,” 1997.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Germán Guzmán, Orlando Fals Borda, and Eduardo Umaña Luna, *La Violencia en Colombia* (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo, 1962) 93-94; English translation in Walter J. Broderick, *Camilo Torres: A Biography of the Priest-Guerrillero* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975) 57-58.

<sup>2</sup> David E. Apter, “Political Violence in Analytical Perspective,” *The Legitimization of Violence*, ed. David E. Apter (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan in association with UNRISD, 1997) 9.

Eliminationist political violence, in which the goal is not just control over perceived enemies but their complete eradication, was all too common in the strife-ridden twentieth century. In all cases, a specific discourse or rhetoric preceded the violence—people were first convinced of the necessity of their acts before taking up their weapons and massacring. State-sponsored genocide was the most devastating manifestation of eliminationist political violence, but in many other instances ethnic, class, or political groups engaged in efforts to eliminate the “other” in their midst, without direction from the state. From 1946 to 1964 in Colombia, members of the Liberal and Conservative parties, usually acting outside of the official state apparatus, committed assassinations and massacres against their partisan rivals, murdering entire families and burning thousands of farmhouses. The conflict, known as *La Violencia*, left nearly 200,000 dead.<sup>3</sup>

A degree of violence had long been a part of the larger political discourse in Colombia. A series of local and national civil wars between Liberals and Conservatives began shortly after the two-party system was established in the 1840s, providing both sides with martyrs and heroes who would be invoked and honored at party gatherings well into the time of *La Violencia*. The nineteenth century ended with the most extensive interparty conflict, the War of a Thousand Days (1899-1902), which weakened the country to the point that it could do little when the U.S. aided the separation of the province of Panama from Colombia in 1903. Although Liberals and Conservatives subsequently agreed to a system of power-sharing, the Conservatives maintained control over the national government through coercion and electoral fraud. When the Liberals won the presidential election of 1930, ending nearly fifty years of Conservative rule, they

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Oquist, Violence, Conflict, and Politics in Colombia (New York: Academic P, 1980) 6-7.

followed the example of the Conservatives and used threats and attacks to change voting patterns in certain key departments in order to establish a Liberal electoral hegemony.

When Conservatives regained power as a result of the 1946 presidential contest, the political violence was more brutal and more widespread than that which occurred after 1930—the goal was not only to guarantee an electoral majority, but to also physically eliminate the opposition. An important change in political rhetoric had occurred in the ensuing years, contributing to the creation of a poisonous atmosphere of intense distrust and suspicion between militants of the two parties. This study will present how political rhetoric changed in the 1930s and early 1940s, producing a discourse that encouraged eliminationist political violence. During this period, both Liberal and Conservative politicians increasingly made inflammatory accusations connecting the opposition to an international plot to subvert Colombia. The perpetrators of violence “talked themselves into it,” to use Apter’s phrase, acting within a discursive framework that encouraged the elimination of the “other;” were it not for the logic and the context of the competition between the two traditional parties, acts of violence would have lacked the symbolic capital to perpetuate themselves within a larger meaning. Over the two decades leading up to *La Violencia*, political discourse went from being expressed in speeches, newspapers, mass rallies, and marches to being performed in spontaneous demonstrations and riots, and to finally being written on the bodies of the victims of *La Violencia*. Although the conflict soon encompassed long-simmering social and economic antagonisms, it maintained the veneer of a Liberal-Conservative rivalry until after the last groups of “political bandits” were disbanded in 1964. As seen in the quotations at the beginning of this chapter, those that perpetrated the violence were

convinced that the qualities of “Liberal” or “Conservative” were passed on through the blood—members of the opposition were castrated, and their children were judged irredeemable and slaughtered, as if membership in a political party marked an individual as much as race or ethnicity.

*La Violencia* is characterized as a partisan conflict between members of Colombia’s two traditional parties. However the conflict was not solely based on the rhetoric of the Liberals and the Conservatives. As will be presented later in this introduction, other studies have effectively shown how long-standing land and labor disputes in different regions and municipalities throughout Colombia took on a partisan hue, especially after 1946. There is certainly evidence of personal vendettas being carried out under the pretext of an interparty dispute; other social and psychological deviancies can also be attributed to any number of individual cases of violence. As Professor David Bushnell puts it, “Other forms of ...motivation masquerading as something else are easy to imagine.”<sup>4</sup> It is not within the scope of this work to examine and quantify the reasons behind each assassination and massacre. However, victimization and victimizing during *La Violencia*, especially during the first years of the phenomenon, were nearly always based on party affiliation to a certain extent. This dissertation will attempt a closer examination of the rhetorical tropes and verbal debates based on the traditional two parties in Colombia, especially taking into account the claims that one side was plotting against the other, and against the nation, as part of some larger worldwide conspiracy. As will be noted, the rhetoric of conspiracy is common to many

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<sup>4</sup> David Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1993) 206.

of the various instances of twentieth-century eliminationist political violence, and such rhetoric deserves a fuller examination in the case of Colombia on the eve of *La Violencia*.

### Political Rhetoric and Political Violence

According to Yale University political scientist David E. Apter, “interpretive discourses embodied in discourse communities” are necessary for political violence to “become both self-validating and self-sustaining.”<sup>5</sup> In Colombia, the “discourse communities” were found within the various factions of the Liberal and Conservative parties; politicians and party militants produced the “interpretive discourses.” Several themes found in these discourses existed in the partisan rivalry long before 1930. Each party espoused a competing partisan-based “nationalism”—complete with separate banners, martyrs, heroes, and ceremonies. Politicians reinforced the idea of a collective experience of partisan struggle and violence, based on retelling the experience of nineteenth-century civil wars and twentieth-century elections. These partisan nationalisms trumped political ideas, since factions within each party frequently disagreed over issues such as government structure, land reform, monetary policy, and civil liberties. Indeed, perhaps the only consistent policy difference between the parties was in their conflicting views on the position of the Church in Colombian society—with Conservatives in favor of a role for the clergy in public education and administration of territories, and the Liberals advocating a degree of separation of Church and state. This issue often led to divisions between political moderates and militants within each party—and within the Church itself, as clergy members debated the extent to which they should support the pro-Church Conservatives and vilify the “godless” Liberals, if at all.

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<sup>5</sup> Apter 11.

Although partisan differences remained important in the rhetorical exchanges in the 1930s and 1940s, they alone were not responsible for encouraging widespread political violence or civil war in the late 1940s. Additional rhetorical themes began to appear in the mid-thirties, received from abroad through books, magazines, and news wires and reinterpreted to meet local circumstances. Both sides perpetuated conspiracy theories involving international cabals, while the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) became a metaphor for the partisan struggle in Colombia for both Liberals and Conservatives. These new interpretive discourses encouraged and deepened a sense of suspicion and distrust for partisan rivals, contributing to an overall expectation of violent interparty conflict.

