

The Rites of Statehood: Violence and Sovereignty in Spanish America, 1789-1821

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In Gabriel García Márquez's novel, The General in his Labyrinth, a long-winded Frenchman lectures a pensive, dying Simón Bolívar. The Liberator responds. He acknowledges that the revolution unleashed the furies of avenging justice, and laments, without repudiating, his decision to order the execution of eight hundred Spanish prisoners in a single day, including patients in La Guaira's hospital. Then he gets testy: "Europeans," he notes, "would not have the moral authority to reproach me, for if any history is drowned in blood, indignity, and injustice, it is the history of Europe." When the Frenchman tries to interrupt, Bolívar puts down his cutlery and glares at his guest. "Damn it, please let us have our Middle Ages in peace!" he exclaimed.<sup>1</sup>

These, of course, were García Márquez's words, not Bolívar's. But they echo Bolívar's requiem on the events he shaped about the relationship between savagery and state-formation. More than lofty proclamations or principles of statehood, the historical memory of the years leading to 1821 are saturated with blood. For the chroniclers and epic writers, from José Manuel Restrepo's (1827) Historia de la Revolución de Colombia, to García Marquez, the scenes of violence and carnage gave rise to narratives of sacrifice and struggle that could not be wholly redeemed by what came after. And yet, we have not thought very systematically about the significance of political violence in Latin America – despite its recurrence. Perhaps it is because of its recurrence: for so many, the cruelty was sown into a "tradition" of conquest and

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriel García Márquez, The General in His Labyrinth (New York: Knopf, 1990), p. 124.

dictatorship, which did not require much analysis precisely because it was endowed with essential qualities.

In spite of the centrality of violence to this era, it has not been an important subject of historical inquiry, with the exception of a shrinking circle of military historians. Since the 1960s, the combined influence of dependency approaches, Marxism, and the Annales-informed histories, diminished the événementelle features of political life in favor of structuralist accounts – which more often focused on underlying continuities than ruptures. And what ruptures could be found were by-products of non-political shifts like the rise and fall of commercial emporia, the advent of free trade, and the proletarianization of labor. In more recent years, the armed struggle has receded even more, for the rekindling of civilian rule in the 1980s, and a shift from concerns with exploitation to exclusion, sparked a revived interest in politics as a civic vocation. The births of the public sphere, ideas of liberty, and new practices of representation have been treated as the source of fundamental breaks. Conventional, heroic, narratives have been displaced by a larger contexts, with important implications for how we understand the legal foundations of inequality and the conditions of democracy that helped legitimate them.<sup>2</sup>

How might we think of political violence more actively? One start is to expand the purview of political violence to include a broadened spectrum between the activities of standing armies on one end and other means to settle scores on the other, a space where crowds, bandidos, militiamen, and semi-organized mobs also struggled for control of state power – and against it. It may help to borrow and adapt from insights derived from the scholarship on early modern European violence, which has explored how angry crowds, riots, and rebellions exemplified a

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<sup>2</sup> Antonio Annino & Rafael Rojas, La Independencia (Mexico: CIDE/FCE, 2008); John Charles Chasteen, Americanos: Latin America's Struggle for Independence (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

pattern of outrage directed at authorities who failed to deliver on customary forms of justice; crowds, in this sense, took the place of governments, even if they were not necessarily calling for new regimes. The public violence in eighteenth-century Spanish America, from comunero takeovers to full-blown insurrections, conform to this model of a defense of a moral or spiritual economy against the perceived failures of its political guardians.<sup>3</sup>

In time, however, large groups and their leaders fought for more than new governors, but for new governments. There was a fundamental shift in the course of the events collapsed under the category of revolution, which comes laden with its own historiographic baggage, not all of which was so celebratory, especially when it came to considering the primus mobile, violence. Edmund Burke's warning that men who make their careers by seizing power through violent means to rid the world of evil cannot help but be consumed by their own devices acquired new significance in the wake of the tumults of the 1960s. Hannah Arendt's On Revolution captured the growing alarm about rising worldwide belligerence, and argued that violence did much more to destroy than to create. Echoes of her Jeremiad could be found among historians of the French Revolution, especially leading up to and during the debate about the bicentenary of 1789. For François Furet, the Revolution was the work of ideological agents who created oppositions to them in order to justify primal bloodshed; once in place, the inner "logic" of revolution could only end in Terror. The events of 1789 predicted 1793, and eventually 1917 – but in a way that

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<sup>3</sup> Classic studies include: George Rudé, The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England, 1730-1848 (New York: Wiley, 1964); Eric Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1959); E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," Past and Present, 50:1 (Feb., 1971), pp. 76-136. For the new world, see William B. Taylor, Drinking, Homicide, and Rebellion in Colonial Mexican Villages (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), and more recently Sergio Serulnikov, Subverting Colonial Authority: Challenges to Spanish Rule in Eighteenth-Century Southern Andes (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

overturned the redemptive genealogy on offer from the French Communist Party. Violence, in his view, was a vortex, and could lead nowhere but to Terrors and gulags.<sup>4</sup>

The same temperament echoed through scholarship on Spanish America. Revolutions took what were ordered, stratified (if not necessarily happy) societies, and flattened them while creating a new archetype, for whom violence and not civility was dominant mode of politics: the caudillo. For John Johnson, this was the birth of a military “tradition.” For others, violence upset what might have been a peaceable transformation, managed within the coordinates of a modernized trans-Atlantic Spanish constitutionalism. Once armed spoilers dominated the stage, the notion of gentlemanly, civic, change ceded brutality and extremism. Perhaps the most influential scholar operating in this scheme was, not coincidentally, working in France: the late François-Xavier Guerra argued that the French Revolution disrupted the conceptual order across the Spanish empire, and that precocious experiences with modern representation were simply overwhelmed by colonial cognates for Paris’ Jacobins. In a basic sense, the work on Spanish America’s end of the ancien regime dovetailed with – and to some extent reflected – late-Cold War, shifts, especially disenchantments with socialism and revolution.<sup>5</sup>

The problem was that the cycle of violence did not itself require much explanation since it was endowed with a macabre ability to reproduce its own conditions. It was central to the master narrative of Spanish America’s long history, and yet not a subject. This reluctance to

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<sup>4</sup> Hannah Arendt, On Violence (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1969); Jim Wolfreys, “Twilight Revolution: François Furet and the Manufacturing of Consensus,” in Mike Haynes & Jim Wolfreys (eds.), History and Revolution (London: Verso, 2007), pp. 50-69; Steven Laurence Kaplan, Farewell Revolution: The Historians’ Feud, France, 1789/1989 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 12-24.

<sup>5</sup> John J Johnson, The Military and Society in Latin America (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964); John Lynch, Caudillos in Spanish America, 1800-1850 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); François-Xavier Guerra, Modernidad e independencias: ensayos sobre las revoluciones hispánicas (Madrid: MAPFRE, 1992). There is a way in which Jaime Rodríguez O’s important Independence in Spanish America (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) echoes an aspect of this lament for a constitutional order that might have emerged from 1808 and the crippling of successor states and making them prey for new kinds of imperial predation.

address role of primal bloodshed may now have passed. Perhaps, the end of the Cold War and the growing visibility of “state failure” and crimes against humanity have renewed attention to political violence because it is not treated as a simple explanandum of ideology. Perhaps, the anti-Marxist revisionism that was so determined to stigmatize revolutions tout cour has now had its run. Either way, new work casts new light. One recent world history of exterminatory violence associates it with the cults of territoriality and land.<sup>6</sup> Arno Maier has posited that as the sacred buttresses of ancien regimes began to crumble and yielded to new ideological faiths, the agents of change and conservation resorted to arms, unleashing “the furies” of impassioned politics. Vengeance and terror were not simply “excesses,” to be explained away by the psychology of cruelty. More recently, David Bell has argued that revolutionary violence sired the view that there could be a war to end all wars, which served as intellectual convictions to motivate total, exterminating warfare by the turn of the nineteenth century, whose butchery reached mass proportions in Napoleon’s invasions of Spain and Russia. The study of civil wars, blood feuds, and reciprocal bloodletting by members of the same political communities, have illuminated how violence unfolds within societies without assuming that the making of modern states was about curbing primordial passions through what Norbert Elias called “the civilizing mission.”<sup>7</sup>

This essay explores how politics *became* a matter of life and death. As local wars brewed within international ones, conflicts aggregated into civil war and mass killing that sliced through

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<sup>6</sup> Ben Kiernan, Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Arno J Mayer, The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); David Bell, The First Total War: Napoleon’s Europe and the Birth of Modern Warfare as We Know It (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2007).

racial, ethnic, and religious divides. This essay seeks to put viciousness and massacring into context and to make some sense of the rhetoric of public cruelty. It ventures a few hypotheses.

First, the cycle went through discrete steps, and did not obey some fundamental logic of revolutions, as if one step anticipated the next in an irreversible sequence of escalating hatred. It will be important, if we are to avoid some of the Furet-style slippage (which presumes that recourse to violent means laid the necessary conditions for future terrors), to recapture the truces, backsliding, pauses and outbursts as reflections of the ways in which revolutionary upheaval entwined peaceable and violent means at the same time precisely because it was so fratricidal – not rooted in ancient discord.

