

# Violent Literatures

## Uniting the Nation; Revealing the State

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## **Introduction**

The production of national literature has long been considered an essential component of the formation of nation-states. Newspapers (Anderson 1983, Castro-Klaren and Chasteen 2003), “foundational fictions” (Sommer 1991), novels, constitutions, laws (Rama 1984, Rojas 2003) are all associated with the birth of the nation-state. Yet the production of nation-states is an on-going process (Woods 2000). Few studies have explored the role of writing in the continuous production of the nation-state. In this paper, I trace the role of literature in (re)producing the Colombian state from its inception to the present day. While nineteenth-century political elite – career politicians and public office holders – reserved the absolute and sole ability to “write” Colombia, both fictionally and legally, the contemporary state takes quite another approach to writing the nation-state. Public office holders have relinquished some control over who produces national literature. While keeping the act of authoring the nation an elite project, they have largely devolved the activity to elite scholars of journalism or literature. This new body of authors has (re)written the nation-state around a national origins myth in violence. In turn, the state has increasingly sought to foment a culture of reading, democratizing access to and increasing consumption of what remains a largely elite-produced body of literature. In this paper, I study the (re)centering of the nation around violence through national literature. I argue that success in promoting the consumption of elite culture has indeed ensured the continual construction of the nation, while undermining and reconfiguring the state, primarily by illustrating the state’s inability to monopolize violence.

## **Writing the Nation-State: Not Just a Question of Origins**

Written language has been considered essential to the formation of nation-states in two ways: 1. the formation of a shared national identity through the writing of national literature and newspapers 2. writing the state through laws, constitutions, contracts, etc... Benedict Anderson (1983) argues that the

rise in print capitalism enabled by technological advancements and the decline of sacred truth languages gave birth to the world's first nationalisms in Latin America. According to Anderson, Latin American creole elites formed national identities based on a common (Spanish) language, the circulation of colonial bureaucrats and newspapers, the exclusion of the lower castes, and their opposition to the mother-land.<sup>1</sup> While most scholars dispute that newspapers defined national space on the eve of independence, as suggested by Anderson, they certainly did so later in the XIX century. Using the colonial framework of viceroyalties as a guide, then, Latin American states preceded their nations, resulting in elite-lead nationalist projects that only gradually deepened around 1900 (Castro-Klaren and Chasteen 2003).

The early Colombian state was constituted through both the act of writing and by those who could write. Control over the “civilizing capital” of writing (Rojas 2001) was essential to the reproduction of power relations through the state. Indeed, wealth was not the primary source of power in 19<sup>th</sup> century Colombia. Power, rather, was accessed through education and literacy. “Grammar conferred on the literati the capacity not only to write the rules of grammar, political economy, and constitutional law, but also to impose their vision from the highest levels of political power,” (Rojas 2001, 55). Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, male creole literati (MCL) monopolized “civil(izing) capital” such as law, grammar, and morality, allowing them the power to impose particular visions of society (Rojas 2001, 50). This MCL, geographically concentrated in Bogotá, comprised the “lettered city” (Rama 1984, 41):

“A través del orden de los signos, cuya propiedad es organizarse estableciendo leyes, clasificaciones, distribuciones jerárquicas, la *ciudad letrada* articuló su relación con el Poder, al que sirvió mediante leyes, reglamentos, proclamas, cédulas, propaganda y mediante la ideologización destinada a sustentarlo y justificarlo. Fue evidente que la

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<sup>1</sup> The wars of independence, ranging from 1810 to 1825, pitted creoles versus Spanish. The necessity for the creoles to employ the support of the masses in the struggle for independence temporarily masked “the distinction between enlightened creoles and the ‘stupid’ masses,” (Rojas 2001, 13).

*ciudad letrada* remedó la majestad del Poder, aunque también puede decirse que éste rigió las operaciones letradas, inspirando sus principios de concentración, elitismo, jerarquización. Por encima de todo, inspiró la distancia respecto al común de la sociedad. Fue la distancia entre la letra rígida y la fluida palabra hablada, que hizo de la *ciudad letrada* una *ciudad escrituraria*, reservada a una estricta minoría.”

The MCL defined themselves as the only citizens, writing in the Constitution of 1843 that only to those at least 21 years of age, male, owner of land valued at \$300 or producing yearly rent of \$150, literate, and tax paying, inclusively, could be citizens (Rojas 2001, 53). Thus by mid-19<sup>th</sup> century there were only two MCL for every 1,000 people, *comprising less than .2% of the population* (Rojas 2001, 53). In this absolute monopoly over the ability to write the MCL wrote the state, “regimes of representation, and even “authored” history. “La capital razón de su supremacía se debió a la paradoja de que sus miembros fueron los únicos ejercitantes de la letra en un medio desguarnecido de letras, los dueños de la escritura en una sociedad analfabeta,” (Rama 1984, 33). Over 90% of the population was thought to be illiterate in 1810 (Rojas 2001, 11).