Agency is necessary to produce interpretive discourses; trusted interpreters, or “story-tellers,” put individual experiences within the larger context.<sup>6</sup> Politicians and journalists served as “story-tellers” in Colombia; they were believed by many of their listeners since they had gained respect and social standing within the context of the partisan political and social culture that had developed in Colombia in the nineteenth century. Still, the interpretive discourses produced by the politicians were not necessarily intended to inspire widespread political violence. The line between political tactics and ideology was often blurred; a close investigation of the context in which many of the inflammatory exchanges took place shows that most politicians did not believe their own rhetoric and were purposefully *armando los espíritus* (“arming the spirits”) of their parties’ rank and file. Politicians chose their words to fit the moment—to win an election, to change the terms of a legislative debate, or to strengthen the position of one faction over another within a party. The leaders of both parties seemed to understand that

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<sup>6</sup> Apter 12-13.

they were following certain rules of a political game as it was played in Colombia—despite the acrimonious debates and personal attacks, politicians from both sides often met outside of congress in their own exclusive social clubs. Hindsight shows that party leaders failed to anticipate the violent outcome of their rhetoric and only foresaw the immediate political gains.

The rhetoric of the 1930s and 1940s was grafted onto the pre-existing patron-client relationships within each vertically-organized party. Moderate political leaders from both parties occasionally attempted to form a bipartisan administration at the national level. However, other politicians and party activists continued to make inflammatory claims about the “real” intentions of the opposition, frequently within the context of an international conspiracy. The more inflammatory rhetoric was readily received in the often less-sophisticated provinces—it was more useful for local political bosses (known as *gamonales*) to compete with the other side than to reconcile their differences. The local benefits of belonging to the party in power were sufficient enough to want to block members of the other party from participation. Inflammatory rhetoric was also more likely to be believed by party members who had been treated badly by members of the opposite party when they controlled the government. After suffering unequal treatment because of one’s party affiliation, one was more likely to be that much more devoted to party leaders and their rhetoric, and also more likely to believe that the opposite party was part of an evil worldwide conspiracy.

As Apter describes, “individuals convey their individual stories to reinforce a collective one and draw down in interpretive power more than they put in.”<sup>7</sup> By the 1940s, one act of violence would lead to another, not only within a municipality, but in

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<sup>7</sup> Apter 12.

localities in other parts of the country as each incident became part of a collective story, broadcast through the partisan media and clientelistic political networks. Logical interpretive discourses existed to explain and contextualize violence for both partisan victims and perpetrators, assuring that one murder (or massacre) would be met with another. Based on their experiences on the local level, individual party members were “drawing down” increasing amounts of the “interpretative power” produced on a national level. *La Violencia* quickly took on a life of its own, leaving little room for conciliation and compromise.

Apter’s model of interpretive discourse serves as a starting point for understanding the importance of virulent partisan rhetoric on the eve of *La Violencia* and encourages us to ask other important questions. First, how and why did partisan rhetoric become so polarized? The answer may begin with an examination of the political history of Colombia in the first decades of the twentieth century, when Colombia’s political leaders were facing the challenges of agrarian unrest, urbanization, and industrialization. In contrast with the party systems in most other Latin American republics, Colombia’s nineteenth-century two-party arrangement remained intact during this period—despite internal party wrangling over the issues of the day as different factions vied for control over the national party directorates. Internal party factions were also influenced by ideas and trends from abroad—for instance, left Liberals were inspired by socialism, the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), and the Spanish Republic (1931-1939), while right-wing Conservatives found inspiration in the Action Française, militant Catholicism, and the Spanish Falange. In many ways, political elites were attempting to confirm that Colombians were world players, European in their concerns, culture, and formation.



Playing on long-existing fears of the partisan rivals was an effective tactic for rallying the party faithful to one or another intraparty faction. Taking their cues from abroad, party leaders began to claim that members of the opposite party were involved in international plots, simply by being Liberals (and therefore pawns of a worldwide Judeo-Masonic-communist cabal) or Conservatives (manipulated by a Nazi-Falangist conspiracy in which militant clerics played a key role).

But why did so many believe the rhetoric and act upon it? This is a far more complex question and can only be answered through an examination of the different rhetorical themes that were repeated time and again. A basic discursive structure had existed almost since the establishment of the two parties. The parties maintained separate traditions, symbols, and heroes that were so deeply embedded among the party faithful that the differences can best be compared to two competing nationalisms within the same nation. Cornell political scientist Benedict Anderson describes nationalism as more akin to religious belief than to an ideology,<sup>8</sup> which effectively describes the emotions expressed by Liberals and Conservatives in Colombia, where politicians routinely spoke of their respective party's "mystique." The result was two separate ideas of "nation" which competed with one another. Throughout the world, public civic rituals, such as celebrating national holidays and erecting monuments in public plazas, were important in strengthening the idea of the nation; in Colombia, these rituals were based more on the local party in power rather than on a nationalist consensus of all citizens.

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<sup>8</sup> Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, revised edition, (London: Verso, 1991) 5.

Anderson also points to the importance of sacrifice in building nationalism.<sup>9</sup> In Colombia, battlefield sacrifices were made in the name of one of the two parties during the civil wars of the nineteenth century; this collective partisan experience continued to inspire the rank and file in the twentieth century, especially at election time. Not only did this reinforce the separate nationalisms represented by the two parties, but it also glorified and legitimated a degree of political violence so that nearly every contested election resulted in a number of deaths.

Violent conflict between the parties never quite achieved the status of a “reassuring fratricide,” as described by Anderson, in which civil wars are reconstructed as a mutual sacrifice necessary for the construction of the nation and for strengthening national identity.<sup>10</sup> As will be described in more detail in later chapters, with some regularity politicians from both parties cooperated in order to bring a degree of order to the country, and attempts were made to rethink the violent relationship between the parties. However, the depth of acrimony between the Liberals and Conservatives and the competing partisan interpretations and celebrations of the same events made it difficult for the fratricide to become reassuring. According to Anderson, the passing of time is a factor in making a civil war a reassuring event; for instance, within a few decades after the U.S. Civil War, the conflict was considered even by combatants to be a struggle of brother against brother rather than of the northern Union against the southern Confederacy—the conflict was seen as an unfortunate but necessary step in strengthening the idea of the United States, made more “United” by a fratricidal war. In Colombia, acts of political violence during elections made the nineteenth-century civil wars more of a

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<sup>9</sup> Anderson, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Anderson 199-206.

constant physical presence in party competition, so that sufficient distance from events was not achieved. The War of a Thousand Days, for example, was never considered a fratricidal conflict that helped to unite the nation, despite the efforts of certain politicians on both sides to form bipartisan coalitions in its wake. Deadly election-day assaults made the War of a Thousand Days a presence on the local level, in some cases right up to the time of *La Violencia*.