Second, to understand the escalation, it helps to pay some attention to the spectrum of modern violence, from the acts of avenging crowds to mass killing and wanton desecration – which together reveal the ways in which criminalizing rivals and demonizing enemies were ways to extirpate the threat from within – and doing so would make society safe for revolution, and its twin, the counter-revolution. Both sides would conform to a natural law precept that the fight against tyrants validated the most extreme kinds of measures. While the steps and counter-steps varied (because Spanish America was not of a piece, especially given the radical decomposition of legal authority), violence was central to the course of revolutions not because large numbers of people went crazy or got more fanatical, but because it appeared increasingly as the only means available to rid their world of threats and enemies.

But why threats and enemies all of a sudden? Here lies the third claim: the shift reflected and was fueled by a deepening crisis of sovereignty across the Spanish empire, which grew more lethal as it reverberated from the metropole where it began. In this sense, it was driven by a civil

war, defined as “armed combat within the boundaries of a recognized sovereign entity between parties subject to a common authority at the outset of hostilities,” occasioned by a break in legal authority, stoked by the fragmentation of juridical spaces, and intensified by efforts to restore the old order. In this sense, the fighting became more and more endogenous – severed from its initial causes and therefore more and more difficult to roll back.<sup>8</sup> It ended not on the battlefield, but when one side collapsed, and left to the “victors” (who, like Bolívar, were all too aware that this was a strange model of triumph, and not easy to convert into uplifting narratives for public memory-making) the challenge of how to reassemble the elements of fratricidally-divided societies into constitutional orders.

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Crowds, conspiracies, and collective banditry had long been the source of public violence in pre-revolutionary Spanish America; they were not patterned by a fundamental crisis of sovereignty, though they reflected an unease with which colonial subjects felt they were governed. Earlier mass rebellions reached their crescendo in the 1780s and spread panic among colonial administrators – but the combination of commercial expansion and lifting some of more onerous fiscal demands on colonial subjects relieved the tension. Still, grievances and unrest did not simply evaporate. Authorities in Quito worried about the news of subterranean plots. They woke up in the mornings to find public walls painted with ominous warnings. “LYBERY, STO, FELYCY7A7EM, E7, GLORYAM, CONSECUENTO” announced one. Important intersections had banners and flags with a white cross and red lettering across the axis – “SALVA CRUCE,” it announced. Flyers and broadsheets also carried the message that “sedition (could be) found all over Quito... directed to hallucinate and provoke the *Plebe*,” wrote the Viceroy. What exactly

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<sup>8</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas, The Logic of Violence in Civil War (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 5.

all this meant was unclear then, and now. But it did not prevent frightened authorities from arresting and interrogating a local school teacher. This was in 1794, shortly after the creole publisher and tertulía empresario, Antonio Nariño, translated the Rights of Man to Spanish. Copies of it were now thought to be circulating in Cartagena, Santa Fé, and beyond. Viceroy José de Ezpeleta put his officers on high alert, lest seditious acts be more than happenchance.<sup>9</sup>

By then, fear was spreading already. The French Revolution issues riptides of panic across the Atlantic world, and witch-hunts for Jacobins and their allies. But in Spanish America, especially in the slave belts, it was the specter of Saint Domingue that was the more frightening. The 1790s saw a spike in thefts and destruction of property, which inspired not a few to worry that this kind of activity was a sign of spreading unrest, especially among rural and urban slaves. Some of this appears to have aggregated into low-intensity social banditry; the late Alberto Flores Galindo has left us with an impression of late colonial Lima as rife with ambiguous tension – stable (in contrast to the upheaval of the 1780s), and yet simmering with popular disrespect for patrician property. But there were plenty of places where the stability was patina, little more. Further north, if authorities in Santa Fé were worried, imagine the concern in Caracas, where slave revolts – and rumours of them – abounded. It was not only seditious slaves that brought concern: there were the occasional creole secessionists to worry about as well, like the botched conspiracy known as the Gual and España plot (named after the two schemers) from La Guaira. In the cache of discovered documents were Spanish translations of the Rights of Man, and copies of songs, some of which were meant to be chanted to the tune of the Marseillaise. One was called “*La Canción Americana*,” whose verses included some troublesome words: “... Viva tan solo el Pueblo/ el Pueblo Soberano./ Mueran los opresores, /

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<sup>9</sup> Archivo General de Indias (hereafter AGI), Estado, Santa Fé, 53/55, 19/11/94, José de Ezpeleta to Duque de la Alcudia.

Mueran sus partidarios..." The idea of slaying the enemy was already on some peoples' lips. But what worried governors most was a convergence of local Jacobins with slaves and Indians. General Mateo Pérez warned his superiors that "we must not underestimate nor irritate mulattos, zambos, and Blacks with disdain and mistreatment!" Indeed, of the 65 men arrested in the conspiracy, only 34 were white – the rest either pardo or free Black.<sup>10</sup>

Warnings became prophecies: in 1799, the slave-coast from Venezuela to Cartagena was seized by a wave of conspiracies and local uprisings. One group tried to seize the Castillo de San Felipe de Barajas overlooking the harbor of Cartagena. Others took over estates and burned mills. In Maracaibo, there were rumours that runaway slaves and Guajiro Indians were preparing an army to assault the town. Authorities reported that slaves "*quadrillas*" were patrolling the country roads, seizing carts and pillaging white farms. One captured slave confessed that he was on a mission with others "to kill all Whites, to plunder the King's treasures as well as those of his subjects." The fugitives, once the lock-down seems to have defused the crisis, scattered into the social wilderness, leaving behind them the smoke of fear and panic. As the revolution on Saint Domingue finally drove Napoleon's forces from the island, boats of insurgents were landing around the area of Rio Hacha to join bands of rebels bandit squads comprised of runaways, freed plebian forces, and Indians. The bottom-up unrest was not restricted to slave provinces. Some of Jalisco's *gavillas*, formed in bars, jails, and gambling dens, graduated from highway robbery to social banditry. In Riobamba, Andean Indians bearing sabres and machetes confronted the Corregidor Xavier Mantúfar in 1803, to protest his ruling ways. The turn of the century was in general a period less of coordinated defenses of "community" (as one might understand the

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<sup>10</sup> Alberto Flores Galindo, "Bandidos de la Costa," in Carlos Augirre & Charles Walker (eds.), *Bandoleros, abigeos y montoneros* (Lima: Pasado y Presente, 1999), pp. 57-68 & *Los rostros de la plebe* (Barcelona: Ed Crítica, 2001), pp. 61-102; AGI, Estado, Lima, 75/48, 1796, Carta Anonima; AGI, Estado, Caracas, 71/2, 30/8/1797, General Mateo Pérez to Príncipe de la Paz.

Comunero predecessors, or the more potent spasm of violence of the 1780s in the central Andes), but one of rising resistance to the more generic terms of colonialism in favor of expanded freedoms (of labour, of expression, from taxes, to trade). Yet, with only a very few exceptions, this unrest did not call for an overturn of colonial rule and monarchy, but can be seen as the exhaustion of a model of exploitation and the social underbelly of fiscal bankruptcy in the age of heightened inter-imperial warfare.<sup>11</sup>

This was not how the unrest was seen by authorities, for whom sedition and insubordination were seen as preambles to revolution, especially after 1789. The authorities responded in predictable ways. One was to bolster local militias to patrol neighborhoods and countrysides. In the frontiers of the Banda Oriental, “Lancers” toured the byways between estates to keep the peace. Squadrons of riflemen, often funded by merchant guilds to make up for public penury, were dispatched to put an end to slave flight from plantations. In 1794, this was a regular practice in Caracas, where the Consulado, for all intents and purposes, backstopped the colonial state in its effort to preserve social order and implemented and enforced a local passport system for slaves who were “off” the plantations.<sup>12</sup>

Seditious literature – including all books or newspapers printed in French – was simply banned, leaving to the censors the task of separating the legal from illegal tracts. Nariño’s translation of the Rights of Man landed him in prison. The Oidor of the Santa Fé’s Audiencia

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<sup>11</sup> AGI, Estado, Santa Fé, 52/76, Pedro Mendieta to Francisco Saavedra; 53/77, Report by Governor of Cartagena; 52/84, 25/03/1803, Mendieta to Ceballos; William B. Taylor, “Banditry and Insurrection: Rural Unrest in Central Jalisco, 1790-1816,” in Friedrich Katz (ed.), *Riot, Rebellion and Revolution* (Princeton...), p. 208-210; On exhaustion, see Enrique Tandeter, *Coacción y Mercado: La minería de la plata en el Potosí colonial, 1692-1826* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1992), pp. 253-263; John Tutino, *From Insurrection to Revolution in Mexico: Social Bases of Agrarian Violence, 1750-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), chpt 2; Richard L. Garner, *Economic Growth and Change in Bourbon Mexico* (Gainesville: University Press, of Florida, 1993), pp. 37-71. More generally on bankruptcy, see Carlos Marichal, *Bankruptcy of Empire: Mexican Silver and the Wars Between Spain, Britain, and France, 1760-1810* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

<sup>12</sup> Archivo General de la Nación, Caracas (hereafter AGNC), Real Consulado, Actas, 2526, ff 37-38.

provided lurid nightmares to Charles IV's minister, "the Prince of Peace," to justify the censorship and incarceration - -which only confirmed the more general view in Madrid that Jacobin agents could be found under beds all over the empire. When the posters and other broadsheets began to appear on the streets, the roundups began. In spite of the protests, by among others the magnates of the Cabildo, there was no leniency. Eleven "conspirators," including Nariño, were dispatched to Spain to face trial (where it was felt that the courts would be free from the pressures of local subjects). Nariño, understandably, felt scapegoated, and when his appeal was rejected, he fled to Paris to become an avowed lifelong opponent of Spanish rule.<sup>13</sup>