There were clear economic benefits in authoring the state. Not only was control over writing a tool of governance through the production of a “legibility effect,” (Trouillet 2001, 132), but it was a political economy based on the control of regimes of representation and the formation of desires surrounding accumulation (Rojas 2001). The writing of contracts and wills in order to transmit property through bloodlines and obtain or conserve investments was one of the primary uses of written language by the lettered city (Rama 1984, 43).

Nineteenth-century government in Colombia was also, literally, a time of “government by grammarians,” (Rojas 2001, 54). Novelists, grammarians, and university professors monopolized politics and shaped the content of the Colombian nation-state by writing novels, constitutions, and presidential decrees. Jorge Isaacs, author of the first national novel, *Maria* (1867), became deputy and self-imposed president of Cauca and Antioquia. President José Manuel Marroquín wrote the *Tratado de*

*Ortología y Ortografía Castellana* that is still in print. President Miguel Antonio Caro authored *Latin Grammar*<sup>2</sup> with Rufino Cuervo before he coauthored the Constitution of 1886 with Rafael Nuñez and later became President. Legislator and prominent advocate of expelling the Jesuits (again), José María Samper, also work as a journalist (Rojas 2001, 55). This close relation between the written word, politicians, and the state continued in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Dr. Eduardo Santos, publisher of the Bogotá edition of *El Tiempo*, was elected President in 1938. Dr. Laureano Gomez, owner and publisher of *El Siglo* newspaper was also President until overthrown in a coup in July of 1944. President Carlos Lleras Restrepo (1966-1970) was also a journalist and writer (Bushnell 1993, 196).

The construction of a body of national literature toward the end of the 19th century was a triumph for the lettered city, marking the first time in history that it began to dominate outlying areas, forming a truly national territory (Rama 1984, 91). The first novel to receive (inter)national acclaim was *Maria* (1867) by Jorge Isaacs. Unlike other “foundational fictions” of the time that sought to unite nations through marriages that crossed social divides, in *Maria*, no exogenous social tensions are evident. The story is cleansed of all violence, instead lamenting the loss of an idyllic past and expressing nostalgia for the “semifeudal slavocracy left over from an obscurantist, colonial order,” (Sommer 1991, 177). “Precisely because there is no violence in it, *Maria* inserts itself in the Colombian tradition of “narrative of violence”: The brutally violent act of the text is the *erasure and denial of real processes of violence that were taking place in society,*” (Avelar 2004, 141). *Maria* served as a nation-building novel, uniting the fragmented regions of the country as the main character, Efraín - as well as Isaacs - traversed across them. So widely recognized is this novel that the history, culture and space it describes have been fundamentally shaped by the novel itself, thus making the novel, the region, and its history, inseparable (Avelar 2004, 133).

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<sup>2</sup> The role of these politicians in policing and monitoring language – which, when spoken by the masses, is open to wonderful levels of innovation and change uncontrolled by the MCL and thus making it a dangerous tool unless regulated – must be emphasized to the extent that it protected and maintained their own privileged places in society (Rama 1984).

Writing became increasingly central to the continuous process of nation-state building in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is during this period that newspapers fulfilled the role that Anderson (1983) predicted for the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Not only did the newspapers write the national news, with their circulation routes defining the limits of the nation (Anderson 1983), but newspapers were important sources of non-fiction literature as well. All of the newspapers of the early 20th century – *El Tiempo*, *El Espectador*, *La Revista Sábado* - had literary sections where they published contemporary authors. According to nobel laureate, Gabriel García Márquez, “The writers that publish here (in the newspapers of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century) turn into heroes of the nation,” (2002, 244). Styles differed, with poetry the favored form of the “ciudad letrada,” but also accompanied by short stories and novels published in weekly series.<sup>3</sup>

While writing continues to be central to nation-state building today, its forms and manifestations are different from the early emphasis on the newspapers, poetry, and legal codes written by politicians. Although the production of national literature remains in the hands of a very small group of “lettered” state elite, fewer presidents and senators directly engage in the activity of writing or identify as authors or journalists. Instead, the production of literature has been assigned to relatives of the early “authors” of the nation-state who have specifically studied literature or journalism at university.

More importantly, however, has been the state’s role in promoting the consumption of elite national literature. The penetration of literate, “high culture” into the entirety of society is the mark of a nation (Gellner 1983), which requires a certain level of cultural homogeneity (García Canclini 1988, 473). Thus the state has actively sought to build a reading nation that consumes elite writing. State

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<sup>3</sup> “Men of letters produced learned essays and clever conversation on almost any subject except the deprivations suffered by the Colombian masses, and they excelled above all in the writing and recitation of poetry on every conceivable occasion,” (Bushnell 1993, 163). Gabriel García Márquez similarly remembers that his friends around mid-century could not understand why he wrote stories “in a country where poetry was the highest form of art,” (2002, 306-307).

promotion of literature and literacy does not provide outlets of expression for marginalized groups, but rather grants them access to - thus democratizing - elite culture. This is contrary to state involvement in other nation-state building projects. In Brasil, for example, many forms of culture have recently been funded by the state in order to draw marginalized groups into the fold of the state. Thus the Brasilian state funds, stimulates, and promotes local, black, and poor cultural manifestations, such as funk music, to be performed and sold at the national level as a symbol of an inclusive national community (Yúdice 2003). In Colombia, however, state funding and support of literature and literacy does not democratize cultural production, but rather cultural consumption, turning the masses into consumers or clients of elite culture.