Again, one of the few issues that consistently separated the two parties from the time of their emergence in the 1840s was the role of the Church in Colombian society. Debates over this issue had been the cause of several civil wars and rebellions in the nineteenth century, and it still stirred powerful passions in the first decades of the twentieth. Conservative politicians, with the support of local and national clergy, frequently claimed that the Liberal Party was bent on putting the Church under its heel and destroying religion in Colombian society—and they could back up their assertions by citing the anti-clerical policies of nineteenth-century Liberal governments, as well as official condemnations of liberalism by the Church hierarchy at home and abroad. Liberals, for their part, claimed that religious fanatics controlled the Conservative Party and would lead Colombia back into the Dark Ages if given the chance, stymieing any hopes for modernization and progress—they also drew upon rhetoric from European radicals in order to strengthen their anticlericalism. Again, leaders on both sides were confirming their worldliness and that of their party by drawing on rhetoric from abroad, especially from Europe.

In the 1930s, additional arguments and metaphors complemented and reinforced the time-honored tropes of political debate in Colombia. Both parties effectively used the

Spanish Civil War as a metaphor for the political situation in Colombia, emphasizing an “it-can-happen-here” attitude. As Stanford literature professor Hayden White shows, metaphors are among the tropes that can structure a particular narrative, contributing to the way one thinks about reality, political or otherwise.<sup>11</sup> In Colombia, the story of Spanish political violence and civil war served as Apter’s “collective story” written on an international scale for the political debates between Liberals and Conservatives. Colombian Conservatives expressed their fears about the actions of the ruling Liberals by referring to the Church-burnings and the massacres of clergy in Spain, while Liberals feared that reactionary Conservatives were plotting coups with the army and militant priests, as happened in Spain. Acts of violence and terrorism taken by a few militants in both parties reconfirmed and extended the preconceived accusations of conspiracy.

Based on political rhetoric from abroad, conspiracy theories about the rival party became more elaborate with the onset of the Second World War. The international political discourse of the 1930s often consisted of tearing down the supposed façades behind which political enemies were hiding. These discourses made their way to Colombia, where they became useful tools of both Liberal and Conservative politicians. Liberals were depicted as part of an international conspiracy organized by Jews, freemasons and communists; Conservatives were presented as Fascist “Fifth Columnists.” As Hannah Arendt points out, the act of “unmasking” what is supposedly the cause of mass suffering is necessary for a successful revolution,<sup>12</sup> “unmasking” can inspire and energize any political movement. Many Colombian political leaders also hoped that claims of an international conspiracy at work in their country would aid them

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<sup>11</sup> Hayden White, Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1973) 31, 34.

<sup>12</sup> Hannah Arendt, On Revolution (New York: Viking P, 1963) 106.

in receiving moral and financial support from abroad—the Liberal governments sought U.S. aid before and during the war, while prominent Conservatives maintained close ties with the German legation and the international Falange.

Arendt points out that the U.S. and British party systems work reasonably well since the opposition is recognized “as an institution of government.”<sup>13</sup> There were times at the beginning of the twentieth century when the politicians cooperated—politics during these years have been depicted in the literature as “conversations among gentlemen”<sup>14</sup> and as “convivialism,”<sup>15</sup> in which political leaders met in the corridors of congress and in exclusive clubs in order to hammer out deals and arrangements that were convenient to the leaders of both parties. Still, convivialism was an elite phenomenon that occurred in Bogotá or in a few departmental capitals. Rarely did Liberals and Conservatives cooperate or even intermingle on the local level, where one or the other party usually dominated. Especially in the thirties and forties, certain politicians within factions of both parties used fear of partisan rivals to develop a following and change the political discourse. As rhetoric became more virulent, the opposition was seen as a cause of suffering and a threat to the nation, rather than as an Arendtian legitimate institution of government. The Colombian version of the two-party system did not guarantee the political stability found in other democracies because of the level of distrust between the parties (in addition to socio-economic disparities and other similar societal tensions).

The partisan discourse soon went beyond words and extended into performance.

Public speeches and political rallies had long been a part of Colombian political

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<sup>13</sup> Arendt 271.

<sup>14</sup> Alexander Wilde, Conversaciones de caballeros: La quiebra de la democracia en Colombia (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo, 1982) 18-20.

<sup>15</sup> Herbert Braun, The Assassination of Gaitán: Public Life and Urban Violence in Colombia (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1985) 20-27.

discourse; to these forms of public display were added marches and processions in an effort to both demonstrate partisan strength and to involve party militants in the physical expression of discourse. By the 1940s this physicality expressed itself in street confrontations with the opposite party, in which both sides demonstrated their concept of “virility” against the opposite party.

A growing sense that a rebellion, coup, or civil war would soon break out also developed into what Columbia University anthropologist Michael Taussig calls “the nervous system,” where the “state of emergency” becomes normal.<sup>16</sup> Government policies and party platforms were taken to mean something else; local incidents were thought to have been ordered from Bogotá; communists, fascists and other international conspirators were said to be infiltrating the country, trying to steal its soul. Colombians became convinced that violence was inevitable; then violence became the normal condition of politics.

The virulent rhetoric of the 1930s and 1940s inspired particularly intense and perverse acts of violence after the Conservatives regained the presidency in 1946. Convinced that their partisan rivals were part of a worldwide plot against *la patria*, militants on both sides believed that members of the opposing party deserved to suffer for their activities against the nation and that only their complete elimination would liberate Colombia. It was not enough that the “others” were killed; their families were also massacred so that “not even the seed” was left to later become a potential threat.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> It is not surprising that among Taussig’s influences in developing his theory were his many visits and longer stays in Colombia over twenty-two years, beginning in 1969. Michael Taussig, The Nervous System (New York: Routledge, 1992) 11-35.

<sup>17</sup> Guzmán et al 227-228.

Torture was often a part of this violence, as was the macabre dismemberment of cadavers.

Colombia's *La Violencia* and Political Violence in the Twentieth Century World

Obviously, *La Violencia* is not the only case in the twentieth century of political or ethnic violence in which the total elimination of the opposition was advocated; the study of these other instances informs this analysis of Colombia in the 1930s and 1940s. As Mahmood Mamdani explains in the preface to his book on the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, state boundaries are not boundaries of knowledge, nor should continents and "areas" be seen as limits to inquiry.<sup>18</sup> Investigations of political violence and genocide throughout the world not only present the situation in a particular country or region, but also increase our comprehension of the human condition—in the present work, how angry words can lead to violent acts.

In recent years, rhetoric and discursive frameworks have been increasingly considered as one of the more important elements of eliminationist violence, moving away from interpretations based strictly on Marx and economic determinism. As Mark Mazower points out, "if this century has shown one thing, it is that politics cannot be reduced to economics: differences in values and ideologies must be taken seriously and not simply regarded as foils for class interest. Fascism...was more than just another form of capitalism."<sup>19</sup> The beliefs and discursive structures within which individuals interpret their surroundings are fundamental in inspiring their acts.

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<sup>18</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001) xii-xiv.