These were preemptive measures and expressions of the manifold ways in which fear mutated into loathing. They represent one end of the deterrent specter. The irony was that Nariño himself printed only 100 copies of the tract, and when he heard that he might be arrested had them all, save two copies, burned. But there is also plenty of evidence of harsh justice for those who crossed the line. Those caught conspiring faced even stricter penalties, and even death sentences. The harshest treatment was meted out to those who did mount uprisings. After Miranda's failed attempt to lead a revolution from Coro in 1806, his followers that did not manage to escape with him, or who did not slip away in canoes to Margarita Island, were rounded up. All were denounced as "traitors," dedicated to whipping up the "*gente reboltosa*," and threatening to bring to Venezuela something akin to "the Black tyrant Dessalines." As a deterrent, ten of Miranda's followers were summarily hung, their bodies left dangling from the gallows. The rest were sent to Spain to wallow in prison. This kind of violence conformed to a

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<sup>13</sup> AGI, Estado, Santa Fé, 53/59, 19/07/1797, Conde de Torre Velarde to Principe de la Paz; Anthony McFarlane, Colombia Before Independence: Economy, Society and Politics under Bourbon Rule (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 284-289.

more general penal practice of shaming rituals, part of a broader “theatre of violence.” Public spectacles of corporal punishment, from whippings to executions – a gamut of bodily desecration – which were meant to dishonor the criminal, demonstrating the baseness and powerlessness of the condemned and the might and glory of rulers. But social conflict is one thing; war is quite another. We are still far from a cycle of civil strife and terror, and certainly no breakdown of the basic colonial system; none of the violence had the “organizational” personality it would have in a few years’ time; desecration and rumours of killing came nowhere close to the language or threat of extermination. It would take a specific kind of break in the legal order that would make enforcements that were once seen as the rites of natural justice to be seen as the exercise of tyranny, or plebian violence to be seen as more than vindictiveness.<sup>14</sup>

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There was no shortage of motives for fear and unrest in late colonial Spanish America. Events in 1808 aggravated them all. Napoleonic armies streamed into Spain and Ferdinand fell into the French ruler’s hands. Gone was the monarchy, the central legitimating symbol for the empire, and source of Christian justice for his subjects. With the King unable to rule his subjects, who, what, and how to fill the gap? These questions blew open the premises of Spanish rulership to spark a debate over who would rule at home, and then how they would rule. And this break in sovereignty changed the practice of political violence. The late Charles Tilly, following an insight of Trotsky’s, argued that revolutionary situations were those in which more

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<sup>14</sup> AGI, Gobierno, Caracas, 458, 2 Sept, 1806, Andrés Bello, “Observaciones sobre la situación de Coro.” The most evocative narrative of this model of justice is Peter Linebaugh, The London Hanged: Crime and Punishment in the Eighteenth Century (London: Penguin, 1991). See also Gene E. Ogle, “Slaves of Justice: Saint Domingue’s Executioners and the Production of Shame,” Historical Reflections/Reflexions Historiques, 29:2 (Summer, 2003), pp. 275-294. “Theatre of violence” is from Robert Darnton, The Great Cat Massacre and other Episodes in French Cultural History (New York: Penguin, 1984), p. 99. This theatre could be both comedic - in the sense that people could turn the tables in ways they thought funny. But it could also be have a tragic mode.

than one power bloc exercised control over part of the state apparatus. Dual or manifold sovereignties provoke different classes, sectors and alliances to lay claim to state power for their own. This is what happened starting in 1808 across the Iberian Atlantic. The fissuring of the ancien regime did not widen under pressure from Jacobin plots or the revolutionary wars – but only when the inter-imperial rivalries blew open with the coronation of Napoleon as the emperor of France and his campaign for European supremacy with a war to end all wars.<sup>15</sup>

If a break in sovereignty occasioned a revolutionary “situation” it did not determine the course; for this, we need to come to terms with the contingencies of the conflicts that ensued and the violence they magnified. As Spaniards and colonists grappled with how to improvise a system of rule, they set off a debate about local autonomy and representation, which cascaded into confrontations of who had voice, how they got to express it, and where. The cycle upset the delicate equipoise of urban patrician models of political domination – which only intensified authorities’ suspicious predilections and in some cases, like Mexico City, reactionary reflexes. It took little time for the war of words to lead to violence. In July, 1809, a group of well-to-do creoles in Quito grew increasingly frustrated with the foot-dragging by the Audiencia, denounced the Viceroy’s local officials, and called for an autonomous Junta to govern the province in the name of the king. This was not a declaration of independence – but it was an affront to some royal officials. There had been arrests and verbal pushing and shoving; but now a harsh reaction was coming. The Viceroy ordered troops to smother the quiteño “traitors,” and their leaders were rounded up. Lima sent 800 soldiers to patrol the city. More suspects were detained. While the government in Spain was debating new principles of representation and elections, Prosecutor Tomás Aréchaga ordered that the property of all the “rebels” be seized, and

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<sup>15</sup> Charles Tilly, From Mobilization to Revolution (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publ., 1978), pp. 190-191.

requested to the Viceroy that they all be executed. Quiteños heard rumours that the repression would spread and lead to bloodshed, until a group of armed men stormed the prison and released the detained. One guard died in the melée. Then, all hell broke loose. Soldiers opened fire on a crowd in the Plaza Mayor. Civilians attacked the presidio to get guns, but got trapped inside. Troops finally captured them, and shot them on the spot. One escaped. By then, fears of the Bastille-style crowd filled the minds of frightened Peruvian troops, who panicked and went on a splurge of assaults and killings in search of the ringleaders and their supporters. Using swords, knives, bayonets and their axes they found and slaughtered 28 of the men who were awaiting sentences, including some scions of the creole aristocracy. Spanish officials, who'd lost complete control, retreated to the presidential palace to pray for a miracle. The absence of authority led to days of revenge killing and retribution. Civilians began to shoot soldiers from rooftops and windows; soldiers responded in kind, and proceeded to pillage the shops around the now seething Plaza Mayor. President Ruiz de Castilla thought that a sign of force would do the trick to restore order – and commanded that a hanging gallows be erected in the Plaza, and that disloyal subjects should be left to dangle without trials. In the end, it was the Bishop that defused the crisis, for the moment. The toll was about 800 civilians dead in the streets, including thirteen children. One hundred soldiers also died.<sup>16</sup>

These at least were the figures – and the images – that circulated at the time. Silence and fear descended on Quito. But the news spread, especially now that censorship was lifted and the Inquisition on its last legs, provoking outrage. In Santa Fé, Camilo Torres seized upon the news of the killings in Quito to cajole the Cabildo of Santa Fé to issue a *Memorial de Agravios*, which

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<sup>16</sup> Restrepo, *Historia de la Revolución*, V. 1, (Bogotá: Ed Bedout, 1969) pp. 118-123; Jaime Rodríguez O., *La revolución política durante la época de la independencia: El Reino de Quito, 1808-1822* (Quito: Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, 2006), pp. 71-73.

catalogued the atrocities and urged subjects to reconsider their loyalties, less to Spain itself than to its governors. Sanguinary news gave definition to a line that was once imperceptible. It also revealed how much the pattern of violence had changed markedly from that which poised colonial militias and enforcers against plebian sectors. Now, the violence was much less clearly isomorphic – breaking the association of enforcement with elites and resistance with subaltern populations.

Violence also amalgamated new coalitions calling for secession to restore peace.

Consider Cartagena, where pro-Spanish Regency factions were threatening since 1810 to roll back local autonomy, and which tried to seize the governor's palace and mobilize the garrison to occupy the city. Several lower-rank officers leaked the plan; crowds took to the streets to preempt the coup, and called out the mixed-race militias and lancers. When Cartagena seceded from Spanish rule in November 1811, it was an interim claim until the crisis in the metropole could be resolved. But secessionists also felt the need to do so to reestablish legitimacy and bring an end to the carnage and its threat. The city's assembly issued an immediate and urgent call to disarm all colonial militias to prevent opponents from militarizing the conflict. The authors of the declaration framed their vindications in the rhetoric of sacrificial bloodshed: "We note with horror for our consideration the three hundred years of vexations, miseries, and sufferings of all types, which accumulated over our country with the ferocity of the Conquistadors and Spanish rulers."<sup>17</sup>

The polarization also gave rise to an ever-more intransigent rhetoric. Some of it also baptized the new autonomist movements with sacrificial imagery and warnings of a more

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<sup>17</sup> *El Argos Americano*, 11 nov., 1811; Aline Helg, "The Limits of Equality: Free People of Colour and Slaves during the First Independence of Cartagena, Colombia, 1810-1815," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 20:2 (Aug., 1999), pp. 7-8.

redemptive, totalizing war. Antonio Nariño, who by now had plenty of time in Spanish prisons to nurse his enmity, returned to the printing presses. His La Bagatela was an organ dedicated to denouncing the venality and viciousness of Spanish authorities, and publicizing every rumoured repression, and invoked the epic choice in September 1811: “salvar la patria o morir.”<sup>18</sup>

Bernardo Monteagudo tired of the Gaceta de Buenos Aires and founded Mártir o Libre. In Venezuela, Juan Germán Roscio, otherwise a less intemperate figure than Nariño or Monteagudo, also justified self-rule to save the peace through legitimacy because the Spanish could only compensate for their illegitimacy with bloodletting. The selfsame blood, however, could also be the bonding agent for a new fraternal association: “we must recognize a legitimate Government and decide to seal with the blood of its very last inhabitants the oaths which have been pronounced at the altar of loyalty and patriotism.” Mariano Moreno got practical about the need for blood-shedding for the revolution. Though he was asked to draft an outline for the makeup of a provisional government in July 1810, Moreno also dealt with the means to this end, and if necessary resort to gruesome measures: “we should not be scandalized by my words, to sever heads, spill blood, and sacrifice at all costs, even when they have all the appearances of the customs of Cannibals and Caribs.”<sup>19</sup>

Demonizing the government meant that the violence could cut both ways. Indeed, no longer were crowds and civilian coalitions taking the place of governments to perform what they considered to be their dutiful obligations to subjects, especially food – the common image of early modern rioting from E.P. Thompson, George Rudé and others – but they were increasingly

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<sup>18</sup> Restrepo, Historia de la Revolución, V.1, p. 183.