The state has democratized the consumption of national literature through the passage of several legislative initiatives that specifically identify all literature written in the country as part of the national patrimony. Decree 460 of 1995 (March 16) stipulates that all publishers must donate four copies of each piece published, distributing one each to the National Library, the Library of Congress, the Library of the National University, and the library of the province where the book was published, if that province is other than Cundinamarca (the province containing the capital, Bogotá), all as a part of the national patrimony. Finally, Law 98 of 1993 (December 22), seeks to “democratize and promote Colombian books,” by stipulating that each editor register all books Publisher by ISBN in order for the state to acquire copies in “no less” than 50% of the libraries registered with Colcultura. Article 17 of the same law regulates even the hours each library must hold: “no less than 4 hours on holidays and weekends.”

The Colombian state also sponsors myriad reading campaigns. “Libro al viento,” a program sponsored by the Instituto Distrital de Cultura y Turismo (Idct), aims to “socialize reading” through multiple programs ranging from public literature readings to group workshops in local libraries and 66

book distribution sites in 20 localities. “That Bogotanos learn to enjoy reading is the principal goal of Libro al viento.” One central component of the program is to emphasize the social nature of reading: “De la escritura se ha dicho siempre que es un oficio solitario: pero la literatura es un acto plural. Un hombre solo que lee un libro es un hombre que dialoga con otro hombre.” The Idct also sponsors “Paraderos paralibros paraparques” (PPP), a reading program that loans books from Transmilenio (public transit) stations. PPP circulates multiple copies of 300 titles, rotated every three months, and chosen in collaboration with local residents. PPP functions in 98 sites across the country, 46 of which are in Bogotá, where 96,056 people participated in 2004. (*El Tiempo* June 22, 2005). Fundialectura (Fundación para el fomento de la lectura) is a non-profit private organization created in 1990, “Para hacer de Colombia un país lector,” (Fundialectura). As its title clearly states, Fundialectura does not promote writing or authors, but rather the consumption of state literature, as it seeks “to provide access for all Colombians to written culture,” (Fundialectura). Finally, the state has sponsored 80 reading clubs in libraries across the city. Approximately 800 people participate in the clubs where books are read out loud and visiting authors and teachers “tell us about their experiences as writers and the pleasure in working as a writer,” (Idct). Visits by authors are not meant to foster individual writers or a culture of creative writing, as one might first think, but rather to sell the virtues of writing as a daily practicality, as most participants are illiterate, explaining the heavy emphasis on oral appreciation of literature (Idct).

Bogotá also has constructed a vast library network, both public and private, for people to indulge in reading. The library Luis Angel Arango, located in the center of the city, is the most used library in the world (Castro Caycedo 2001, 10). The public library system itself consists of 19 libraries, several recently constructed. Ten are neighbourhood libraries, six local, and three head libraries. In recognition of these programs and the construction of public spaces for reading, Bogotá was designated

the 2007 “World Book Capital” by UNESCO, putting it ahead of other applicants, including Holland, Portugal, Ireland, Argentina, and Austria.

### **Building the Nation; Subverting the State**

The success of these nation-state building programs that promote the consumption of national literature is contradictory. On one hand, they have succeeded in the continuous (re)production of the nation by (re)writing national histories and cultural referents. On the other, they have undermined state legitimacy. Exacerbated and gratuitous portrayals of violence in contemporary national literature have (re)written of the national origins myth as one through the common experience of violence. While this (re)writing contributes to the (re)production of the nation, it undermines the sublime image of the state. This empirical fracture of the nation and state is noteworthy. No longer – if ever they were - are “nation” and “state” coterminous or causally linked. Instead, the nation-state homology particular to one time and location must be suspended (Trouillot 2001, 127).

The Colombian state’s efforts in democratizing access to elite literature have successfully (re)written the origins of the nation as one founded in violence. Far from the sanitized representation of violence found in the nostalgic, idyllic writing of social relations in *Maria*, repetitive, graphic portrayals of violence now take center place in Colombian literary production. The history of Colombia has been (re)written as a timeline of violent events, moving swiftly through the Thousand Day War to the assassination of Gaitan and the subsequent *Violencia*, picking up again with the rise of the drug cartels, the crisis of extradition and kidnappings, and finally ending with the formation and terror of paramilitary groups. The (re)centering of violent events, people, and places into contemporary literature –to the near exclusion of other events, people, and places - has written violence into the historic memory of the nation, (re)writing the origin myth of the Colombian nation as one founded in and through violence. “Colombia has come to represent Latin America’s ultimate instance of violence as a constant, pervasive element in the nation’s self-definition,” (Avelar 2004, 22). As poetry has

increasingly been replaced by novels, auto/biographies, and investigative reporting as the preferred form of writing, the emphasis on violence as the common thread holding the nation together has become increasingly explicit.