<sup>19</sup> Mark Mazower, Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century (New York: Vintage Books, 1998) xiii.

Norman Naimark (2001) presents the long history of ethnic cleansing in Europe in the last one hundred years, from the Armenian genocide and the expulsion of Greeks from Anatolia during and after the First World War, through the attempted Nazi extermination of Europe's Jews, the Soviet deportation of ethnic minorities, and the expulsion of Germans from Eastern Europe during and after the Second World War, and the more recent cases of ethnic extermination and dislocation in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s.<sup>20</sup> Naimark's comparison of the genocides of Armenians and Jews reveals the importance of rhetoric and propaganda in contributing to the inspiration of eliminationist violence. "Modern integral nationalism" created

the "other," the hated and the despised, the enemy within...essential in developing the potential for mass murder. In both cases, the victims were dehumanized ideologically and physically. Their degradation by their persecutors proved their "otherness" and inhumanity.<sup>21</sup>

In Colombia, a similar dehumanization took place, expressed during *La Violencia* by the brutality of the massacres. The human body became a site where eliminationist discourse took place. The first study of *La Violencia* by Guzmán, Fals, and Umaña (1962) described the specific acts of violence—the different ways in which people were killed.<sup>22</sup> These acts are more fully explored and interpreted by María Victoria Uribe (1990). As seen in the quotations that begin this chapter, partisan rivals were to be deprived of their voice and of their ability to physically reproduce. The protagonists believed that the victims not only deserved to die but should also suffer first for their perceived crimes. Like the acts of torture and humiliation performed on the Jews during

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<sup>20</sup> Norman M. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001).

<sup>21</sup> Naimark 82-83.

<sup>22</sup> Guzmán et al 225-237.



the persecutions before and during the Holocaust,<sup>23</sup> certain mutilations contained specific meanings for the perpetrator. For instance, beliefs about making the dead truly dead through decapitation were widespread throughout Colombia. At times, the decapitated heads were arranged in comical tableau, such as placing the head in the hands of the victim;<sup>24</sup> at other times the heads were used in games of soccer by the perpetrators of the crime and their supporters.<sup>25</sup> Such acts of violence emphasize the dehumanization of the victim.

Both Conservatives and Liberals were concerned with symbolically destroying the ability to communicate—words were powerful for those who participated in the massacres. For the perpetrators, one of the most offensive aspects of their victims was their capacity to shout in favor of one party or the other—or to conspire against the nation. The destruction of the voice was not limited to cutting out the tongue; certain cuts made in the bodies of the victims re-placed the mouth in a farcical way. These cuts were so common that their names became famous: in the *corte de franela* (strip cut), a machete slashed under the jaw almost to the spine so that a second mouth appeared under the actual orifice. In the *corte de corbata* (necktie cut), an incision was made below the mouth through which the tongue was passed, resembling a necktie.<sup>26</sup>

It was also necessary to destroy the ability to reproduce, as if being Liberal or Conservative was genetic. Male genitals were cut off and stuffed in their victim's mouth in order to emphasize the loss of manhood, or preferably in the mouth of a female victim,

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<sup>23</sup> For an analysis of how Jews were forced to perform meaningless labor in accordance with the anti-Semitic belief that Jews avoided physical work, see Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996 and Vintage Books, 1997) 283-292.

<sup>24</sup> María Victoria Uribe, Matar, rematar y contramatar: Las massacres de la Violencia en el Tolima, 1948-1964 (Bogotá: CINEP, 1990) 174.

<sup>25</sup> Ernesto León Herrera, Lo que el cielo no perdona (Bogotá: Editorial ARGRA, 1954) photo, 255.

<sup>26</sup> Guzmán et al 228-229, photo 16, insert between 280-281; and María Victoria Uribe 173-174.

to ridicule the loss of the ability to make new militants for the party. Fetuses were ripped out of pregnant women and left far from the corpses in order to separate the would-be Liberal or Conservative from the source of life and nurturing. Women's breasts were hacked off to represent the same separation, as if party identity was passed through mother's milk.<sup>27</sup>

These acts of torture and mutilation illustrate not only how the discourse of eliminationist violence was performed on bodies, but also indicate the extent to which eliminationism was part of the discursive framework that preceded the massacres. The perpetrators were not merely terrorizing members of the opposite party in order to win elections, but rather eradicating the country of its enemies.

Other recent studies of the Holocaust also contribute to an understanding of the discursive framework of the protagonists of violence against Jews, including Christopher Browning (1992),<sup>28</sup> Inga Clendinnen (1999),<sup>29</sup> Mark Mazower (1998),<sup>30</sup> and Naimark (2001).<sup>31</sup> The controversy following the publication of Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust (1996) is also helpful in understanding the idea of eliminationist rhetoric and violence, although Goldhagen goes too far in assuming that Germans were somehow particularly programmed to eliminate Jews, making the Holocaust inevitable.<sup>32</sup> A discursive framework is only one element in political violence, but nevertheless necessary for perpetrators to commit acts of elimination.

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<sup>27</sup> Guzmán et al 228-229; and María Victoria Uribe 175.

<sup>28</sup> Christopher Browning, Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland (New York: Harpercollins, 1992).

<sup>29</sup> Inga Clendinnen, Reading the Holocaust (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999).

<sup>30</sup> Mazower 3-249.

<sup>31</sup> Naimark 57-84.

<sup>32</sup> Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, "A Reply to My Critics: Motives, Causes, and Alibis," The New Republic 23 Dec. 1996: 37-45.

The perpetrators of *La Violencia* in Colombia were also convinced that a certain group was dangerous to the “health” of the nation and needed to be wiped out.<sup>33</sup> This trope also had its origins in Europe in the early twentieth century. As Mazower point out, eugenics and “race health” were not only the concern of Nazis but also of politicians and intellectuals across the political spectrum.<sup>34</sup> This discourse resonated in Colombia; in order to present society as an ordered social organism, political and religious rallies and marches mimicked those of Europe from the same period. As in Europe, those who supposedly threatened the nation’s health needed to be isolated and/or eliminated in order to protect society.

A similar phenomenon occurred in Cambodia in the late 1970s, where the slaughter of class enemies also included the death of entire families in the “killing fields.” In his study of the Cambodian genocide of the 1970s, Alexander Laban Hinton (2005) analyzes the rhetorical tropes of the Khmer Rouge and how these tropes fit within a much older discursive structure extant in Cambodia that included concepts such as disproportionate revenge.<sup>35</sup> Hinton emphasizes in his study the importance of “emotion-laden local understandings.”<sup>36</sup> In Cambodia, the revolutionary ideology of the Khmer Rouge followed well-established cultural understandings based on Buddhist enlightenment and a Cambodian tradition of “disproportionate revenge” (a head for an eye). He notes that such cultural understandings are neither hegemonic nor uniform—indeed, he faults Goldhagen (1996) for making this claim about Germany.<sup>37</sup> For Hinton,

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<sup>33</sup> For a discussion on the modern uses of the metaphors health and disease in describing the problems of nations and societies, see Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978) 78-85.