<sup>19</sup> Juan Germán Roscio, “Alucación del Reglamento para la elección de diputados del Primer Congreso de Venezuela Independiente de 1811,” in his Obras, V.2 (Caracas: Secretaría General de la Décima Conferencia Interamericana, 1953), p. 20; Mariano Moreno, “Plan de Operaciones,” in Escritos políticos y económicos (Buenos Aires: Cultura Argentina, 1915), p. 307.

claiming to be *the* government, with rights to wield its weapons against toppling incumbents. In May and June 1810, the highlands around Potosí were swept by similar unrest over loyalties to splintering sovereignties. But when the news arrived to the mining center in November that colonial armies under General Balcarce had defeated Spanish troops at Suipacha, crowds took to the streets. One set off for the house of the Governor Francisco de Paula Sanz who had earlier squashed dissent. The Arequipa Division of Royal Troops opened fire – which, like Quito ignited an urban insurrection. By the time the smoke cleared, Paula Sanz was under arrest and the city was in hands of rebels. When Buenos Aires' Juan Jose Castelli arrived in Potosí, he ordered that firing squads execute the Governor and his associates. Vengeance begat more avenging. Lima's Viceroy Abascal dispatched armies to the incendiary the highlands to drive the porteño forces from the region. What is more, commanders were under orders to extirpate the cities of all sedition. In the mop-up operations from La Paz to Potosí, rebel leaders were hung in the main squares and their bodies ordered to be left to rot or be picked apart by scavenging birds. By 1816, the only republiqueta to survive the savagery of Spanish repression was Ayopaya, whose guerrillas, based in the towering highland hamlets of Palca, Machaca, and Inquisiui, menaced the roads – and silver caravans – around La Paz, Cochabamba, and Oruro.<sup>20</sup>

In the borderlands of the Banda Oriental, crisis of sovereignty was additionally complicated by the competition for dominion on the shores of the River Plate. The ratcheting up of conflict between rival autonomist and pro-Junta factions coincided with – indeed, occasioned – the rapid decomposition of the viceroyalty. In the vacuum that opened up, Portuguese armies were willingly sucked in, to give the disequilibrium an imbalance of its own. Viceroy Elío holed

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<sup>20</sup> Ricardo R. Caillet-Bois, "La Revolución en el Virreinato," Historia de la Nación Argentina V. 2 (Buenos Aires: Academia Nacional de Historia), pp. 152-155; Charles W. Arnade, The Emergence of the Republic of Bolivia (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1957), pp. 35-36.

up with his troops in Montevideo, and his fighters gave up all hope of a peaceable solution: José María Salazar, a royal naval commander, concluded that “no other methods than the force of Bayonets can pacify these provinces now.” His enemies agreed. One of the military commanders, José de Artigas, gathered his cavalry to besiege the port in an early opening of the city-country divide. His was a force made up of Lancers and gaucho volunteers and in the fighting that ensued, the distinction between formal and informal warfare was as fluid as the alliances that fought them. The siege itself lasted almost three years, and turned the prosperous outpost into a hub of disease and famine. The clash soon gave way to something more chaotic – and would only resolve itself by the late 1820s with the formation of an “independent” Uruguay. While Artigas’ coalition broke up in mid-1811 (and some factions threw their lot in with the enemy when they saw the tides quickly turn), Portuguese troops began to mass along the border. This inflamed matters. The siege of Montevideo yielded to sacking and pillaging on both sides. Even Artigas’ ranks began to fill with internal agitation; the massive refugee camp of Ayuí seethed with anger and fear. To assert his authority over the camp, Artigas ordered the public execution of three men on criminal charges. The war of attrition was such that no single group could assert authority until the Spanish finally evacuated Montevideo, by which time, the autonomist coalition was at open war with itself. Suffice it to note for now that this war was less one conducted by standing armies but resembled more a high level of organized banditry and despoliation conducted by all sides. When Portuguese troops did finally invade under General Diego de Souza, they faced the dilemma of most occupying armies surrounded by an armed society: they too had to resort to burning and pillaging to thwart their attackers. Where entire towns evacuated, the Portuguese moved in, and began to settle their own footholds in abandoned counties.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> AGI, Estado, Buenos Aires, 79/26, 04/12/1810, Salazar to Ministerio de Marina; Agustín Beraza, La economía en

The cycle from increasing intransigence to stepped-up vengeance and civil war was especially notable in central New Spain. In Querétaro, militiamen plotted the overthrow of gachupín power in response to repression in the viceregal the capital, sowing the seeds for popular mobilization. Father Miguel Hidalgo, the moral crusader of the Bajío proclaimed: "Long live Our Lady of Guadalupe, death to bad government, and death to the Spaniards!" Four days later, his armies plunged into the Battle of Guanajuato, culminating in sacking, plundering, and the public execution of the city's defenders. While defenders were being mutilated, attackers broke into shops and began to parade through the streets – with a little help from pilfered alcohol – dressed up in fancy clothes; the festive and the horrific combined in a single scene of confusion. In one September fortnight, more than a million Indians, Blacks, and mulattoes joined the rebellion. Bishop Manuel Abad y Queipo, enraged that the rebels had painted their standards with the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe warned of a "mortífero contagio." "Terror pánico" swept through loyalist ranks. As Spain's armies in New Spain stumbled in the face of insurgents, provincial cities emptied not only of their Peninsulars, but often all whites, for fear of the government's collapse. Querétaro and Mexico City filled with refugees from the provinces. While Hidalgo's forces had some hallmarks of armies, there was a way in which they more resembled a mass armed mob – a crowd of some 80,000 that was poised to seize Mexico City. Behind the lines (such as they were), a social order was in upheaval. Villagers seized haciendas. The owners and managers were routinely killed, their bodies desecrated. Local governors and mayors faced the same fate. One witness of the takeover of the Hacienda Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, observed that attackers "were still stabbing (the bodies) with swords, and Santiago Cuenca cut off their heads with a long knife given to him by Juan Agustín González, and

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la Banda Oriental, 1811-1820 (Montevideo: Ed. Banda Oriental, 1964), pp. 18-29; Pablo Blanco Acevedo, El federalismo de Artigas y la independencia nacional (Montevideo: n.p., 1939), pp. 70-92.

Luciano Telles three them (the heads) in a sack and tied it to the pommel of his saddle.” In the puebla of Atlacomulco, crowds rioted, looted, and killed four Spaniards. Outbursts like this multiplied across Central New Spain, and aggregated into a full-scale rebellion. Once royalists organized and stood their ground, the Army of the Center quickly turned the tide, and levied a series of devastating defeats. In the hysteria that followed, untold numbers of civilians became victims of exemplary justice. After Hidalgo’s execution in July 1811, his victor, General Félix María Calleja ordered that the corpse be hung from Guanajuato’s granary – where the worst of the rebel massacres had transpired – for ten years. After that, Calleja imposed a rein of fear. When he learned that people were tearing down his posted decrees at night, he ordered his soldiers to find the culprits. They couldn’t. Instead, 40 plebeian men were arrested, and when none would name names, four of them were chosen by lot to face a firing squad.<sup>22</sup>

The fact that the cycle of violence in New Spain escalated so quickly and swept across such vast territories (unlike the more localized, and still largely urbanized clashes in much of the rest of Spanish America) helps explain what came after. By containing and then crushing the “insurgency” so decisively, Calleja succeeded in legating to the vicerealty’s patrician classes a fear of what might happen in the event of a renewed contest over sovereignty. This grand peur coincided, more or less, with the restoration of Bourbon authority in Madrid; for the next six years, it was possible to convey an impression of reconstituted imperial sovereignty, and so avert the kind of dynamics that ratcheted up the contestation in the Northern Andes and the River Plate.

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<sup>22</sup> Hugh M. Hamill, Jr., The Hidalgo Revolt: Prelude to Independence (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1966), p. 142; Christon I. Archer, “La Causa Buena’: The Counterinsurgency Army of New Spain and the Ten Years’ War,” in Jaime Rodríguez O. (ed.), The Independence of Mexico and the Creation of the New Nation (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center, 1989), p. 85, 90, 93; Eric Van Young, The Other Rebellion: Popular Violence, Ideology, and the Mexican Struggle for Independence (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 98, 129, and for the case of Atlacomulco, see chpt. 15..