This (re)centering violence at the heart of the nation undermines the Weberian myth of the state. According to Max Weber, “a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory,” (1958, 82, italics in original). This definition serves as the model for the “myth of the state” (Hansen and Stepputat 2001). Many scholars investigate the ways in which states do not comply with Weber’s sublime myth. They point out that states may not be undermined by profanities, but rather constituted by them, both physically and discursively (Gupta 1995; Roitman 2004). Tilly (1985), for instance, argues that the state is merely the ultimate form of “organized crime,” while numerous scholars have demonstrated how law functions as a second order violence that works to obscure originary violence, that is, the origins of the state in violence itself (Coronil 1997; Das and Poole 2004; Derrida 1976, 101-140; 2002, 230-298; Mbembe 2001; Poole 2004). Janet Roitman (2004) argues that the pluralization of regulatory authorities and the flowering of parallel – that is, “informal” and “illegal” – economies in the Chad Basin do not undermine state power but rather are essential to its very (re)composition. Still others note the Janus-faced nature of state practices such as monopolizing violence, checkpoints, and identification and documentation procedures that simultaneously threaten and protect citizens (Das and Poole 2004, Sanford 2004).

States may, and frequently do, act in contradiction to the Weberian myth of the state while still retaining the status, legitimacy, and power of states. This is possible, as noted by Joel Migdal, because states are not constituted merely through practice, but through image, too. According to Migal, the state is “a field of power marked by the use and threat of violence and shaped by (1) *the image of a coherent,*

*controlling organization in a territory, which is a representation of the people bounded by that territory, and (2) the actual practices of its multiple parts,”* (2001, 15-16). Banal state practices then, such as links to paramilitary groups or the use of “proxy” violence, in the case of Colombia (Sanford 2004), are not inherently problematic to the legitimacy or existence of the state. These qualities only undermine the state’s power and legitimacy when they are made visible, contradicting the *image* of a sublime Weberian state. The representation of violence in contemporary national literature does just that. The foregrounding of violence in state-sponsored national literature contradicts the Weberian image of the state, reducing state legitimacy and power, while (re)producing the original violences committed. In the following section I will explore the writing of violence in contemporary Colombian literature, examining both how it (re)writes the nation around violence and undermines the image of a sublime Weberian state.

### **Writing Violence**

One important example of the (re)writing of violence into the origins myth of the Colombian nation is the (re)writing of the 1928 massacre of banana strikers in the fictional novel, *Cien años de soledad* (1967) by Gabriel García Márquez. Márquez, who was not present at the massacre, but rather learned of it through the oral history of his grandfather, establishes in his novel the number of deaths at 3,000. In later works, Márquez clarifies that “el ejército había matado en 1928 un número nunca establecido de jornaleros del banano,” (2002, 22). Nevertheless, “la cifra de muertos la mantuve en tres mil, para conservar las proporciones épicas del drama, y la vida real terminó por hacerme justicia,” (Márquez 2002, 79-80). “Quizás no habían sido tantos… pero cada quien aumentaba la cifra de acuerdo con su propio dolor,” (Márquez 2002, 38). Admittedly, this method of writing history is not the most orthodox. Yet so powerful was this oral and fictionalized telling, that it did indeed become history. Márquez himself relates that, “hace poco, en uno de los aniversarios de la tragedia, el orador de turno en el Senado pidió un minuto de silencio en memoria de los tres mil mártires anónimos

sacrificados por la fuerza pública," (Márquez 2002, 79-80). Thus history was written through fiction, despite historians systematically discounting the "myth," insisting that only 60-75 were killed Bushnell (1993, 180).

As early national fictions constituted the nation by uniting and traversing fragmented regions of the country, contemporary fictions constitute space through the violence associated with them.<sup>4</sup> Numerous contemporary Colombian authors purposefully and descriptively write real places into their fictional work, indelibly intermixing place with the real or imagined violences they narrate in them, such that, even more so than *María*, literary works shape both place and history. As in the above mentioned narration of the banana strikers massacre, the "history" by García Márquez has indelibly shaped the coast. So famous, in fact, is his fictional town, Macondo, that visitors frequently inquire after it. The province of Cauca is similarly created through paramilitary violence in this passage from the novel *Delirio* (2004) by Laura Restrepo. Drawing upon national understandings of the spatiality of indigeneity, paramilitary forces, and massacres, Restrepo writes of the following fictional character:

"Jorge Luis Eyerbe, que tenía encima a la prensa por una masacre de indios en el departamento del Cauca, de donde es esa familia suya tan tradicional y tan patrocinadora de paramilitares, porque hacía un par de meses los Eyerbe habían mandado a su tropita particular de paracos a espantar indios invasores de unas tierras realengas que según Jorge Luis le pertenecían legítimamente a su familia desde los tiempos de los virreyes, nada fuera de lo normal, recurrir a mercenarios es lo que se estila para controlar casos de invasión, sólo que esta vez a los paracos se les fue la mano en iniciativa y se pusieron a incendiar los tambos de los indios adentro..." (Restrepo 2004, 43).