<sup>34</sup> Mazower 95-100.

<sup>35</sup> Alexander Laban Hinton, *Why Did They Kill? Cambodia in the Shadow of Genocide* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2005).

<sup>36</sup> Hinton 23.

<sup>37</sup> Hinton 24-31.

these understandings are applied according to local and individual circumstances, although they may be well-known to all. In Colombia, eliminationist rhetoric was broadcast in an environment where the two party nationalisms already existed. Eliminationist rhetoric was easily applied to this pre-existing cultural understanding, providing a discursive framework for the massacre of members of the opposite party. As in Cambodia, these understandings were also neither hegemonic nor uniform—different regions of the country experienced violence in different degrees and in different ways.

In the last thirty years, inspired by anticommunist rhetoric, several military regimes in Latin America descended into pathological behavior, similar to that of Colombia during *La Violencia*. In Guatemala during the seventies and eighties, the military committed acts of genocide against Indian communities and encouraged others to do the same, claiming that in order to attack subversive guerrillas, the communities in which they were supposedly hiding had to be destroyed, or, as the popular metaphor had it, the water needed to be drained from the ponds to get at the fish. In this case as in Colombia, it was deemed necessary to “not even leave the seed,” eliminating women and children as well. These actions were inspired by the discourse of the Cold War “National Security Doctrine,” promoted by elements within the U.S. and Latin American military establishments; Guatemalan military officers felt that they were saving their country from an international communist conspiracy.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> An excellent general study of the period is found in Susanne Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala: Rebels, Death Squads, and U.S. Power* (Boulder: Westview P, 1991); for analysis of discourse within the military, see Jennifer G. Schirmer, *The Guatemalan Military Project: A Violence Called Democracy* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1998).

In Argentina during the “Dirty War” (1976-1983), thousands of people were claimed to be enemies of the state and eliminated.<sup>39</sup> Mark Osiel (2001) points out that Catholic nationalists had cultivated an anti-Christian conspiracy theory among the members of the armed forces during the previous decades, providing the discursive framework for the atrocities against suspected guerrillas and their supporters.<sup>40</sup> As we shall see, similar tropes from Catholic conspiracy-mongers in Colombia in the 1930s and 1940s fed into Conservative Party rhetoric, justifying the massacres of Liberals in the minds of Conservative perpetrators.

During *La Violencia* in Colombia, civilians were more often the protagonists in massacres than members of the armed forces—which makes it somewhat different from the state-sponsored massacres in twentieth-century Europe, Cambodia, and Latin America. In this context, *La Violencia* was similar to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, in which all Hutu civilians were exhorted by the “Hutu Power” government to participate in the massacre of their Tutsi neighbors. The genocide in Rwanda was far more extensive than *La Violencia*, indeed, it was the most rapid genocide committed in the twentieth century, with at least 800,000 people massacred in one hundred days.<sup>41</sup> The Hutu Power movement had prepared for the genocide in advance, organizing armed gangs, publishing inflammatory anti-Tutsi propaganda in their own widely-read newspaper, and broadcasting against the Tutsi “cockroaches” over the radio.<sup>42</sup> The death of President

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<sup>39</sup> For studies of the Dirty War in which political rhetoric is considered, see Donald C. Hodges, *Argentina's “Dirty War:” An Intellectual Biography* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1991); M. Patricia Marchak, *God's Assassins: State Terrorism in Argentina in the 1970s* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1999); Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture* (New York: Oxford UP, 1998).

<sup>40</sup> Mark J. Osiel, “Constructing Subversion in Argentina's Dirty War,” *Representations* 75 (Summer 2001) 119-58.

<sup>41</sup> Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998) 133.

<sup>42</sup> Gourevitch 85-88, and 93-96.

Habyarimana in a plane crash on April 6, 1994—in all likelihood planned by Hutu Power—initiated the genocide.<sup>43</sup> Hutus were encouraged to take up clubs and machetes and kill all of the Tutsis in their midst, blaming them for the assassination as well as for the guerrilla movement that had invaded from Uganda, which was making headway in the north of the country. Rwanda’s conflict was not necessarily ethnic, given that the categories of “Hutu” and “Tutsi” established by the European colonizers and maintained on identification cards after independence were related more to occupation rather than ethnicity. Tutsis were favored by the Europeans under this system, and were attacked by Hutus as abusive elitists after independence in 1959.<sup>44</sup>

The Rwandan genocide was an instance when the twentieth-century ideologies of nationalism, racial purity, and elimination of the other coincided with media saturation of these concepts to create a discursive framework for genocide. In Rwanda, clubs and machetes were even more efficient than the Nazi extermination camps. Colombia’s *La Violencia* lacked the extensiveness of the Rwandan genocide, but the rhetorical basis for its perpetration was similar—the “other” was blamed for conspiring against the nation, making their elimination a necessity.

*La Violencia* also differs from the Holocaust, ethnic cleansing, the Rwandan genocide, and the persecutions mounted by Latin American and Cambodian military regimes in another important way: in these other cases, there were not two sides trying to eliminate each other as in Colombia. To an extent, *La Violencia* is comparable to the conflict in Kashmir, where a conflict between competing nationalisms based on religion and ethnicity periodically explodes into civilian-perpetrated violence between two

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<sup>43</sup> Gourevitch 108-115.

<sup>44</sup> Mamdani 24-157.

groups.<sup>45</sup> Still the Colombian case in the mid-twentieth century is different from the confrontations in Kashmir in that the violence was between rival political groups. In this sense, *La Violencia* is more comparable to the Spanish Civil War.

In both Spain and Colombia, rising suspicions between political antagonists resulted in a conflict in which civilians were both victims and victimizers. It is not coincidental that events in Spain resonated in Colombia during the thirties and forties. The political rhetoric of the two countries was similar in certain ways, and it is not surprising that Colombian politicians took their cues from their Spanish counterparts to a certain extent after the Spanish Republic was declared in 1931. The left in Spain, from radicals and socialists through communists and anarchists, all generally agreed that the Church had too much power, especially in education, and needed to be muzzled.<sup>46</sup> The right, for its part, felt that the Catholic religion was integral to Spanish identity—all parties from the parliamentary right, through the traditionalists, monarchists and Falangists basically agreed on that point.<sup>47</sup> Both sides had their echo within Colombia's two traditional parties in the 1930s—certain Liberal legislators pushed for anticlerical legislation similar to that passed during the Spanish Republic, while after 1936, Conservatives proclaimed that an international leftist conspiracy was afoot in Colombia, similar to that which was supposedly corrupting Spain on the eve of its civil war. These tropes will be examined in later chapters—they are mentioned here in order to show the similarities between the cases of political violence in Spain and Colombia.

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<sup>45</sup> Navnita Chadha Behera, *State Identity and Violence: Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2000).

