

Preface and Acknowledgments

This work examines the creation of the absurd inversions, entailed by the politicoeconomic model currently in place in Colombia, that enable the powerful to claim that war is peace, state violence is democracy, impunity is justice, poverty is a sign of progress, human rights defenders are terrorists, and the victims of crime are the perpetrators. While I closely examine the specifics of violence, I have tried to avoid the trap of analyzing violence for its own sake. Instead, I attempt to offer a model of a twenty-first-century state apparatus of coercion under a formally democratic regime by exploring the structure and functions of that apparatus, the conditions that make it a necessity, and its capacity to evolve into new forms.

A Different Theoretical and Methodological Orientation

Through this book I hope to generate a new way of conceiving Colombia's social reality—one that exposes and problematizes existing misconceptions about present-day violence. My analysis rests on the idea that academics and educators must participate in the construction of a society where human life, well-being, rights, and dignity are respected. Such a vision calls for a critical, active, humanizing, and accountable social research that transforms material conditions and rejects abstract intellectual contemplation that lacks any commitment to solving real-life problems. The methodological foundation of this approach is influenced by Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.¹ In accordance with one of the pillars of Freire's methodology, the major questions I deal with arise from the concrete social reality of the protagonists in the Colombian conflict.

The approach I have chosen is relational; it focuses on the ways certain phenomena intersect and interact. My analysis treats the various forms of violence not as isolated, temporary, or accidental occurrences, but rather as expressions of trends that must be considered in relation to wider political and economic processes. Furthermore, in order to provide a nuanced

understanding of the Colombian conflict, I try to actively expose many of the contradictions that have been overlooked by existing studies. In this light, the book contests rigid black-and-white explanations in an attempt to reveal the fluid and blurred nature of violence-generating conditions. Finally, it is my aim to give voice to the peaceable, persistent, and dignified struggles of millions of Colombians silenced through fear and terror as well as to share the stories of those who are or have been implicated in some way in the machinery of repression and impunity. In order to identify structural features without losing sight of the agency of social actors, I link individual testimonies to the large-scale patterns created by many voices, thus revealing how local everyday practices and institutional systems where power is situated mutually sustain each other.

Critical Issues

Recognizing the inseparability of economic interests and political matters, such as that of national security, is critical to fully comprehending the contexts that give rise to human rights abuses and violent death. Hence, the central theme I deal with is the relationship between economic processes that deepen social inequalities and the violence employed by the state and dominant groups within it. In order to elucidate the forces that have enabled the impoverishment of the greater part of the population and kept them in a position of subordination and dependence within the current hierarchy of power, my analysis exposes the acts of violence that dispossess, discipline, and keep people inside exploitative and alienating social relations. I draw attention on one hand to the material motivations guiding the organized use of armed force and, on the other, to the repressive, coercive, and militaristic practices that facilitate the implementation of market-friendly (and thus elite-friendly) policies that in turn exacerbate patterns of unequal wealth distribution. As part of examining the role of violence in Colombian political economy, I challenge the widely held notions that a free-market economy requires peace and lawful institutions and that the lack of these requisites is the cause of socioeconomic underdevelopment.

A second theme is the continuity and the change in forms of violence. In order to understand the current state-sanctioned (including paramilitary) violence in its entirety—most important, its relationship to economic

activities and processes—it is imperative to recognize it as a continuous and intrinsic element of the history of capitalism in Colombia. At the same time, even though there are substantial historical continuities in certain areas, such as doctrines of national security aimed at eliminating the subversive threat, there are compelling novelties in the modes of violence, which this book explores. In particular, I account for the following aspects of violence: the grounds on which policies and practices of social control, which eventually contribute to violence against civilians, are justified; the various ways in which they penetrate everyday life; and the means through which the conduct of citizens is shaped. Moreover, I try to offer a new and more comprehensive way of capturing the entire spectrum of mutually supporting violent acts carried out by state forces, organized crime, and paramilitary groups, forming a vicious circle of wealth-creating atrocities that have had tragic and overwhelming consequences for human rights and people's lives.

The third major theme is the centrality of the state in generating and maintaining conditions conducive to violence and repression. The greater part of overt forms of discipline and repression, including violent acts against civilians, while appearing as coming from multiple sources, are ultimately state sanctioned, as in the case of paramilitary violence in general.

