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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Circulating Political Information in Colombia: Written and Oral Communication Practices in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century

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Abstract

This article examines how people gathered and transmitted political information in Colombia during the second half of the nineteenth century. Existing scholarship has predominantly focused on the study of the press in Colombia and Latin America. However, few historians have explored other forms of information, such as telegrams, rumours and letters, or how Colombians combined these. By focusing on how various forms of information circulated through political, familial and commercial networks, this study offers a new dimension to our understanding of communications in Colombia. It argues that this was a period of increasing circulation of information due to social, political and economic change, as well as new links between oral and written practices. Thus, this article illuminates how Colombians circulated political information in a society of restricted literacy in post-colonial Latin America, offering new insights into politics, communications and the interplay between written and oral culture.

Keywords: communications; oral and written culture; circulation of information; Colombia; politics; nineteenth century

Introduction

This article explores how people gathered and transmitted political information in Colombia during the second half of the nineteenth century, focusing on the daily practice of circulating letters, telegrams and oral news. The period marks key changes in communications, beginning with the introduction of steam navigation on the Magdalena River in 1848 and concluding just before the arrival of radio in 1929: new agricultural colonisations, import–export trade, a busy electoral calendar fostering the expansion of the press, and the introduction of the telegraph and railroads.[1] Contemporaries left abundant records of their wide-ranging

[1]On these changes, see Marco Palacios, *La clase más ruidosa y otros ensayos sobre política e historia* (Bogotá: Editorial Norma, 2002); *El café en Colombia 1870–1950: Una historia económica, social y*

communication practices and networks in memoirs, official papers and the manuscript archives of politicians, merchants and military figures. By studying these sources, this article argues that the second half of the nineteenth century was a period of not only increasing circulation of political information in Colombia due to social, political and economic change, but also new links between oral and written communication practices. The correspondence of the Guardia Colombiana's officers (1862–86), Aquileo Parra, Salvador Camacho Roldán and José María Samper, among other prominent figures in commerce and politics, helps us redefine our concept of 'political information' in this period. What I term 'political information' includes a variety of ideas, news and topics (e.g., elections, Church matters, justice, conspiracies) that flowed through wide-ranging communication practices (e.g., letters, telegrams, printed matter, conversations, rumours) disseminated throughout society. Colombians employed different combinations of oral and written practices depending on class, literacy, epistolary customs, and political circumstances. In this context, the circulation of 'political information' included all levels of society and various spaces of sociability in towns, pueblos and rural landscapes. Colombians used written and oral practices throughout state and political channels which were imbricated in familial and commercial networks. Merchants, shopkeepers, women and peons also gathered and transmitted information about elections, the Church and rebellions, among other political issues, by playing the role of spies, correspondents and *postas* (messengers) on behalf of governments, landowners and states. This information was central to how politics and government functioned in Colombian society.

The question of how this information flowed, however, has not had a fully satisfactory answer. Some historians have concluded that this circulation was limited, stressing 'insurmountable physical barriers', 'geographical isolation', 'poor means of transportation', and a 'lack of communication', underlining Colombia's political fragmentation and deficient integration of its regional economies into a national market.[2] These interpretations about limited communication extrapolate from geographic, commercial and cultural conditions, but have not been drawn from analysis of communication networks and technologies. Moreover, some of the indicators used in these studies suggest challenges to communication but do not in fact demonstrate a lack thereof. Literacy rates, for example, do not offer definitive conclusions about the flow of information in societies that mainly used oral

política (Bogotá: Colmex; Ediciones Uniandes; Editorial Planeta, 2002); Eduardo Posada-Carbó, *The Colombian Caribbean: A Regional History, 1870–1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Richard Hyland, 'A Fragile Prosperity, Credit and Agrarian Structure in Cauca Valley, Colombia, 1851–1887', *Hispanic American Historical Review* (hereafter *HAHR*), 62: 3 (1982), pp. 369–406; Eduardo Posada-Carbó, 'Limits of Power: Elections under the Conservative Hegemony in Colombia, 1886–1930', *HAHR*, 77: 2 (1997), pp. 245–79.