As images of bloodbaths and news of plotting filled the press and fueled rumour mills, they could also turn inwards and stoke fears of treasonous behaviour from within autonomist coalitions. The difficulties that Artigas had with Buenos Aires – and the feud over whether the model of autonomy should be centralizing within the colonies, or decentralizing – replicated themselves all over. The porteño regime – understandably paranoid about Peninsular schemes for a “reconquest” and federalist uprisings in the littoral provinces – announced that all Spanish “horrenda conspiraciones” would invite the harshest of penalties and declared that Artigas was a “traidor a la patria!” His arrest and summary execution were ordered; his killer or captor would earn 6,000 pesos’ bounty. Caracas was at odds with Puerto Cabello, Santa Fé de Bogotá (as it was now renamed) fought Cartagena, and so forth. The feuding spread. As it did, the demonizing of the enemy that was once directed outwards turned inwards – and widened local fissures. That the competition for political loyalty mobilized popular sectors only aggravated the sense of declension among many of the original “patriotic” leaders, for the rebel populacho were not as menacing as the defenders of the Junta, but they were untrustworthy. Uncensored newspapers that once filled pages with news of a crumbling Spanish government and its cruelties in the colonies, soon began to report on the dangers of “the multitude” at home, and distinguish between *popular* opinion to be eschewed and *public* opinion to be nurtured. In Cartagena, the victory of popular forces over public opinion demonstrated precisely why they could not be trusted – at least from the point of view of centralists like Nariño, whose La Bagatela was almost as vitriolic about the masses as it once was about the Spanish government. Events in Cartagena drove him to distraction. From the neighbourhood of Getsemaní, Black and mulatto militias, organized by the Cuban-born mulatto Pedro Romero, took up light arms and began to patrol their own streets to defend themselves against their own local authorities that wanted them disarmed.

The Getsemaní battalions soon became the core of the armed forces of the city – and soon found themselves defending the city against Spanish attacks (mainly from Santa Marta) and centralists from Cundinamarca.<sup>23</sup>

As local governments weakened, their publicists worried about the limits of the citizenship. No longer was the threat the enemy from without, but the danger within. By 1812 in Caracas, the independence coalition traded accusations of treason, and on April 12 of that year the crumbling government promulgated the death penalty for treasonous acts. All opposition, the decree cried out, was treason because it was, by definition, an expression of particular interests against the general will of a newly freed “public.” Monteagudo, a witness to the fragmentation of the region, pointed to the persistence of “destructive and antisocial” passions; for a people tutored only in centuries of tyranny there were no virtues. “A people who so suddenly passes from servitude to LIBERTY is in close danger of precipitating itself to anarchy and then regressing to slavery.” The danger, he noted – some would say prophetically – was that passions would “renew a more pernicious internal war against LIBERTY than one waged with all the weapons of tyrants.”<sup>24</sup>

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Internalized violence begat despair, heightened suspicion, justified spying, and raised the temptation to deal with the growing instability with yet more violence. When the first

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<sup>23</sup> Juan Canter, “La Asamblea General Constituyente,” *Historia de la Nación Argentina*, Vol. VI, p. 183; Véronique Hébrard, “Opinión Pública y representación en el Congreso Constituyente de Venezuela (1811-12),” in François-Xavier Guerra & Annick Lampérière (eds.), *Los espacios públicos en Iberoamérica* (México: FCE, 1998), pp. 211-224; Alfonso Múñera, *El Fracaso de la Nación: region, clase, y raza en el caribe colombiano (1717-1810)* (Bogotá: banco de la República, 1998), pp., 179-192; Marixa Lasso, *Myths of Harmony: Race and Republicanism during the Age of Revolution, Colombia 1795-1831* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 44-46.

<sup>24</sup> Bernardo Monteagudo, “Observación,” *Escritos Políticos* (Buenos Aires, n.d.), pp. 57-58; Gustavo Montoya, “Pensamiento político de Bernardo Monteagudo,” in his *La independencia del Perú y la fantasma de la revolución* (Lima: IEP, 2002), pp. 152-188.

Venezuelan government crumbled in July of 1812, and prepared to withdraw, a handful of its younger leaders – Simón Bolívar among them – schemed to turn their president Francisco de Miranda over to the Spanish commander to face imperial magistrates. They were furious at him for allegedly betraying the cause (though there is some evidence that Bolívar himself was on the verge of switching sides preemptively). Miranda, arrested and taken away in chains, would waste away in a cell in Cádiz. The new local ruler was Domingo de Monteverde; by late 1812, Monteverde announced to his government that Venezuela is now “pacified.” Like so many claims to victory in fratricidal conflicts, this was premature. Behind the lines, the province was in upheaval. Though the republican leadership had fled, local chieftains filled the void – José Francisco Bermúdez, Santiago Mariño, and the mulatto Manuel Piar mobilized slaves and freed blacks in the east and eventually helped drive Monteverde from the capital. The see-saw continued; the second republic was even weaker, and more shortlived, than the first. What the cycle revealed was how each side was strong enough to neutralize its adversary, but was not strong enough to inflict a decisive victory.<sup>25</sup>

What happened in Venezuela also reveals, in extremis, a more general pattern: where there was a standoff and the armed conflict disintegrated the lines that divided camps from each other, warfare engulfed non-combatants. Mariño, for instance, capped victories with butchery. After taking Cumaná, he ordered the execution of 47 Spaniards and creoles; Barcelona saw 69 of its citizens shot. “The life of such men,” he noted, “was incompatible with the existence of the State.” Royalist reprisals were not far behind. As civilians and soldiers fled before the republican caudillos, they also regrouped. And they responded in kind. The Canarian shopkeeper, Francisco Rosete pushed back through the valleys of Tuy, liberating slaves along the

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<sup>25</sup> AGI, Estado, Caracas, 22/11/1812, Oficio de Domino Monteverde.

way, and when he reached Ocumare his retaliatory campaign ended with systematic desecration of civilians: noses, ears, breasts, sexual organs were all systematically and publicly sliced off the bodies of captives, ending with mass decapitation. When Bolívar got the news, in a white fury he ordered the immediate execution of every captive Spaniard; this was the beginning of the War to the Death. More on this shortly. The political violence reached a fever pitch at the hands of José Tomás Boves' Lancers, whose axial year of carnage became the core of Arturo Uslar Pietri's classic fictional account, Las Lanzas Coloradas. The Asturian merchant turned his multi-racial recruits into a slaughtering machine which worked over the llanos in 32 months (until a spear did him in on the plains of Urica in December, 1814). In units of 50-60 horsemen, they were organized not so much to win open battles with republican forces (though this did occur), but more to establish territorial control through fear, sweeping into towns and systematically pillaging, raping, and murdering its occupants into submission. This was an "acquired" propensity. Boves was not always a mass murderer; he became one. After he learned of a civilian plot to infiltrate his ranks at Espino, Boves sought revenge. He caught the plotters and ordered their execution. Even the whistle-blower lost his head. This was followed by a victory parade in which he stuck the heads of the dead at the tops of pikes and marched them around town with a musical band. At first, Boves wore no uniform, and often went shirtless. But by the middle of 1814 his vestments had become more formal, and his methods of terrorizing more elaborate. After the Battle of Victoria in June 1814 (where a trounced Bolívar had fled), Boves took morbid delight with his victory, mixing the festive with the funereal: he dined with a captured commander Col. Diego Jalón, then publicly humiliated him before his fellow captives, ordered 200 lashes, then they all watched him be executed; his head shared the fate of others' at the end of a pike for all to see. The night after another battle, an insouciant Boves invited the

townswomen to a banquet, after which, whip in hand, he ordered them to dance while, beyond the walls, their husbands and brothers were rounded up and massacred.<sup>26</sup>

Such actions illustrate the ways in which perpetrators wavered between the domain of politics and the realm of theatre. But one should not lose sight of the strategic purposes to which slaughter was put. Consider the way preying and pillaging became commonplace in the Platine borderlands, where power rivalries were more internationalized. Unlike the llanos of Nueva Granada and Venezuela, popular monarchist forces were for the most part hemmed into Montevideo; the furies of rural violence from a different source, for in the countryside it was Portuguese divisions that got bogged down in a brutal cat-and-mouse war with guerrillas. While Joaquina Carlota was plotting from Rio de Janeiro to reestablish a Bourbon monarchy in the borderland region with herself on the throne (in advance of her reconquest she'd sent a printing press, some personal goods, including, allegedly, her jewels), she had to wait for her armies to put down the insurgency, which was on the run by mid-1812. But the war had degenerated into a cruel exchange of guerrilla ambushes followed by army depredations of civilian hamlets; the empress's field marshal, Gaspar Vigodet defended his actions – noting among other things that his proxy war would free the Spanish armies to crush rebellions in the Andes, to create a vast multilingual coalition of regal armies crushing insurgents in the backlands to restore what the French Revolution came perilously close to annihilating: imperial monarchy.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The work on Boves and his epigones is more extensive than deep. For details, see John Lynch, *Simón Bolívar: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 76 & 82-87; Stephen K. Stoen, *Pablo Morillo and Venezuela, 1815-1820* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1974), pp. 52-55; Tomás Pérez Tenreiro, *José Tomás Boves: Primera del Rey* (Caracas: Ministerio de Defensa, s.d.) pp. 91-92. Perhaps the best single study is Germán Carrera Damas, *Boves: Aspectos socio-económicos de su acción histórica* (Caracas: Min de Educación, 1968), which emphasizes how pillaging was a war technique.

<sup>27</sup> AGI, Estado, Buenos Aires, 79/38, 01/09/1810, José María Salazar to Min de Marina; 79/59, 22/06/1812, Vigodet to Joaquina Carlota.