In this passage, the department of Cauca is inscribed with both indigenous and paramilitary presence, both groups complying exactly the sensationalized, national understanding of them, invading land and massacring peasants, respectively.

Urban centers are also constructed through violence. Medellín, in particular, has been violently constructed through the works of Jorge France (*Rosario Tijeras*, 2004) and Fernando Vallejo (*El fuego*

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<sup>4</sup> Wade (1993) similarly looks at the racialization of regions.

*secreto*, 1987; *La Virgen de los Sicarios*, 1994). Both authors richly describe both the physical layout of the city and the unthinkable levels of (drug-related) violence, actually constructing the cities through violence. Similarly, violence is spatially written into Bogotá. Contemporary novels routinely describe the capital city in such a way that anyone familiar with it feels as if they, too, were traversing the dangerous city streets along with the characters in the book:

“caminábamos desde el centro por la carerra Séptima a la medianoche, es decir, plena happy hour de raponzos y puñaladas... yo, tenso y vigilante, iba pendiente de cada bullo que se agitaba en la calle solitaria, un par de figuras encorvadas sobre el calor de una hoguera en la esquina de la Jiménez de Quesada, otras envueltas en cartones que parecían dormir en el atrio de San Francisco, un muchacho drogado hasta el tuétano que nos siguió un trecho y afortunadamente pasó de largo,” luego “subieron hasta las Torres de Saltona atravesando las sombras apenas dispersas pro los focos amarillos del Parque de la Independencia, en frente tenían al cerro de Monserrate y como su mole era invisible en la oscuridad, la iglesia iluminada que se asienta en su cumbre flotaba en la noche como un ovni, en esa iglesia se mantiene guarecido un Cristo barroco que ha caído bajo el peso de su cruz...” (Restrepo 2004, 55).

In this way, these fictional descriptions of space/place form cultural referents that unite people across the country around familiar places while inscribing these places with violence.

Contrary to *Maria*, which geographically united the country as the protagonist travelled across it by boat and horse in order to reach the perfect, idyllic family ranch, absent of all violence, contemporary Colombian novels decry the inability to travel across the country due to the state's incapacity to maintain or secure decent roads:

“en un país como éste, cruzado de arriba abajo por una maciza cordillera, las carreteras, por lo general en mal estado, se entorchan y se encabritan bordeando abismos y por si eso fuera poco, son tomadas un día sí y otro también por los militares, los paramilitares o los enguerrillados, que te secuestran, te matan o te agraden con granadas, a patadas, con ráfagas, con explosivos, cazabobos, mina antipersonal o ataque masivo con pipetas de gas...” (Restrepo 2004, 41).

Contemporary literature has also (re)written the national origins myth around rape rather than marriage. In *Delirio*, Blanca Mendoza, the grandmother of the female protagonist, was raped and impregnated by her piano teacher. All of the violence commonly associated with rape has been erased

form this story, as the older man marries his victim, half his age, “más por amor que por compromiso,” (36) and by all indications, Blanca loves and cares for her husband until his death. In *La novia del torero* (2002), Eduardo Bechara Navratilova retains a detailed level of violence in the description of the rape of his protagonist, Camila. Despite this traumatic rape that consumes the victim’s life throughout the book, however, the final scene finds Camila seeking out her rapist for sexual intercourse. Rosario Tijeras was also a rape victim – abused repeatedly by a local man when she was only eight. Rosario finally tells her brother about the ritual rapes, and he kills her abuser. Unlike Camila and Blanca, the scars obviously stay with Rosario, as she kills a man much later in life for being too aggressive with her in an orgy in which she was voluntarily participating.

Contemporary Colombian literature also writes a number of personas famous for their violence, if nothing else. Perhaps the most written violent national figure in recent years has been Pablo Escobar (see also, Carlos Castaño *Mi Confesión* 2002). Seen alternately as a savior and a sadist, Escobar is one of the most popularly recognized national figures, immortalized in more than just his official biography, *Killing Pablo* (2001) by Mark Bowden. Escobar is also described in detail in the fictional novel *Delirio*, where Restrepo describes his hacienda Nápoles, with its clandestine airport, Olympic size pools, sports stadiums, and zoo filled with exotic animals, exactly according to national myth. The physical description of Escobar also resonates with national memory: “Cuando me lo presentaron… lo que veo es un gordazo de bigotito con una mota negra en la cabeza que no se deja peinar y una panza reverenda que se le derrama pro encima del cinturón,” (81). Escobar is similarly invoked in *Rosario Tijeras* (2004). “A “el” no llegué a conocerlo. Para mi suerte, la misión resultó un fracaso, un intento que no traspasó la portería del edificio donde supuestamente se refugiaban porque ya les habían montado la cacería,” (134). So widely recognized is Escobar, that Franco does not even mention his

name, replacing it with an entirely unambiguous “el,” so sure is he that everyone in the country would understand the implication.