[2]See Frank Safford, *Aspectos del siglo XIX en Colombia* (Bogotá: Ediciones Hombre Nuevo, 1977), p. 35; James Park, *Rafael Núñez and the Politics of Colombian Regionalism, 1863–1886* (Baton-Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1985); Jorge Orlando Melo, 'Vicisitudes del Modelo Liberal (1850–1899)', in José Antonio Ocampo (ed.), *Historia económica de Colombia* (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo Editores, Fedesarrollo, 1996), p. 127; Marco Palacios and Frank Safford, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

practices and linkages with written culture.[3] Recent scholarship has enriched our perspectives on the circulation of information in nineteenth-century Colombia and Latin America. While approximately 90 per cent of the Colombian population lived in pueblos at the end of the century, this did not mean that they did so in isolation.[4] Early on, historians of the late colonial period have uncovered different flows of oral and written information reaching port cities and villages.[5] In the new republic arising from the Spanish American revolutions, other scholars reveal that Colombians spread information to small villages through politics, the Church and local trade networks.[6] In particular, enslaved people, peasants and Indigenous people from remote villages relied on oral practices but also sent petitions to Congress and different authorities.[7] Recent social and cultural histories of politics and commercial networks imbricated with global economies further reveal that diverse people travelled throughout nineteenth-century Colombia and Latin America, bringing with them goods, foreign newspapers, letters and oral news to pueblos and haciendas.[8] This historiographical shift emphasising different forms of connections and communications has been given additional stimulus by studies of the press which have so far dominated the history of political information in Latin America.[9] These works have not only improved our understanding of nineteenth-

[3]Paris and British India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries offer points of comparison. See Robert Darnton, *Poetry and the Police: Communication Networks in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[4]Beatriz Castro Carvajal, 'La vida pública en las ciudades republicanas', in Beatriz Castro Carvajal (ed.), *Historia de la vida cotidiana en Colombia* (Bogotá: Editorial Norma, 1996), p. 242.

[5]See, for example, Cristina Soriano, *Tides of Revolution: Information, Insurgencies, and the Crisis of Colonial Rule in Venezuela* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2018); Marcela Echeverri, 'Popular Royalists, Empire, and Politics in Southwestern New Granada, 1809–1819', *HAHR*, 91: 2 (2011), pp. 237–69; Rebecca Earle, 'Information and Disinformation in Late Colonial New Granada', *The Americas*, 74: 1 (1997), pp. 167–84; Rebecca Earle (ed.), *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600–1945* (London: Routledge, 1999).

[6]Malcolm Deas, *Del poder y la gramática y otros ensayos sobre historia, política y literatura colombianas* (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo Editores, 1993); Michael F. Jiménez, 'La vida rural cotidiana en la República', in Castro Carvajal (ed.), *Historia de la vida cotidiana*, pp. 181–8; Nancy P. Appelbaum, 'Historias rivales: Narrativas locales de raza, lugar y nación en Riosucio', *Fronteras de la Historia: Revista de historia colonial latinoamericana*, 8 (Dec. 2003), pp. 111–29; María Teresa Calderón, *Aquella república necesaria e imposible: Colombia, 1821–1832* (Bogotá: Planeta, 2021).

[7]James Sanders, *Contentious Republicans: Popular Politics, Race, and Class in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Catherine LeGrand, *Frontier Expansion and Peasant Protest in Colombia, 1850–1936* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1986).

[8]See Ana María Otero-Cleves, 'Foreign Machetes and Cheap Cotton Cloth: Popular Consumers and Imported Commodities in Nineteenth-Century Colombia', *HAHR*, 97: 3 (2017), pp. 423–56; 'Jéneros de gusto y sobretodos ingleses: El impacto cultural del consumo de bienes ingleses por la clase alta bogotana del siglo XIX', *Historia Crítica*, 39: 1 (2009), pp. 20–45; James Sanders, *The Vanguard of the Atlantic World: Creating Modernity, Nation, and Democracy in Nineteenth-Century Latin America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Arnold J. Bauer, *Goods, Power, History: Latin America's Material Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[9]More recently, see: Corinna Zeltsman, 'Defining Responsibility: Printers, Politics, and the Law in Early Republican Mexico City', *HAHR*, 98: 2 (2018), pp. 189–222; Willie Hiatt, 'Indians in the Lobby: Newspapers and the Limits of Andean Cosmopolitanism, 1896–1930', *The Americas*, 68: 3 (2012), pp. 377–403; Pablo Piccato, *The Tyranny of Opinion: Honor in the Construction of the Mexican Public Sphere* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Paula Alonso (ed.), *Construcciones impresas:*

century communication networks but also shown the press' key political and educational role.