For all the grand designing, however, on the ground the social situation was highly unstable – and in some places led to wholesale dislocations. Wherever the fighting became inconclusive and protracted, refugees filled churches and overwhelmed the meager supplies of the armies that could not protect them. As Boves' slaying frontier moved eastward, encroaching on the capital, panic seized Caracas. Families of all ranks began to pack carts and horses to prepare to flee. Bolívar gave the order to evacuate, starting with his own emaciated troops. Civilians streamed out of the city, and made for Barcelona and Cumaná, starving, shoeless and petrified. Bolívar's troops could not defend them. The stragglers at Aragua were simply wiped out. Royalist troops went on hunting expeditions, killing refugees en route to Barcelona. Towns swollen with refugees became easier targets for the marauders, who did more than kill. One royalist chieftain, Francisco Morales, took care of Maturín, and gloated that he personally raped every woman of the town.<sup>28</sup> Fear and flight also possessed the Banda Oriental, where non-combatants also became excuses for target practice and bodily desecration by both sides. As Portuguese armies moved forward, burning and pillaging, the "Exodus" began: up to 80 per cent of the rural population – estancieros, merchants, peons and slaves – began their long march north to the littoral, where federalist chieftains were preparing their recruits. Meanwhile, Spanish royalists, plundered and immiserated in a blockaded Montevideo, also sought refuge – fleeing to Brazil, and after 1814 back to Spain. News from far away could spark a stampede of frightened civilians. In early 1815, there were rumors that Ferdinand was sending his massive expeditionary force to the River Plate; all sides began to pack their bags for fear of an all out war. A resolution of March 1815 announced that all Spaniards suspected of collusion with Madrid's reconquista would face the consequences for their treason. José Battle y Carreó, for instance, fled, leaving his wife and children behind, hoping to rescue them later and praying that

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<sup>28</sup> Lynch, *Simón Bolívar*, p. 86.

“that class of woman would not be persecuted.” In September, Artigas began rounding up Spanish and Portuguese subjects, as well as his creole opponents, and herding them into a concentration camp he called, without irony, “Purification.” Then he gave away their property to “free blacks, zambos, indios, and poor creoles” – proclamations that rolled off Princess Carlota’s old printing press. When the Portuguese armies (once more with the complicity of Buenos Aires) returned in 1816, they trounced the artiguista forces, wiping them out in a succession of battles. But this time the Luso-Brazilian campaign was a longer and more brutal one; General Federico Lecor’s army became an occupation force. While the Banda Oriental had been converted into an embattled province of refugees perpetually in search of shelter, Lecor’s divisions were surrounded by guerrillas, and so lashed out in the standard counter-insurgency style, at defenseless civilians. Fed up, an entire regiment of Artigas’ plebeian force, comprised of freed slaves, surrendered on condition they would be allowed to seek refuge in Buenos Aires, where they were welcomed with open, if somewhat duplicitous, arms. This phase of the protracted war ended at Tacuarembó, with Artigas’ final defeat, his personal flight to Paraguay, and the Portuguese annexation of the province to Brazil – setting the stage for another decade of conflict directly with Buenos Aires.<sup>29</sup>

We are getting slightly ahead of our story. Body parts and cadavers became instruments of politics; public executions and torture were intended to terrorize non-combatants – either into submission and loyalty or flight and exit, these being two pendular alternatives to the deterioration of public life, and eliminating the room for “voice” that had been such a prominent part of the contest over sovereignty in the immediate aftermath of the French invasion. But there

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<sup>29</sup> AGI, Consulado, 345, 30 sept., 1812, Manuel Diego to Consulado; Blanco Acevedo, El federalism, pp. 200-209; Beraza, La economía en la Banda Oriental, pp. 73-87; Acevedo, Obras históricas, pp. 605-623; Sala de Touron et al., Artigas, pp. 71-97.

was more going on than the politics of terror. There was an assumption that these lethal crowds also acted like magistrates issuing – in their view – justice as a way to exterminate the enemy. What started out as a cleansing campaign against corruption, or shaming rituals by the hanging of a few royalists and rebels, had now become mass killing, with little discernable systematic social isomorphy; this was not a plebian war against aristocrats, or blacks against whites. Seen this way, we can rethink warfare of this sort – or at least the conflict in this context. Once upon a time, historians tended to see killing and maiming like this as a breakdown of “normal” war into deviant personalized vendetta – as a failure to cohere armies as prototypical affiliates for nations coming into being stocked with citizens in arms. But we might perhaps see it in reverse, as the endurance of a kind of rite that is more familiar to early modern historians, albeit with a less religious tinge to it: of extreme violence of crowds that behaved in mindful ways and who saw their cause as legitimate and their method as logical, of militarized groups with more or less aptitude to be regimented forces, that assumed the role of justice-dispensing magistrates where the state has collapsed. It is a subset within a broader family-type of civil war. This helps explain why unarmed non-combatants got swept up in the fratricide with not infrequent malice.<sup>30</sup>

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One anonymous limeño lamented to his sovereign in 1810 that the appeal of rebellion to many of his subjects reflected less the sense of ingratitude to the king (which could be remedied because all children could learn gratitude) than something more pernicious, and not easily cured: love of “tiranía.”<sup>31</sup> While the view of rebels as more than mere malcontents, but as deadly

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<sup>30</sup> Paul Friedland, “Beyond Deterrence: Cadavers, Effigies, Animals and the Logic of Logic of Executions in Pre-Modern France,” Historical Reflections/Reflexions Historiques, 29:2 (Summer, 2003), pp. 295-318; Natalie Zemon Davis, Society and Culture in Early Modern France (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), pp. 154-162.

<sup>31</sup> AGI, Indiferente General, 1568, 10 agosto 1810, anonymous letter.

agents, spread with the fighting, it is important to recall that all-out savagery was not its only outcome; it was hardly the expression of some pre-political logic, but rather was the function of the (im)balance of forces. Consider Peru, where Viceroy José de Abascal, the spiritus rector of continuism, snuffed out the rebellions with an iron fist – and thus projected a view of how to dispense with those who loved godless tiranía over the rule of a beneficent Bourbon king. Having driven Buenos Aires' armies from the highlands, Abascal assuaged the Spanish government that “we can restore in motion the minerals of Potosí.” What is more, he added, between his armies in the Andes, and the royalists troops in Montevideo (this was written before the city's evacuation), the government's pincers could now squeeze Buenos Aires' dominion back into submission. After all, he mopped up Pasto, Quito, and Alto Peru – and in the latter two cases leaving behind the trademark odor of excessive force, plunder and indiscriminate executions. And the news from Santa Fé and Buenos Aires regarding their imminent collapse only confirmed that only force would compel insurgents “to enter reason.”<sup>32</sup>

Discourses such as these have enjoyed an appeal to those with a fondness for coercive solutions to political impasses, especially if they happen to favor their own lust for power. It certainly did for Ferdinand, who was determined to restore imperial grandeur. It also had an aura of plausibility. Calleja and Abascal were waging counterinsurgency campaigns in Mesoamerican and Andean hamlets. Buenos Aires was “free,” but the littoral and borderlands were engulfed in civil war or occupied by Portuguese armies which served as proxies for Madrid. In Venezuela and Nueva Granada, fledgling self-rule movements collapsed into fratricidal conflict. It was in this context that the restored emperor chose to rebuild his empire by

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<sup>32</sup> AGI, Estado, Lima, 74/2, 23/05/1812, José Abascal to Secre de Estado; 74/8, 13/10/1812, José Abascal to Secr de Estado; 74/51, 25/01/1813, Marqués de la Concordia to Secr de Estado; 74/72, 23/07/1813, Joaquín de la Molina to Consejo de la Regencia.

arrogating to himself the providential powers of the avenger – this, despite the anxieties of some of his ministers and warnings of some of his envoys that the delicate impasse was leaning his way without the need for a massive intervention. There was a political reason for this decision, to resolve Tilly’s “revolutionary situation” – for the task of the revolution and the counter-revolution is to reintegrate state power through the exercise of force. This is what Ferdinand sought. But there was also a historic memory (concocted in Madrid) of the violence that preceded the restoration, inscribed in consultas to the (restored) Council of the Indies, which argued that some “malvados” took advantage of the French invasion to take power for themselves, to introduce “libertinaje of the press” to “corrupt public opinion” and “demoralize the pueblo.” What were needed were a decisive crushing of “impiety” and “insurrection,” a purging of “all the prejudicial novelties introduced to our constitución indiana.” The full force of the Spanish empire would be dedicated to a massive cleansing operation, to root out evil and corruption as conditions for a new peace premised on “the solemn and general forgetting of the past.” A war to bring real peace. “Pacification” plans were laid to reconquer the provinces from rebellious infidels and restore the image of a “Padre tierno” among subjects who’d been seduced to forget his magnanimity. But for this, the king needed an avenging angel to deliver the message, to root out the sources of liberal venality, and to destroy the false gods of constitutional idolatry.<sup>33</sup>

The angel was Brigadier General Pablo Morillo, and his task could not help but erase what was left of the lines between combatants and non-combatants. But it would be unfair to charge the fernandina counter-revolution with singlehandedly turning the unarmed into victims. We have seen evidence that armed crowds quickly became important actors, and that these could

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<sup>33</sup> AGI, Indiferente General, 1568, 3 Oct 1814, Consultas del Consejo de Indias”; 2320, 7 marzo, 1815, Consulado to Secr de Estado.