The relevance of the lessons that can be learned from the present analysis extends well beyond Colombia, due to multiple connections that transcend national boundaries. First, a considerable part of the forcible displacement of those residing in areas of strategic economic importance in Colombia is linked to the activities of foreign investors, particularly corporations based in North America. Second, many of the neoliberal policies currently in place in this country have been adopted partly due to pressure from international institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. A third international dimension of the Colombian conflict revolves around the fact that U.S. military and economic involvement in Colombia has serious implications for the political relations between the latter country and its South American neighbors, as does the related geographic expansion of operations by Colombian armed forces and paramilitary bodies—as the diplomatic tensions between Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela in the spring of 2008 illustrate. Fourth, the conclusions drawn from studying certain developments in Colombia are pertinent to other parts of the world. Although the experience of each

nation is contingent on its particular demographic, political, economic, environmental, and cultural features, there is much evidence that allows for the detection of significant patterns across Latin America. For instance, forcible displacement of the rural poor by international capital has occurred in Ecuador, Mexico, and Guatemala; and so there have arisen popular movements opposing such displacements, which have become a target for the repressive and militaristic measures taken by the state. Although less organized and powerful than in Colombia, increased paramilitary activity in southern Mexico and Guatemala have also been documented. However, many works that have critiqued the economic aspects of the neoliberal model for its detrimental impacts on social development in the region have failed to address accompanying state policies and practices that have contributed to violence against those who in some way represent an obstacle or a challenge to the market-friendly model.

Equally important is that the process of economic liberalization is present in countries of the North as well, and so are issues of marginalizing vulnerable social sectors, criminalizing certain minority groups, and sporadic instances of harsh repression of dissent. These actions are expressions of underlying processes that are global.

This book draws from material produced by

- North American and Colombian academics;
- various Colombian and international human rights bodies and NGOs, such as the Center for Popular Research and Education in Colombia (Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular, or CINEP), the Interchurch Commission of Justice and Peace (Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz), the National Trade Union School (Escuela Nacional Sindical, or ENS), the Association of Family Members of the Detained and Disappeared (Asociación de Familiares de Detenidos y Desaparecidos, or ASFADDES), the Consultancy on Human Rights and Displacement (Consultora para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento, or CODHES), the International Centre for Trade Union Rights (ICTUR), the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch;

- trade unions, particularly the Confederation of Colombian Workers (Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Colombia, or CUT) and other social movements, such as the National Association of Peasant Women, various local-level peasant organizations, and the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca, or CRIC);
- Colombian and international mainstream media, including *Semana*, *El Tiempo*, *El Espectador*, BBC and CNN news;
- Colombian and international independent media, such as *Noche y niebla* and ZNet;
- Colombian, U.S., and Canadian official state sources;
- online sources belonging to the former AUC.

In addition to these sources, throughout the text are excerpts and summaries of semistructured interviews I conducted between August 2004 and February 2007 with

- state officials from the attorney general's office (Procuraduría General de la Nación), the national ombudsman (*defensor del pueblo*), the Presidential Program for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (Programa Presidencial de Derechos Humanos y Derecho Internacional Humanitario), and the U.S. embassy in Bogotá;
- the colonel and head of the Third Division of the Colombian Armed Forces;
- Gustavo Petro, a Colombian congressman and leader of the Polo Democrático;
- Gloria Cuartas, former mayor of Apartadó, Antioquia,² and general secretary of the Frente Social y Político political party;
- Francisco Ramírez, president of the Union of Colombian Mine Workers (Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Minería en Colombia, or SINTRAMINERCOL);

- members of the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca, or CRIC);
- indigenous families displaced by the Alto Naya massacre,³ department of Cauca;
- three former criminal investigators from the Technical Investigation Unit (Cuerpo Técnico de Investigación, or CTI) of the public prosecutor's office (Fiscalía General de la Nación) in Cali;
- four criminal lawyers;
- ordinary, low-income people who shared with me stories about what it is like to be poor in Colombia.

The interviews with state officials listed in the first two categories above illuminate the dominant discourses through which violence is justified, legitimized, and democratized. The stories of the rest of the interviewees throw light on the diverse ways in which the conflict affects citizens' daily lives. In an effort to allow people to name themselves rather than be named, I share the commentaries of CRIC members so that they may express their own perception of the movement's collective potential to transform the wider social and political context by challenging the government's neoliberal and militarization policies.