Not just Escobar, but the violence begot by the drug trade itself is a central feature of much contemporary literature. Novels like *Rosario Tijeras* and numerous books by Fernando Vallejo detail the consumption of drugs. One of the main characters in *Delirio*, Midas, makes his money by investing money for “old moneys” into Pablo’s drug cartel and giving them 5:1 returns. Both *Delirio* and *Rosario Tijeras* are set in the late 1980s/early 1990s, framed by the political question of extradition, the formation and activities of Los Extraditables, bombing campaigns in Bogotá and Medellín, the death of Escobar, and even Escobar’s political career ending in his expulsion from the Liberal Party lists.

Franco describes Medellín under Pablo’s wrath:

“Era cierto que la ciudad se había “calentado”. La zozobra nos sofocaba. Ya estábamos hasta el cuello de muertos. Todos los días nos despertaba una bomba de cientos de kilos que dejaba igual número de chamuscados y a los edificios en sus esqueletos. Tratábamos de acostumbrarnos, pero el ruido de cada explosión cumplía su propósito de no dejarnos salir del miedo. Muchos se fueron, tanto de acá como de allá, unos huyéndole al terror y otros a las retaliaciones de sus hechos,” (Franco 2004, 84).

Similarly, in *Delirio*, Restrepo relates Escobar’s commitment to “invertir mi fortuna en hacer llorar a este país.” (238) through bombing it. She writes of a bomb bomba “en un restaurante de ricos en plena zona residencial del norte,” (236), as well as this richer description:

“...nos sacudió un cimbronazo brutal que alcanzó a levantar la camioneta del asfalto, al tiempo que un golpe de aire nos lastimaba los tímpanos y un ruido seco, como de trueno, salía de las entrañas de la tierra y luego se iba apagando poco a poco, como en sucesivas capas de eco, hasta que un silencio absoluto pareció extenderse por toda la ciudad, y en medio de esa quietud mortal escuché la voz de Anita que decía Una bomba, una berraca bomba puramente grande, debió estallar cerca de acá... Anita encendió la radio del auto y así nos enteramos de que acababan de volar el edificio de la Policía en Paloquemao, a unas doce cuadras de donde estábamos...” (Restrepo 2004, 183).

Contemporary Colombian novels also subtly critique the state in their more overt mockery of the Colombian elite or “old moneys” (Restrepo 2004). In her novel *Delirio*, Laura Restrepo particularly

illustrates the banality of the state through a vicious attack on the corruption, violence, and even the national loyalty of the wealthy. For example, one very wealthy and elite man, Araña “andaba paranoico con los secuestros,” emphasizing both the perverseness of the wealthy man as well as the fact that the state cannot protect its citizens from being kidnapped (Restrepo 2004, 42). Similarly, the crazy protagonist, Augustina, explains why her family cannot visit their *finca*: “una Guerra que salió del Caquetá, del Valle y de la zona cafetera y que ya va llegando con sus degollados, que a Sasaima ya llegó y por eso no hemos vuelto a Gai Repos, de ladrones que rondan y sobre todo de esquinas en las que se arrodillan los leprosos a pedir limosna...” (Restrepo 2004, 91). Again, Restrepo is simultaneously mocking this wealthy interpretation of the conflict as “ladrones que rondan” y “leprosos,” and criticizing the state for the insecurity that inhibits the free movement of people in the countryside and for creating such poverty that robbers and beggars are national cultural symbols.

Language, in contemporary Colombian literature, becomes more than just a way to convey violence, but to symbolize and even inflict violence itself. Sharing a common language is nearly universally understood as a requisite for a nation-state. Historically, this language has been violently imposed from the top down, as Spanish was forcefully used to eradicate indigenous languages in Colombia. Contemporary Colombian literature, however, undermines the myth of the state not by pointing out how many other languages are still spoken in Colombia, but rather by illustrating that lettered elites – precisely those that hold public office and comprise the state – have the education and power to “opt out” of Colombia – represented by Spanish – when it cannot or does not fulfil their needs. In *Rosario Tijeras* (2004) by Franco, the family of Rosario’s boyfriend “pertenece a la monarquía criolla, llena de taras y abolengos. Son de esos que en ningún lado hacen fila porque piensan que no se la merecen, tampoco le pagan a nadie porque creen que el apellido les da crédito, hablan en inglés porque creen que así tienen más clase, y quieren más a Estados Unidos que a este país,” (Franco

2004, 64). Franco explicitly links the “creole “monarchy” to speaking in English, relations to the United States, class, and a sense of entitlement that allows the wealthy in Colombia to both write and selectively comply with/enforce rules and regulations in the country. Race, education, class, and speaking “at least English without an accent” are intricately linked to the lettered elite in Colombia.