This article offers a new dimension to previous studies on political information in nineteenth-century Colombia and Latin America in two significant ways. First, it focuses on the linkages between oral and written practices following the introduction of new technologies (steam navigation and telegraph) in the second half of the nineteenth century, which accelerated and expanded communications; second, it analyses how Colombians gathered and transmitted political information through both political and state channels and those we traditionally associate with the economy, the family or commerce.[10] In this context, I see correspondence and telegrams as material objects that were carried by various people, but also as sources that reveal how both oral and written information reached audiences beyond the recipient. This article therefore contributes to illuminate how a literacy-restricted society communicated in post-colonial Latin America, highlighting the key role and interplay of correspondence, telegrams, rumours and conversations. By exploring these latter practices, I suggest that politics and public opinion in Colombia were not the monopoly of politicians and newspaper editors living in towns, but also the affair of military officers, shopkeepers, beggars and peasants, among others, who mobilised oral and written information in the pueblos and the rural world. Finally, this article seeks to nuance the 'lack of communication' that part of the Colombian historiography has tended to accentuate by showing diverse forms of connections, circulation of information, and how Colombians related to the written and political culture of their time.

In the first section, the correspondence from the Guardia Colombiana's higher ranks offers a vantage point from which to study how political information flowed through oral and written practices and their linkages. Their letters uncover how oral gossip was included in military reports; conversations retransmitted in different spaces of sociability, which included private houses, battalions and public squares; and correspondence exchanged between militaries and politicians. The manuscript archive of President Parra (1876–8) and other sources will allow us to explore how the telegraph changed and expanded the flow of political information in Colombia

Panfletos, diarios y revistas en la formación de los estados nacionales en América Latina, 1820–1920 (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2004); Eduardo Posada-Carbó, 'Newspapers, Politics, and Elections in Colombia, 1830–1930', *Historical Journal*, 53: 4 (2010), pp. 939–62; '¿Libertad, libertinaje, tiranía? La prensa bajo el Olimpo Radical en Colombia, 1863–1885', in Alonso (ed.), *Construcciones impresas*, pp. 183–201; François-Xavier Guerra, 'Epílogo. Interview with François-Xavier Guerra: Considerar el periódico mismo como un actor', *Debates y Perspectivas*, 3: 1 (2003), pp. 189–201; Victor Uribe-Urán, 'The Birth of a Public Sphere in Latin America during the Age of Revolution', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 42: 2 (2000), pp. 425–57; François-Xavier Guerra and Annick Lempérière (eds.), *Los espacios públicos en Iberoamérica: Ambigüedades y problemas. Siglos XVIII–XIX* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1998); Francisco A. Ortega Martínez and Alexander Chaparro Silva (eds.), *Disfraz y pluma de todos: Opinión pública y cultura política, siglos XVIII y XIX* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia; Facultad de Ciencias Humanas, Centro de Estudios Sociales; Universidad de Helsinki, 2012); Gilberto Loaiza Cano, 'Prensa y opinión en los inicios republicanos (Nuevo Reino de Granada, 1808–1815)', *Historia Crítica*, 42 (Sept.–Dec. 2010), pp. 54–83; Adrián Álzate, 'Pedagogía societaria en el régimen radical colombiano (1863–1878)', *Historia Crítica*, 42 (Sept.–Dec. 2010), pp. 182–203.

[10]On this occasion, I will not focus on petitions or sermons, which were also key communication practices then.

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in the late nineteenth century. By focusing on the private correspondence of Samper, Parra and Camacho Roldán, three relevant political and commercial figures from Santander, Cundinamarca and Tolima in this period, the second section explores how political information also circulated through commercial and familial networks, including the actors and spaces of sociability involved in this process.