While it is crucial to hear the voices of the excluded and oppressed sectors, the accounts of those who have been on the inside of a system that generates poverty and violence—such as the former criminal investigators—disclose a great deal of the dynamics and practices dominating the many channels and networks of terror, impunity, and corruption that most of the time remain behind a veil of secrecy. Their stories of witnessing or participating in (or both) the production and enactment of schemes that serve to perpetuate these phenomena, are quite revealing. By exposing the connections between particular lives and social organizations, these narratives can perhaps help in challenging structures of domination. The first informant, whom I shall call Pedro, was an employee of the CTI from 1990 to 2001. He presently works as a taxi driver. Ramiro, who was an investigator from 1990 to 2004, is currently a lawyer for individuals accused of drug trafficking. Prior to 1990 Pedro and Ramiro were special agents with the Technical Judicial Police Unit of Criminal Instruction (Cuerpo Técnico

Policía Judicial de Instrucción Criminal, CTPJ), which after that year was converted into the Fiscalía and its CTI. Fernando was a member of the Fiscalía from 1990 to 2002, following which he emigrated to the United States. Except for public figures, all interviewees have been given fictitious names to preserve their anonymity as well as that of any individuals they refer to. Also incorporated throughout the text are my personal observations from various conflict zones in the country.

Organization

The main features of the current Colombian socioeconomic context are established in chapter 1 through a discussion of the nature of neoliberal policies adopted by Colombian governments in the last fifteen years and an examination of the impacts of these policies on the poor and the lower-middle class. Chapter 2 exposes the structure and mechanisms of the Colombian state's coercive apparatus (SCA) by looking at its three dimensions—legislation, armed force, and the production of ideology—and how these elements jointly sustain the country's national security doctrine and the notion of the internal enemy. It also provides a vast range of empirical data illustrating human rights violations perpetrated by state agents. Chapter 3 consists of an in-depth inquiry into the phenomenon of paramilitarism as an extension of the state's machinery of terror and as an instrument for repression and dispossession of the poor by economically powerful groups.

Chapter 4 takes up the specificities of strategies for territorial expansion and methods of terror through which the paramilitary operates. In order to put a human face on the nature and extent of atrocities inflicted by these groups, I document numerous examples of human rights violations against the different categories of people that constitute the internal enemy—from homeless youth to university professors. Chapter 5 deals with the paramilitarization of the state or, to put it differently, the actual institutionalization of paramilitarism, by highlighting the penetration by illegal armed groups of the national economy as well as state institutions outside the coercive apparatus at all levels of government, especially those pertaining to the management of public resources and the administration of justice. The reelection of Uribe in May 2006 is situated within this context.

Moving away from the machinery of terror, its targets, internal and external mechanisms, and sources of sustenance, chapter 6 presents a case study of the oldest and best-organized indigenous movement in the country, the CRIC. I trace the movement's history, its goals, activities, and accomplishments as well as the aggression it has faced from all armed actors in the conflict. Stepping outside the apparatus of coercion, we can hear the voices of those committed to nonviolent resistance in the midst of an intensifying militarization and appreciate the frequently downplayed importance of grassroots organizing and efforts to establish peace with social justice.

Acknowledgments

I thank all the individuals who took time to sit down and speak about the subjects I was interested in, but most of all those people who trusted me enough to share at length many detailed stories from their lives, those who tried to keep me safe as I was testing my luck in areas of Colombia considered dangerous, and those who radically disagree with my ideas but nevertheless helped me understand the complexity of the conflict in their country by allowing me to see their often delicate and risky daily activities. I also thank the human rights organizations, research centers, and media groups—such as CINEP, the Escuela Nacional Sindical, and *Semana* magazine—whose material has been indispensable, as well as ACIN for keeping me abreast of the latest developments in indigenous communities. I am also grateful to Cecilia Zarate-Laun of Colombia Support Network (in the United States), with whom I visited Colombia for the first time and thanks to whom I was able to interview important political and military figures. From the beginning I knew that the project was not going to be easy, given my status as a graduate student, with no grants or assistants. Nevertheless, a number of people encouraged me in this endeavor, among them Patrick Bond at the University of KwaZulu-Natal; Kenneth Mills and Patricia Landolt at the University of Toronto; David McNally, Hira Singh, Lesley Wood, Lorna Weir, and Himani Bannerji at York University; Audrey Tokiwa, the wonderful administrative assistant in the university's Department of Sociology; the faculty and staff at the Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean; and my friends Benjamin Cornejo from the

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Harriet Tubman Institute for Research on the Global Migrations of African Peoples and future political science professor Jeff Webber. Finally, my enormous and special gratitude goes both to my PhD supervisor, Peter Landstreet, who supported me immensely throughout the entire process in many ways, and to my husband, Jhon, who was the first to make me believe I could write this book.