mutate into plebian “armies,” and that sieges and pillaging were becoming methods of anti-colonial warfare on all sides. In Venezuela, the lines had become all but meaningless even before Morillo’s expeditionary troops arrived. Republicans were on the run in most places. The targets became towns and cities, and not just their defenders. Morillo “liberated” Venezuela (which really meant wresting control from the royalist chieftains and disbanding their plundering bands – a mistake whose consequences became clear later, when republicans like José Antonio Páez filled the rural vacuum with guerrilla forces of their own). A senior cleric, who once sided with the republicans in 1811 but was appalled by what followed, switched sides and applauded the pacification mission in Venezuela as the restoration of God’s authority, and shared his own tactical recommendations for liquidating the anti-Christ.<sup>34</sup>

The next stop was Cartagena, the gateway to Nueva Granada. Morillo’s forces besieged the port of 106 days, with promises of food and mercy in return for surrender. Though many immediately swore loyalty to Ferdinand to avoid recriminations, Cartagena held out – and its leaders responded by pulling their Spanish prisoners out of jail and dragging them through the streets before shooting them on the ramparts of the fort for the besiegers to witness. But starvation finally brought the city to its knees, and it surrendered. When Morillo marched in, he was greeted by the stench of death: 6,000 people had died from disease or starvation, and their corpses had to be mounted on huge pyres for burning to control the contagion. “The city,” noted Morillo, “was a most horrific spectacle.” A group of merchants petitioned the king, thanking

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<sup>34</sup> AGI, Estado, Caracas, 18, 21/12/1816, Juan Antonio de Rojas Queipo sobre la pacificación de Venezuela.”

him for sending “a destroyer of our past anarchy, and real restorer of the peace under which we now live.”<sup>35</sup>

The “Reconquest,” as it has become known, was as bloody as it was rapid – but the violence was itself adapted; Morillo was not vicious when he took Cartagena. To be sure, the siege decimated the port; yet, he had pardoned opponents. Matters quickly changed. The news that Venezuela had begun to unravel in the absence of the General was dispiriting. What was worse, the “liberation” in Nueva Granada was not going cleanly. It did not help that the Council of the Indies was internally split, and the King himself a relentless source of confusion. Morillo asked the Minister of War to be relieved of his duties so he could return to Spain, to no avail. Stuck now, with war on all fronts, or no fronts, his justice took a cruel turn. On the heels of knocking off the already hobbled government, the avengers sought to ensure that it would never revive. After executing the 25-year old President, Liborio Mejía, Morillo issued a public statement in November 1816 to the pacified Neogranadines, in which he promised a new reign of peace and justice (LOCATE FULL TEXT IN AGI). The assumption was, as with many self-styled “liberators,” that the population was living under tyranny (in this case a treasonous, republican, ungodly regime) and that it was awaiting its deliverance. But in this case, deliverance did not mean leading the oppressed from the lands of republican pharaohs, but rather to eliminate the oppressors and purging the country of those who worshipped false idols. The script was a modified Exodus-tale: the proclamation was posted all over the capital, and was followed by mass arrests and systematic killings of men who were not just involved in republican rule, like Camilo Torres, but those who sympathized with it. The avenger signed

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<sup>35</sup> AGI, Gobierno, Santa Fé, 961, 10 dic., 1816, “Sobre el restablecimiento del Consulado de Cartagena de Yndias,” Alfonso Múnera, *El fracaso de la nación: región, clase, y raza en el Caribe colombiano (1717-1810)* (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1998), p. 212; Christiane Laffite Carles, *La costa colombiana del Caribe (1810-1830)* (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1995), pp. 236-238.

execution orders for the scientist Francisco José de Caldas. A Tribunal of Purification hunted down suspects, seized their properties, and “processed” their cases. Three hundred were publicly executed, many of their heads sent to adorn the central squares around the viceroyalty.

According to Victor Uribe, one quarter of the viceroyalty’s lawyers were executed in an effort to expunge dissident letrados.<sup>36</sup>

In New Spain, while the insurgency of 1810 shocked and frightened the viceroyalty’s gentry, the rebel forces were soon thwarted and crushed. But the victors wanted more than a battlefield triumph. They wanted vengeance and a deterrent. It is true, much of the Army was made up of Mexicans, which prompted its commanders to hesitate before ordering them to wipe out the rebels. Still, after the Battle of Calderón, the insurgent defeat turned into a bloody massacre. Calleja also knew that long sieges would immobilize his forces and prevent them from going others. Towns like Zitácuaro, Cuautla, and many others, were pillaged, burned and in some cases demolished to deliver the message to other rebel posts to give in. As Viceroy, however, Calleja recognized that terror could be counterproductive. When he heard that one of his commanders burned the towns of Medellín and Rancho de Tejar near Veracruz, he informed the colonel that “we do not wish to convert the country into a frightful desert and increase the evils that exist and the hatred with which measures of this nature are viewed.” His successor found himself in the same position – and likewise wavered between appealing to loyalties and giving in to the temptations of exemplary justice. Summary execution of captured officers was standard practice. Anyone captured with weapons, or caught in suspicious acts, was to be shot

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<sup>36</sup> AGI, Estado, Santa Fe, 57/34, 15 Nov., 1816, Morillo Proclamation to Viceroyalty; Laura F. Ullrick, “Morillo’s Attempt to Pacify Venezuela,” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 3:4 (Nov., 1920), pp. 539-545; Victor Uribe, “Kill all the Lawyers!: Lawyers and the Independence Movement in New Granada, 1809-1820,” *The Americas*, 52:2 (May, 1995). For more on this kind of model of “purging,” see Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

and the cadaver had to be mounted publicly. And if viceroys wavered, local commanders tended not to; their fears often led them to be much less squeamish about harsh measures.<sup>37</sup>

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Avengers enhanced the cruelty on all sides. In Mexico, royalist triumphs and repression deepened the hatred of gachupines. José Vicente Gómez began, around late 1812, to castrate his Spanish captives; indeed assassinations had acquired a ritualized quality as hatred simmered below the surface of the restored viceroyalty. This was the backcloth of Bolívar's proclamation of a "war to the death" in June of 1813. "Justice demands vengeance," he intoned. But at the same time he invited Spaniards to follow a "path of reconciliation and friendship," "to live peacefully among us" if they cooperate with us, and share fealty to the Republic. Those who do not will be considered an enemy, treated as a traitor, and "inevitably" shot. In a later letter to the Governor of Curaçao, he explained this lamentable exigency. He bemoaned the "ravenous fires of war" and "the furies of unrest (that) agitate the remotest settler." After accusing the reconquerors of turning on their own "sons whom he had brought forth in the land that he had usurped," the Liberator felt that his crusaders had no option. "I resolved," he concluded, "to put in effect a war to the death, in order to deprive the tyrants of the incomparable advantage of their organized methods of destruction." Until then, Bolívar had usually rejected his commanders' requests to kill civilians, and had to reprimand those who sent him the dripping heads of captives. In the course of the escalation, however, the conventions of gentlemanly warfare had to go by the wayside. John Lynch has noted that Bolívar viewed his struggle as now asymmetrical: Spaniards had adopted exterminating practices even though republicans had given impunity to Spaniards – an imbalance that put his cause on the perpetual defensive. Now,

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<sup>37</sup> Archer, "The Counterinsurgency Army," pp. 92-94.

liberating armies were under orders to take and keep no prisoners. This was no longer a matter of deterring loyalists or releasing avenging furies to extirpate the enemy. It was an expediency; where fronts had evaporated and civilians were killed and desecrated, civil peace required a total war.<sup>38</sup>

Warfare changed in more than just determination of its leaders; it also transformed the social composition of armed conflict. Some movements, like the casta-Indian uprising in the Bajío, were born plebian. But others mobilized popular sectors more gradually. Cotton growers of Guerrero's Costa Grande, mulatto sharecroppers and Indian villagers, became mortal enemies of Spaniards, and formed the backbone of the province's guerrillas, which was crucial for the continuity of the insurgency after 1814. In the Oriental borderlands, Artigas' September 1815 "Reglamento Provisorio" enlisted plebeians, and especially slaves and Guaraní Indians to his ranks; 400 Abipones moved from the Chaco to take advantage of land being doled out. By 1816, there was a full-blown assault on estate properties, which yielded to the desperate plea from estancieros and merchants for an avenging intervention – and thus the second Portuguese invasion and its scorched earth war on revolutionaries. The Banda Oriental came as close as one might imagine to a cross-ethnic class war within a civil war as one might imagine.<sup>39</sup> In general, the complexion of violent upheaval varied, depending on local conditions. In the Andes, the specter of Túpac Amaru returned. What started as an urban insurrection spread to the countryside – and reached deeper into lower social strata, shredding incumbent structures of indigenous governance. When reforms of previous years were revoked, and the power of the crown – and its envoys in the highlands – was restored, villages rose up. In Cuzco, the royalist

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<sup>38</sup> I am grateful to Alfredo Avila for the account of José Vicente Gómez. "Proclamation to the People of Venezuela" (15 June, 1813) & SB to Governor of Curaçao, Valencia, 2 Oct, 1813, Harold Bierck Jr. (ed.), Selected Writings of Bolívar (New York: Colonial Press, 1951), pp. 31-32 & 37-43; Lynch, Simón Bolívar, p. 73.