State and Political Networks of Information

The second half of the nineteenth century marks key changes in the political history of Colombia with the abolition of slavery (1851); the expansion of universal manhood suffrage (1853); the growing mobilisation of popular groups in support of Liberal and Conservative parties and factions; a busy electoral calendar during the federal period (1863–86) and the Conservative hegemony (1886–1930); and the expansion of the press. A series of technological changes also improved and increased communications in Colombia during this period. One of them, so far unexplored by the historiography, was the introduction of the telegraph in 1865 under the Liberal-Radical government of Manuel Murillo Toro (1864–6). Along with correspondence, different governments considered the telegraph as an agent of opinion, news, commerce and good representative government.[11] The growing circulation of telegrams, moreover, challenges narratives of a 'lack of communication'. In 1871, 1,335 telegrams were dispatched in Colombia; two decades later there were 1.8 million sent, a higher figure than in Bolivia (127,000), Brazil (520,770), Denmark (1.2 million) and Portugal (1.7 million) and a relatively high number proportional to the national population of 2.7 million.[12] In 1913, that figure increased to 3.8 million telegrams received and dispatched through post offices. Bogotá, Barranquilla and Honda were the major information centres. This telegraphic explosion translated not only in numbers but also in diffusion: more than 600 municipalities and villages had telegraph offices by the beginning of the twentieth century.[13]

The manuscript archive of President Parra illuminates how the telegraph modified the perception of time and space in political communications. During the Conservative rebellion of 1876–7, following the creation of secular schools by the Liberal federal government in 1871, President Parra received dozens of daily telegrams sent from distant pueblos. In the Battle of Garrapata on 19–22 November 1876, for example, the use of the telegraph saved time and mitigated the consequence of distance. Several government agents, telegraphers, officers and soldiers of the Guardia Colombiana followed the battle's outcome, almost minute by minute, despite being separated by several days' journey. Towns located within two weeks' walk were now in contact within a few hours or days. 'It is 5 o'clock

[11]See, for example, *Informe del director jeneral de correos al poder ejecutivo para conocimiento del congreso federal de 1870* (Bogotá: Imprenta de Gaitán, 1870), pp. 13, 16, available at the Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia (hereafter BNC).

[12]*Informe del director jeneral de correos nacionales* (Bogotá: Imprenta de Echeverría Hermanos, 1871), p. 9, BNC; Julio Cuervo Márquez, *Enciclopedia de bolsillo arreglada para uso de los colombianos* (Bogotá: Casa Editorial de J. J. Pérez, 1891), p. 230; Castro Carvajal, 'La vida pública', p. 242.

[13]*Informe que el director general de correos y telégrafos rinde al señor ministro de gobierno, relativo al año administrativo de 1913 a 1914* (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1914), pp. 60–73, BNC.

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in the morning. Everything is ready for a battle that will begin at 8 or 9 o'clock. The army is happy and full of energy. The day has dawned splendidly. Today this horrible war will be decided', General Gabriel Reyes Patria from Facatativá, Cundinamarca, telegraphed to President Parra in Bogotá.[14] At nightfall, General Santos Acosta submitted the report from the distant battlefield in Garrapata, Tolima, to the federal government in Bogotá.[15] In less than a day, the telegraphers had transmitted the battle news to different towns of Cundinamarca.[16] Years later, a Liberal politician, who was in Bogotá then, recalled how he followed the battle in real time by telegrams addressed to President Parra: 'While I was chatting with other friends at the palace, the news was received in the president's private telegraph office and we were anxiously expecting to know the result of the great battle.'[17]

In addition to the telegraph, a growing number of letters and printed matter characterised the second half of nineteenth-century Colombia. Historians have shown how Colombian newspapers reached high circulation figures in comparison with other Latin American countries, although publications were often intermittent.[18] But the focus on the press has diverted our attention from other forms of political information and communication practices. Indeed, correspondence was another key part of information networks and the written culture that shaped public opinion. Letters were dispatched in similar numbers to printed material and served as the basis for many newspaper publications. In 1870, for example, 171,108 letters and 154,091 printed copies of leaflets and newspapers moved through federal post offices; in 1875, 322,401 letters and 323,367 printed copies.[19] The circulation of information was potentially even greater than these numbers indicate: the official figures did not register numerous personal channels for passing letters nor the multiplication of audiences through collective reading and loaning of correspondence.[20]

Elections and commerce increased the sheer volume of information in circulation. In contrast with the high freight rates for the transportation of goods and commodities, the Liberal-Radical governments of the federal period (1863–86) subsidised the mailing of letters and bore the cost of the distribution of printed material.[21]

[14]Gabriel Reyes Patria to Aquileo Parra, 21 Nov. 1876, Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, Bogotá (hereafter BLAA), Libros Raros y Manuscritos (hereafter LRM), Archivo Histórico de Aquileo Parra (herefter AHAP), box 4, folder 20, folio 303A.