<sup>46</sup> Gabriel Jackson, *The Spanish Republic and the Civil War, 1931-1939* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1965) 32-35, 48-51, 56-62, 104-108.

<sup>47</sup> Jackson 106-107, 117, 178-180.

There were also important differences between the two countries—the traditional hegemony of Colombia’s two parties did not compare to the multi-party situation of the Spanish Republic, or even to the Franco dictatorship. Politicians in Colombia on the eve of *La Violencia* also differed from their counterparts in Spain from 1931-1936; few if any of the Colombians sought directly to inspire violent actions through their political rhetoric, while in Spain politicians on both sides encouraged and participated in attempted rebellions.<sup>48</sup> Most Colombian Liberal and Conservative leaders underestimated the effect that their words would have on their followers. For instance, after the assassination of Liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán on April 9, 1948, when nearly 4,000 were killed as enraged mobs attempted to take over the national and departmental governments, panicked national leaders reorganized a bipartisan government—extreme violence was not what they intended.<sup>49</sup> No similar attempt at reconciliation was made between Loyalists and Nationalists in Spain after Franco’s uprising in July 1936.

Despite the desperate actions of party leaders in Bogotá on April 9, local Liberals blamed Conservatives and sought to avenge the death of their fallen leader, while Conservatives felt that Liberals were being manipulated by international communism, and sought to defend the nation by eliminating Liberals. Violent street encounters in the early 1940s were a prelude of the events of April 9, 1948—after Gaitán’s assassination, violent political ritual went beyond public performance to very real attempts on the part of civilians to take over the government or to defend the government from attack. There was no turning back *La Violencia* after Gaitán’s death—within a year, the bipartisan

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<sup>48</sup> Jackson 148-157, 223-228.

<sup>49</sup> Braun 179-184.



accord had ended and many politicians either withdrew from public life, or fanned the flames of civil war through their own partisan actions.<sup>50</sup> The spoken, written and finally the physical rhetoric of the previous decades had taken hold of party militants.

### Assessment of the Current Historiography

Again, the rhetoric that preceded *La Violencia* helped to characterize the conflict as partisan, but by no means can the rhetoric be considered as a sole prime mover behind the phenomenon. The following brief assessment of more than fifty years of investigation of *La Violencia* will underscore this point, while also showing that a more thorough study of the rhetoric—as attempted by this dissertation—would be an important addition to the current literature.

The first investigations of *La Violencia* published in the 1950s tended to be partisan, with Liberal writers blaming Conservatives, and Conservatives blaming Liberals.<sup>51</sup> This began to change in 1962, when Germán Guzmán, Orlando Fals Borda, and Eduardo Umaña Luna published *La Violencia en Colombia*, in which the three academics took a more sociological approach to the conflict. Guzmán et al treated the protagonists of *La Violencia* as poor, ignorant *campesinos* (peasants) whose general good nature was twisted by conspiracy theories promoted by unscrupulous (and unnamed)

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<sup>50</sup> Braun 191-199.

<sup>51</sup> For a Liberal point of view, see for instance Raúl Andrade, *La internacional negra en Colombia, y otros ensayos* (Quito: Editora Quito, 1954); Eduardo Franco Isaza, *Las guerrillas del Llano* (Caracas: Editorial Universo, 1955); and Carlos Lleras Restrepo, *De la república a la dictadura* (Bogotá: Editorial Argra, 1955). For the Conservatives, see Rafael Azula Barrera, *De la revolución al orden nuevo: proceso y drama de un pueblo* (Bogotá: Editorial Kelly, 1956); Joaquín Estrada Monsalve, *Así fue la revolución del 9 de abril al 27 de noviembre* (Bogotá: Editorial Iqueima, 1950); Testis Fidelis, *El basilisco en acción o los crímenes del bandolerismo* (Medellín: Tipografía Olympica, 1953) and Hugo Velasco, *Ecce homo: biografía de una tempestad* (Bogotá: Editorial Argra, 1950). A communist treatment is seen in Comisión del Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Colombia, *Treinta años de lucha del Partido Comunista en Colombia* (Bogotá: Ediciones Paz y Socialismo, 1960).

politicians of both parties. Although paternalistic in its assessment, La Violencia en Colombia took the important steps of organizing the study of the phenomenon by regions and of noting various aspects of the conflict that were not seriously analyzed previously, including the organization of armed groups, the development of a “guerrilla culture,” and the different ways in which victims were killed and mutilated.

From the initial break with the partisan aspect of the conflict represented by La Violencia en Colombia, important interpretations came forward that examined the conflict from many different perspectives. In the Spanish version of Primitive Rebels, British historian Eric Hobsbawm included a chapter on the bandits of *La Violencia*, describing them as part of a frustrated social rebellion and not as revolutionaries.<sup>52</sup> This theme has been elaborated upon in later works, most notably by Gonzalo Sánchez and Donny Meertens (1983—Hobsbawm wrote the foreword for this work),<sup>53</sup> Alfredo Molano (1985),<sup>54</sup> and Pedro Claver Téllez (1993).<sup>55</sup>

The violence itself was most intense in areas of recent settlement or where agrarian conflict had already occurred in the previous decades; this aspect of the conflict has led to an examination of economic motives for the violence, seen especially in regional studies, including those of Carlos Miguel Ortiz on the western coffee-growing region of the Quindío (1985),<sup>56</sup> of Henderson on the mixed-agriculture department of

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<sup>52</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, Rebeldes primitivos, trans. Joaquín Romero Maura (Barcelona: Ariel, 1968) 225-234.

<sup>53</sup> Gonzalo Sánchez and Donny Meertens, Bandoleros, gamonales y campesinos: El caso de la Violencia en Colombia (Bogotá: El Áncora, 1983).

<sup>54</sup> Alfredo Molano, Los años del tropel: relatos de la Violencia (Bogotá: CEREC, 1985).

<sup>55</sup> Pedro Claver Téllez, Efraín González: la dramática vida de un asesino-asesinado (Bogotá: Planeta, 1993).

<sup>56</sup> Carlos Miguel Ortiz, Estado y subversión en Colombia: La Violencia en el Quindío años 1950 (Bogotá: CEREC, 1985).

Tolima (1986)<sup>57</sup> and of Mary Roldán on the coffee-growing and industrially-developed department of Antioquia (2002).<sup>58</sup> Colombia is most definitely a country of regions, so that such studies are necessary for understanding the particular socioeconomic phenomena that attached themselves to the partisan conflict fairly early on in *La Violencia*. In the Quindío, coffee buyers used the political violence as a way of taking land from small coffee growers;<sup>59</sup> in the Llanos, ranchers took advantage of the unrest to extend their holdings. Roldán points out how the violence in Antioquia had a racial aspect to it, particularly in municipalities on the margins of both physical and cultural Antioquia.<sup>60</sup> Economic motives during *La Violencia* are also described by Eduardo Sáenz Rovner (1992)<sup>61</sup> who presents the role of the industrialists in the initial stage of the conflict, when their support of tariff barriers and “import substitution industrialization” led them to side with the Conservative government. Still, without the intense partisan rhetoric, the economic and social opportunism that manifested itself almost from the beginning of *La Violencia* would have lacked the discursive justification and legitimization that was necessary for perpetuating violent actions all across the country.