<sup>39</sup> Sala de Touron et al., Artigas, pp. 175-232; Beraza, La economía, p. 75

cacique Mateo García Pumacahua – a former ally in the suppression of the 1780s, and again in 1808-09 – responded to the uprisings in the ayllus in opposition to Lima's tribute and tax demands to fund the war, and gave the armed opposition some lethal cohesion. When he did, the uprising spread more quickly. A crowd of Indians seized a five-year old José Rufino Echenique and his family from their uncle's estate south of Cuzco; one considerate attacker plucked the child from the mob as it murdered the rest of the family. In the ayllu of Ocongate, Indian villagers formed their own military unit which swelled to 3,000 men armed with farm tools and clubs ("buenos palos"), while local whites took refuge in the church. But seasoned royal troops eventually crushed the rebels, capturing and massacring thousands of prisoners. Pumacahua himself was executed in front of a mass of his followers. Abascal endorsed vicious reprisals. While Lima's armies eventually crushed the insurgency, the new Viceroy, Joaquín de la Pezuela, was still forced to lament several years later that "the opinion of the cholos and indios is not especially favorable to the King; and among the multitude of slaves they are openly siding with the rebels from whose hands they await their freedom." Montoneros prowled central Peru, guerrillas assaulted royal troops in the Mantaro Valley. The Viceroy's troops were deserting in droves.<sup>40</sup>

In joining sides en masse slaves changed the nature of political violence. Their claims radicalized ideologies. They manned militias and guerrillas. And they left old elites whose fortunes depended on their toil in ruins. But this was not a foreordained result. Peter Blanchard's work illustrates how in many colonies slaves remained loyal to the king. Ramón

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<sup>40</sup> AGI, Estado, Lima, 74/30, 12/11/1818, Pezuela to Secr de Estado; David Cahill & Scarlett O'Phelan Godoy, "Forging their Own History: Indian Insurgency in the Southern Peruvian Sierra, 1815," Bulletin of Latin American Research, 11:2 (May, 1992), pp. 125-167; Cahill, "Una vision andina: El levantamiento de Ocongate de 1815," Histórica, XII:2 (dic., 1988), pp. 133-159; Charles F. Walker, Smoldering Ashes: Cuzco and the Creation of Republican Peru, 1780-1840 (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 98-100; Peter F. Guardino, Peasants, Politics, and the Formation of Mexico's National State, Guerrero, 1800-1857 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 52-53 & 71.

Piñero joined Boves, “arms in hand” and “served with much love and faithfulness my king.” Domingo Ordoy, a slave in Montevideo, petitioned for his freedom in Peru, having served loyally in the defense of the River Plate. And not a few rallied to Boves and his commanders in Venezuela. The course of war, however, shifted allegiances. Revolutionaries trumped the supplicative ethos of kings with promises of freedom. Rebel after rebel promised to release slaves from bondage in return for their loyalty to the cause. As Artigas’ rebels encircled Montevideo in 1811, they promised freedom to all slaves belonging to Spaniards who joined the uprising. Francisco Estrada did, bolting from his master to march “under the flags of freedom.” Not all slaves joined the revolution; some seized the opportunity to flee all sides, starting with their masters. As rebel armies neared plantations along the Peruvian coast, slaves gathered their belongings and hit the road. And yet, innumerable captives joined the ranks of the armies, and would rise up in them as the war dragged on. What the process of Indian and slave mobilization did was transform the original patrician struggle into a vertical one in which plebeian sectors shaped the fate of sovereignty; it raised and altered the stakes of struggle to more than a conceptual displacement of the regime, but a shattering of the legal fundamentals that legitimated colonial exploitation. Early outrage against violations of a moral colonial code gave way to demands for equality that invoked ideas for new coda.<sup>41</sup>

Mobilizing plebeian sectors turned countrysides into theatres for a protracted, unwinnable warfare for the Spanish side. The result: avengers found themselves on perilous legal grounds. In the words of one, “we are merely the lords of the ground we walk on.” Viceroy, once heralded as saviors, were flooded with pleas from loyal subjects. Taxes, forced appropriations,

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<sup>41</sup> Peter Blanchard, “The Language of Liberation: Slave Voices in the Wars of Independence,” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 82:3 (Aug., 2002), pp. 499-523 & his full length study, *Under the Flags of Freedom: Slave Soldiers and the Wars of Independence in Spanish South America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008), p. 41.

and continued arrests became the source of local elites' obloquy. The Cabildo of Cuzco beseeched Lima to lift martial law and shadow of suspicion covering the region, and to respect the honor of its good subjects. Local appeals had echoes in the metropole, where ministers were growing increasingly anxious about the costs – financial as well as moral – of pacification. This was most acute where the campaign had driven into the sands of a savage civil war. Reports abounded of atrocities. Without salaries, soldiers had to resort to pillaging. (SEE AGI FILES FOR DETAIL) Even one of Morillo's officers, Colonel León Ortega, submitted a report to Madrid decrying the conditions of the army. By November 1817, authorities in Cartagena issued testimonies about "the violences" committed by the expeditionary troops. The Secretario de Estado suggested to the Minister of War that a proper Viceroy be sent to Santa Fé; for too long the provinces had been subjected to "the arbitrarinesses of the Chiefs and Subaltern Officers" of Morillo's armies. It is an "anti-political system." But the proposal to have civilian authorities restore governance while generals took care of insurgents got nowhere – in part because the end to the armed struggle seemed more remote than ever. The king stood steadfast behind his model of martial pacification. In 1817 and 1818, the king sent out a personal "memorial" to all his officials in the Americas to spurn all peace entreaties, especially offers of mediation. By then, Morillo's troops were on their heels everywhere, royal soldiers were soundly beaten in Chile, Lima's war on the republiquetas was grinding nowhere, and trade arteries of New Spain were under constant assault from guerrillas. Back in Madrid, the king did not flinch, that is until the regime he sought to restore collapsed under the weight of his own costly determination.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> AGI, Estado, Lima, 74/13, 29/04/1817, VC Pezuela to Secr de Estado; Santa Fé, 57/35. This is the file series that got lost in the mail; see AGI series cards 211-212; Estado, Americas, 88/3, "Memorial en nombre de Fernando VII."

Political violence made the process of imperial decomposition more and more concentric: the global contest between empires ignited wars within wars, revolutions within revolutions. It is important to remind ourselves that it did not begin with an epochal, irreversable colonial break with empire. What this essay has sought to do is to shine a light on the ways in which violence shaped the sequence that would bring down the fundamentals of empire. Instability created a struggle *for* power, and evolved into a struggle *about* power – and the nature of this instability provoked all sides to violent measures to put an end to it. It was not the exclusive recourse of one side or another. Ransackings, public slaying, desecration of bodies, and violent humiliations appeared from the outset in all camps as part of the repertoire, or rites, from the colonial period. Moreno called for sacrifice and bloodshed in Buenos Aires, while his nemesis, Viceroy Abascal in Lima, did the same. The events in Guadalajara anticipated what would become more widespread elsewhere as the struggle wore on: human bodies would become the site for resolving the increasing polarization of politics and the radicalization within competing coalitions. Boves and Artigas may have been at opposite ends of an ideological spectrum, and the former was unarguably more morbid in the delight he took in victimizing on a large scale, but the point is: they both were prepared to turn people who were once their neighbors into their victims. This escalation of killing and mutilating needs to be put alongside the institutional improvisations of the era, like a free press and new practices of representation, as shapers of political life as old regimes fell and new ones emerged.

But the escalation did so in a way that cannot be simply adduced to some basic psychology of a people who lacked civic traditions (though many like Bolívar would despair that what he had really freed were latent furies); we know of too many examples in history in which societies accustomed to living by civic rules quickly found themselves engulfed in carnage. The

history described in this essay represents a passage of a particular sort, from violence associated with acts of vengeance directed against particular agents (be they venal judges, predatory tax collectors, or rabble-rousing publicists) to avenging activities directed at groups. In the first instance, the bloodletting was more targeted, aiming to remove the wicked so that the virtuous may rule. But with time, vindictive violence gave way to vindicatory violence, which was more and more unbridled as people sought to set things straight by force to restore an old equilibrium or create a new one – and this was resolved less with a decisive triumph from one side, but the utter moral and fiscal collapse of the other. This is one of the reasons why the Morillo affaire is so revealing, for as the commander himself grew increasingly aware of the futility of his counter-insurgency campaigns, he was less and less able to conceive of a plausible alternative that would still uphold the original purpose of the expedition: to restore the righteous equilibrium of colonialism. In the meantime, his own troops resorted to atrocities that even the king's ministers agreed were defeating the purpose. As the circular logic of violence would have it, the atrocities were waved away as the unfortunate price that had to be paid to rid the empire of all sources of instability.<sup>43</sup>

These examples of collective violence are reminders that they are not necessarily “deviant” from the normal process of institutional politics, although they do have spiral features that surface when the ordinary structures of sovereignty are shattered. We can abhor them, and mourn the losses. But to treat them as the pathologies of ideology or the eruption of man's inner brutality misses the point – and the lessons that might be derived from the histories of which they were a part. For this reason, the accent is on *political* violence, which did not obey natural psychological laws or reveal the underlying mindlessness of large groups of armed people –

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<sup>43</sup> Stuart Carroll, Blood and Violence in Early Modern France (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 207.

whether they be angry crowds or petrified soldiers. It helps to understand the ways in which they thought what they were doing was legitimate as a precondition for performing and ritualizing savagery. We can remind ourselves of an observation made by Natalie Zemon Davis about a different context and time: “if we try to increase safety and trust within a community, try to guarantee that the violence it generates will take less destructive and cruel forms, then we must think less about pacifying ‘deviants’ and more about changing the central values.”<sup>44</sup> This was the challenge confronting the heirs of sovereignties created by violence – whose aftermaths face those for whom politics is still a matter of life and death.

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<sup>44</sup> “The Rites of Violence,” in her Society and Culture in Early Modern France (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), p. 187.