When describing in *Delirio* the characteristics one elite man insisted his prostitutes have, he enumerated: “Quiero que sean blancas... Estudiantes universitarias... que comen sushi y hablen sin acento por lo menos el inglés....” (2004, 58). But perhaps most dramatically, this critique of the class dynamic of speaking foreign languages among the elite who have studied abroad and often return to lead their countries in Latin America is expressed in the following description of two friends, one elite and one poor, that actually re-enacts class violence in that the majority of Colombians who are not fluent in English would not understand the humor, thus making this part of the novel, at least, inaccessible to them:

“cantaban el Yésterdei de los Bicles y también los Sauns of Sailens de Sáimonan Garfúnquel, siempre maldiciendo a Sáimonan por haberle robado esa canción a los indios latinoamericanos, par aterminar con la explosión sideral y absoluta, el orgasmo cósmico que era el Satisfacchon de los Rolin, ¡AICANQUET-NO! ASATISFAC-CHON!, ¡Ése se volvió mi grito de batalla, mi desiderata, mimantra, ¡Anaitrai! mi creado, ¡Anaitrai! mi secreto, ¡Anaitrai! mi conjuro, Dale, Joaco, dime qué quiere decir Anitrai, qué berraca palabra tan poderosa y tan extraordinaria, pero él era muy consciente de la superioridad que sobre nosotros le otorgaba el dominio del inglés y se daba el lujo de dejarme con las ganas, Eso quiere decir lo que quiere decir, sentenciaba y luego cantaba él solo con su acento perfecto, I can’t get no satisfaction ‘cause I try, and I try, and I try...” (Restrepo 2004, 202).

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Comment: i am not getting why this is violence...

Again, this excerpt clearly identifies the actual monetary, class, and social superiority of the elite child who speaks English without an accent and understands it perfectly over those who don’t.

More than mere selective linguistic abandonment of the country by elites, however, is their selective physical abandonment of it. After an accident that left him paraplegic, one elite character “se hizo llevar a Houston Texas en avión particular, a uno de esos megahospitales donde en su momento

llevaron también a tu papá.... Porque en este remedio de país a todos los platudos que se enferman se les da por peregrinar a Houston Texas convenidos de que en inglés si los van a resucitar, de que el milagrito funciona si se paga en dólares," (Restrepo 2004, 25). CONCLUSION/TRANSITION!

More than drug-related violence or political violence per se, the Colombian state is exposed in its inability to live up the Weberian myth through the writing of simply gratuitous, uncontrollable violence. The protagonist in *Rosario Tijeras*, for example, kills someone every few pages, not just for living, but for fun. The boys that accompany her look the other way while she kills a mate in a club, a man she is having sex with, the driver of a car that hit her after she caused an accident, and so on and so forth until her own violent death. In *Delirio*, one character, la Araña, is unable to have sexual relations after an accident that left him paralyzed. Several prostitutes are hired in order to perform the impossible task of "restoring his manhood:

"la Nautilus 4200 Single Stack Gym, mi aparato más amado y recién adquirido, acondicionado con deck para pectorals, extention station para las piernas, barra para abdominales, ancle cuff, torre lateral y stack de 210 libras, allí sobre mi aparato vi que yacía la Dolores toda desarticulada, como si la hubieran desnucado al amarrarla y hacerle demasiado fuerte hacia atrás con la correa, como si la hubieran descuartizado, como si se hubieran puesto a jugar con ella convirtiendo en potro de tortura a mi Nautilus 4200, como si se les hubiera ido la mano y la hubieran reventado," (194). "Esta hijueputamente muerta dijo la Araña, muerta, muerta, muerta para siempre, pero muévete, Midas my boy, no te quedes ahí parado poniendo cara de duelo porque esto no es un velorio, lo del luto y las condolencias dejémoslo para más tarde que ahora tenemos que deshacernos de esta cadáver," (195).

This passage, again inscribed with class and gender violence, is so gratuitously, shockingly violent that it is almost, disturbingly, comical.

These novels which combine fact and fiction, real places, people, and violence with imaged characters, incidences, and location are not the only writing of violence in contemporary Colombian literature. Indeed, investigative reporting of the violence is growing increasingly popular, marked perhaps most notably by Gabriel García Márquez, documenting the kidnapping of ten prominent public

figures –including the son of the owner of the country’s front-running daily newspaper, *El Tiempo* - in 1990 by the Extraditables, in *Noticia de un secuestro* (1996), and German Castro Caicedo’s in *Con Las manos en alto* (2001) and *Más allá de la noche* (2004).