In the United States, political scientists have been particularly interested in the question of the role of the state in the conflict; earlier works by Vernon Lee Fluharty (1957)<sup>62</sup> and John D. Martz (1962)<sup>63</sup> in their own way took sides, with the former in favor

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<sup>57</sup> James D. Henderson, When Colombia Bled: A History of the *Violencia* in Tolima (University: U of Alabama P, 1985).

<sup>58</sup> Mary Roldán, Blood and Fire: *La Violencia* in Antioquia, Colombia, 1946-1953 (Durham: Duke UP, 2002).

<sup>59</sup> Ortiz 289-321.

<sup>60</sup> Roldán 35-40.

<sup>61</sup> Eduardo Sáenz Rovner, La ofensiva empresarial: industriales, políticos y violencia en los años 40 en Colombia (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo, 1992).

<sup>62</sup> Vernon Lee Fluharty, Dance of the Millions: Military Rule and Social Revolution in Colombia (1930-1956) (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1957).

<sup>63</sup> John D. Martz, Colombia: A Contemporary Political Survey (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1962).

of the military dictatorship of Rojas Pinilla (1953-1957) and the latter expressing approval for the bipartisan National Front arrangement (1958-1974). These works were followed by more complex interpretations (Robert H. Dix, 1967,<sup>64</sup> and James L. Payne, 1968),<sup>65</sup> culminating in a description of the “partial collapse of the state” by Paul Oquist (1978, 1980).<sup>66</sup> For Oquist, the breakdown of traditional relations between opposing politicians contributed to the collapse of the state and widespread anarchy, explaining why the conflict lasted so long,<sup>67</sup> but Oquist does not sufficiently describe how and why “elite consensus” broke down in the thirties and forties, nor does he analyze the importance of rhetoric in the political game as it was played by Colombia’s politicians.

In Orden y violencia: Colombia 1930-54 (1987),<sup>68</sup> the French sociologist Daniel Pécaut places more emphasis on the problems of modernization in Colombia and how workers and peasants were frustrated in their attempts to have more of a say in socio-economic relationships through labor unions and other social movements. *Gaitanismo* is criticized in Pécaut’s book for distracting workers from organizing themselves into a more socialist or revolutionary force,<sup>69</sup> which is a criticism of Latin American populism seen most notably in Francisco C. Weffort’s O populismo na política brasileira (1978)<sup>70</sup> and Steve Stein’s Populism in Peru: The Emergence of the Masses and the Politics of Social Control (1980).<sup>71</sup> Pécaut also includes some analysis of Colombian political

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<sup>64</sup> Robert H. Dix, Colombia: The Political Dimensions of Change (New Haven: Yale UP, 1967).

<sup>65</sup> James L. Payne, Patterns of Conflict in Colombia (New Haven: Yale UP, 1968).

<sup>66</sup> Paul Oquist, Violencia, conflicto y política en Colombia (Bogotá: Instituto de Estudios Colombianos, 1978); English version, Violence, Conflict, and Politics in Colombia (New York: Academic P, 1980).

<sup>67</sup> Oquist [English version] 89-196.

<sup>68</sup> Daniel Pécaut, Orden y violencia: Colombia 1930-54 (Bogotá: CEREC, 1987).

<sup>69</sup> Pécaut 426-449.

<sup>70</sup> Francisco C. Weffort, O populismo na política brasileira (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1978).

<sup>71</sup> Steve Stein, Populism in Peru: The Emergence of the Masses and the Politics of Social Control (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1980).

discourse, focusing more on how politicians represented their ideas, rather than considering how the rhetoric itself played a role in igniting and maintaining *La Violencia*.

Even in more recent works, much of the political history that has been written by Colombian academics about their country in the mid-twentieth century frequently chooses one side over the other, most frequently in favor of the Liberals. These works use a broad brush to paint the Conservatives and the Church as being the source of violent political rhetoric and actions. Several studies fall into this pattern, such as Alvaro Tirado Mejía's treatment of López' first administration (1981),<sup>72</sup> Leopoldo Villar Borda's biography of Alberto Lleras Camargo (1997),<sup>73</sup> and Darío Acevedo's investigation of elite attitudes about violence (1995).<sup>74</sup> Javier Guerrero's study of the political violence that occurred in the early 1930s during the Liberal Olaya administration (1991)<sup>75</sup> was an important break in the pro-Liberal pattern, setting the stage for more critical studies of Liberal-supported violence. Carlos Mario Perea (1996)<sup>76</sup> has pointed out that both sides produced violent discourses in the thirties and forties.

While certain Conservatives and members of the clergy deserve a fair share of the blame for the rhetoric and the ensuing violence, neither the Church nor the Conservative Party were as monolithic and militant as Colombian academics have tended to present them. Priests and Conservative politicians have had a more balanced treatment in the hands of foreign scholars. British historian Christopher Abel's study of the Church during

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<sup>72</sup> Alvaro Tirado Mejía, Aspectos políticos del primer gobierno de Alfonso López Pumarejo, 1934-1938 (Bogotá: Procultura, 1981).

<sup>73</sup> Leopoldo Villar Borda, Alberto Lleras: el último republicano (Bogotá: Planeta, 1997).

<sup>74</sup> Darío Acevedo Carmona, La mentalidad de las élites sobre la violencia en Colombia (1936-1949) (Bogotá: El Áncora, 1995).

<sup>75</sup> Javier Guerrero, Los años del olvido: Boyacá y los orígenes de La Violencia (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo, 1991).

<sup>76</sup> Carlos Mario Perea, Porque la sangre es espíritu (Bogotá: Aguilar, 1996).

the first decades of the twentieth century (1987)<sup>77</sup> and Ana María Bidegain's investigation of a 1930s Catholic youth movement (1985),<sup>78</sup> present how the Church was divided among reactionaries, moderates, and social progressives during these years. U.S. historian James D. Henderson's two books on Laureano Gómez (1988<sup>79</sup> and 2001<sup>80</sup>) contribute to a better understanding of the polemical Conservative leader, who dominated his party from 1932 to 1953, without holding him solely responsible for *La Violencia*, as has often occurred in Colombian historiography.

Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, whose political movement has inspired all Colombians on the left since his assassination in 1948, has also been generally treated uncritically by Colombian scholars, even though his rhetoric and charisma heightened political tensions in the mid-forties; as the leader of the Liberal Party after March 1947, he did little to rein in *La Violencia* once it began. U.S. historian Herbert Braun's work on Gaitán (1985), although it avoids a critical assessment of his subject, is nonetheless important in its interpretation of the political culture leading up to this time, showing how "public" and "private" realms collided in the actions of the "liminal" Gaitán and of the enraged mobs after his assassination.<sup>81</sup> Still, it does not fully appreciate the uniqueness of particular actions taken during the riot, particularly the burning of churches. W. John Green's recent work (2003),<sup>82</sup> while contributing to an understanding of the left-liberal roots of *gaitanismo*, as opposed to simply labeling the movement as populist, also fails to

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<sup>77</sup> Christopher Abel, *Política, iglesia y partidos en Colombia* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional, 1987).

<sup>78</sup> Ana María Bidegain, *Iglesia, pueblo y política: un estudio de conflictos de intereses, Colombia, 1930-1955* (Bogotá: Universidad Javeriana, 1985).

<sup>79</sup> James D. Henderson, *Conservative Thought in Twentieth Century Latin America: The Ideas of Laureano Gómez* (Athens: Ohio UP, 1988).

<sup>80</sup> James D. Henderson, *Modernization in Colombia: The Laureano Gómez Years* (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2001).

<sup>81</sup> Braun 20-38.

<sup>82</sup> W. John Green, *Gaitanismo, Left Liberalism, and Popular Mobilization in Colombia* (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2003).

examine the role of the leader or his movement in succumbing to certain violent discourses which were intrinsic in the glorification of certain Liberal Party heroes and martyrs, such as Benjamín Herrera (1853-1924) and Rafael Uribe Uribe (1859-1914).<sup>83</sup>

Acevedo (1995) and Perea (1996) explore the political culture in Colombia in the thirties and forties from a point of view similar to that expressed here: that political discourses helped inspire violent acts. Both works err in not fully considering the political context in which particular debates took place and in not consulting a wider range of sources. In considering partisan rhetoric, one needs to understand words and statements in the moment they were broadcast and received. In the Colombian case, politicians did not always believe their own rhetoric and investigators should not assume that every word produced by politicians and journalists represented their ideology nor that their intention was to encourage widespread political violence. Likewise, the rhetoric was received by party members in different ways at different times, depending on the speaker and the local and national circumstances.

A study of the political rhetoric on the eve of *La Violencia* also illuminates certain themes underlying the current conflict in Colombia, in which guerrilla insurgencies, paramilitary groups, and governmental forces often involve the civilian population. In some cases, there is a direct link to *La Violencia*. For instance, Pedro Antonio Marín (alias Manuel Marulanda, alias *Tirofijo* ["Sureshot"]), the leader of the largest

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<sup>83</sup> For a discussion of historiography on *La Violencia*, see Carlos Miguel Ortiz, "Historiografía de La Violencia," *Historia al final del milenio*, comp. Bernardo Tovar, vol. 1 (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional, 1994) 371-424; for historiography on twentieth century political history, see Medófilo Medina, "La historiografía política del siglo XX en Colombia," *Historia al final del milenio*, comp. Bernardo Tovar, vol. 2 (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional, 1994) 433-532. In English, important assessments of Colombian historiography are found in Robert H. Davis, *Colombia* World Bibliography Series: 112 (Oxford: Clio, 1990); Robert H. Davis, *Historical Dictionary of Colombia* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow P, 1993); and the appendices of Bushnell, *Colombia* 318-321, and of Frank Safford and Marco Palacios, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society* (New York: Oxford UP, 2002) 383-385.

insurgency, the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC), has been a guerrilla since the 1950, when he organized a small band of Liberal peasants to attack Conservatives in his home region of Quindío.<sup>84</sup> Often the same kind of brutality seen during the forties and fifties is occurring in Colombia today—the paramilitary groups in particular are known for torturing and dismembering suspected “subversives” and their supposed sympathizers. The habit of accusations and counter-accusations still exists in Colombian political culture—virulent political rhetoric influences the actions of all groups, and to be called a “*terrorista*” in one region or a “*paramilitar*” in another is often a death sentence. In Colombia, the ideological hegemony described by Antonio Gramsci still includes rhetorical tropes that contribute to inspiring eliminationist violence. The development of a counter-hegemonic ideology of peaceful dialogue in recent years gives some hope that Colombian political culture can change and overcome a tradition of violent and acrimonious rhetoric.

### Organization of Chapters

In the next chapters, I plan to address three questions: Why was the inflammatory political rhetoric of the 1930s and 1940s so readily received by party militants? What were the conspiracy theories that were spread? and What was the political context in which the conspiracy theories were generated? The answers to these questions will describe the discursive framework in which eliminationist violence was performed during *La Violencia*.

In the next two chapters, I consider the first question, examining why party militants could accept the claims made by party leaders about the opposite party. The

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<sup>84</sup> Arturo Alape, *Tirofijo, los sueños y las montañas, 1964-1984* (Bogotá: Planeta, 1994) 77-78.



political rhetoric of the 1930s and 1940s was grafted onto a preexisting discursive structure about the two traditional parties; in Chapter Two I present this discourse as two competing nationalisms, one Liberal and one Conservative, each with their own colors, heroes, martyrs, monuments, shared history of struggle, and special ceremonies commemorating past events and celebrating party unity. In Chapter Three I examine the party leaders themselves, showing how they constructed a profession based on the practice of politics, complete with their own set of professional requirements (including superior use of the Spanish language, travel and study abroad, and an advanced degree). As a profession, some able members of the lower and middle classes were able to enter politics, as long as they were able to successfully complete the requirements. More importantly, as professionals, party leaders were able to present themselves to the general population as experts with specialized knowledge deserving the respect of the *hoi polloi*. Within this context, the rhetoric generated by the politicians was also respected and acted upon by party militants.

In Chapters Four and Five I hope to present the European origins and the Colombian application of two international conspiracy theories: first, the supposed worldwide Judeo-Masonic cabal bent on destroying Christianity (expounded by reactionary and neo-fascist Conservatives and clerics) and second, the Nazi-Falangist plot against freedom, democracy, and progress (disseminated by radical Liberals). Although both supposed plots had a grain of truth based on circumstantial evidence—freemasons were active in the Liberal Party, Falangists and militant Catholic clergy had influence among the Conservatives—I will try to show that in the end, both theories were seriously flawed given the divisions within freemasonry, the Catholic Church, the military, and

both traditional parties. The serious lack of unity made any coordinated conspiracy an impossibility. Still, these conspiracy theories were important for the protagonists of *La Violencia*, providing the discursive framework for massacre.

The last chapter will attempt to bring together all of these themes, putting the political rhetoric on the eve of *La Violencia* in the context of the current Colombian civil conflict, in which guerrilla insurgencies, paramilitary groups, narcotraffickers and the state compete with one another for control over rural municipalities and regions. I will hope to end my investigation by briefly examining the ways in which rhetoric in Colombia on the eve of *La Violencia* indicates how in general inflammatory words can inspire terrible deeds by providing a larger discursive framework for the perpetrators of political violence.