Yet it is not clear how “investigative journalism” and factualized novels differ. For example, Albalucía Angel wrote *Estaba la Pájara Pinta Sentada en el Verde Limón* (1975) by interweaving extensive archival research of newspaper and radio reports into the experiences of a fictional character, Ana, in order to relate the history of the Bogotazo and the assassination of Gaitán. Similarly, Mario Mendoza’s novel *Santanas* (2002) culminates in relating the 1986 massacre of 25 people by a Vietnam veteran in the upscale Bogotá restaurant, *Pozzetto*. There are both political and ethical reasons to be cautious in embracing this genre. As cultural critic Nestor García Canclini points out, “One polemical point concerns the limits involved in choosing the thriller form for an evaluation of political violence and a rethinking of one’s own participation in it: to turn a crime novel into an historical drama is to prefer action to reflection, to concede to action the initiating and self-justifying space given to guerrilla insurrectionism,” (García Canclini 1988, 481).

As a system of cultural signification, nations are marked by ambivalence toward the “transitional social reality” between historic origins and future. Articulating the nation involves a “double narrative” that looks both back to tradition and forward to progressive modernity, recreating historical objects in the process. This continual (re)writing of both past and present cultural referents is a necessary part of the continuous process of nation-building.

Yet when this continual (re)writing involves the continual (re)writing of violence *almost exclusively*, there is the possibility, more than preferring action to reflection, of (re)inscribing and (re)committing past violences unwittingly. Ballard (2002) analyzes the use of graffiti by state military forces to police communities in the Indonesian. Military graffiti marks the “permanent presence and

eternal vigilance” of the military in the community (Ballard 2002, 21). This graffiti recalls past abuses committed by the military, implicitly threatening the community of what the military might do again. Produces a “visual economy of political violence” (see Poole 1997), that is, “a systematic production, exchange, and reproduction of images and interpretations in whose organization the relations of power feature prominently,” (Ballard 14). Terror comes to mark the very landscape a society inhabits thus rendering the violence and the memory of it *perpetually present* even between episodes of murder, torture or disappearance (2002, 13). Emphasizes that memory of, recalling violence/terror is as violent/terrorizing as original event itself. Create a “culture of terror” in which the “perpetual imminence of the threat of death, can create a “space of death,” an imaginary zone in which fear locks the senses as violence and representations of violence achieve a near-perfect circle of mirrors reflecting terror back upon both perpetrators and victims,” (Ballard p. 13). Same is possible for literature – a *written* economy of political violence can also serve to form culture of terror, recalling with each word original violence.

If narration has power to create culture of terror, also has power to heal and resolve violence. As Rojas argues, only a speech pact can put an end to violence – not more violence (Rojas 2001, 23). Ballard agrees, arguing that resisting or changing violence occurs through reclaiming the discursive ability to name (Ballard 2002, 23). Similarly, Veena Das argues in the “The Act of Witnessing” witnessing or being victim to a violent event signals the death/end of one period that can only be mediated through the re-narration of the event itself. This re-narration happens from a liminal space in the aftermath of the trauma in an attempt to reoccupy “the very signs of injury that marked her so that a continuity could be shaped in that very space of devastation,” (2002, 219).

How are we to distinguish if narrating violence serves to reproduce or ameliorate violence? That is, how can violence be used, reflected, or remembered in literature without perpetuating that violence?

Derrida (1976; 2002) suggests that the narration/writing must be commensurate to the original violence. Rojas, however, argues that violence can be resolved only through (re)representation, or, in other words, refixing meanings and recreating original relations of identity and difference (Rojas 2001, 170). Her solution is not so much Derrida's making 3<sup>rd</sup> tier violence commensurate with original violence of writing, but to alter original meaning or violence by recreating original relations. I suggest that need to make writing of national literature less elitist. Gayatri Spivak, in her famous essay entitled "Can the Subaltern Speak" (1988) poignantly reminds us of the violence done in monopolizing regimes of representation that leave subaltern sectors of the population, poor women, in her case, speechless, lacking both political and literary representation. While Spivak comes to an early conclusion that subalterns cannot speak, the ethical way to mark this violence is not to speak for subaltern people, but rather to allow them space to speak for themselves, and if unable, understand that silence as the sublimity of the violence done to them. Thus in Colombia – lettered city, elite, MCL must relinquish not only access to elite culture, but production of.... Meaning the active fomentation of subaltern writers – women, indigenous, blacks, rural residents/people from outside Bogotá or Medellín – and letting them relate their own stories of violence.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper I have looked at the continuous formation of the Colombian nation-state through literature. I have argued that literature has played a key role in the historic and contemporary constitution of the nation-state. Noting the disjuncture between the nation and the state, however, I argue that the portrayal of violence in contemporary literature successfully continues to (re)write the nation through violence while undermining the sublime image of the Weberian state. By exposing the state's inability to monopolize violence, provide for the basic security of its citizens, control its "sovereign" territory, or regulate legal and illegal economies, these literatures reveal the banality of the state, effectively truncating its legitimacy and power. Perhaps most importantly, the effectiveness in

undermining the sublime image of the state is due to an effective state policy of democratizing access to literature. Thus the continued creation of the nation has been contingent upon the stagnation and withdrawal of the state.

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