[15]Santos Acosta to Aquileo Parra, 21 Nov. 1876, BLAA, LRM, AHAP, box 4, folder 20, folio 305A.

[16]Eleuterio González to Aquileo Parra, 22 Nov. 1876, BLAA, LRM, AHAP, box 4, folder 20, folio 322A.

[17]José María Quijano Wallis, *Memorias autobiográficas, histórico-políticas y de carácter social* (Bogotá: Editorial Incunables, 1984), pp. 273–5.

[18]Posada-Carbó, '¿Libertad, libertinaje, tiranía?', pp. 183–201.

[19]*Informe del director jeneral de correos i telégrafos nacionales al poder ejecutivo de la Unión* (Bogotá: Imprenta de 'El Tradicionista' por F. Ferro, 1875), p. 10, BNC; 'Informe del director jeneral de correos i telégrafos nacionales', in *Memoria del secretario de guerra i marina dirijida al presidente de los Estados Unidos de Colombia para el congreso de 1876* (Bogotá: Impresa por Cándido Pontón, 1876), pp. 5, 23.

[20]For some of these practices, see Rafael Núñez, Manuel Montúfar and other Guardia Colombiana officers' letters in Archivo General de la Nación, Bogotá (hereafter AGN), Archivo de la Academia Colombiana de Historia (hereafter AACH), Biografía de José María Botero, Cartas a Rafael Núñez, box 14, folder 56, folios 1–112.

[21]*Informe del director* (1871), p. 14; *Informe del director* (1875), pp. 22–3.

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This growth in circulation was matched by the expansion of mail routes. During the federal period, correspondence spread through main cities by means of eight direct national postal routes linking them (Atlantic, South, Pacific, West, Honda, North, Northeast, San Martín).[22] The smaller pueblos were included in these networks, too. Cundinamarca and Tolima, for example, respectively registered 46 and 27 weekly mail routes connecting distant villages.[23] There were occasional losses and delays, but the postal lines operated with regularity and, in fact, greater speed than the transport of goods.[24] Even the Conservative rebellion of 1876–7 did not stop this flow of communications, despite interrupting trade and contacts between the interior and the Atlantic coast, through the Magdalena River.[25]

In this context of increasing telegrams and postal connections, the correspondence among officers of the Guardia Colombiana (1862–86) illuminates in more detail how information spread through state and political channels. This small federal army, ranging from 1,000 to 5,000 soldiers stationed in different states, had the duty of 'watching over' public order under the Rionegro Constitution of 1863.[26] The Guardia Colombiana enjoyed a privileged degree of training, arms and literacy (about 40 per cent of the troops in the 1870s) compared to both rebels and state militias.[27] Due to these conditions and their well-known commitment to the Liberal cause, the officers and soldiers were important political actors, whether as electoral agents, spies, correspondents, voters or simply preservers of public order.[28] Their correspondence enabled these men to gather and spread more detailed information to distant territories. It also facilitated the existence and sociability of political circles. Thus, the officers' letters played a key role in the federal army as well as in Colombian society and had the dual role of being a means of communication and a political practice. Their correspondence also shows the links between written and oral political information.

The letters of Julián Trujillo, chief general of the Guardia Colombiana (1880–2), show a diversity of links between oral and written communications. Trujillo, resident in Bogotá, received correspondence from officers stationed in Medellín,

[22]*Informe del director* (1870), pp. 3–5.

[23]*El Diario de Cundinamarca*, Bogotá, 148 (26 April 1870), pp. 589–91; *El Constitucional: Periódico oficial del Estado Soberano del Tolima*, Ibagué, 29 (4 Jan. 1869), pp. 136–7.

[24]*Informe del director* (1870), p. 14.

[25]During the Conservative rebellion of 1876–7, 290,935 letters and 357,485 pieces of printed material circulated throughout Colombia, a similar figure to the previous year. 'Informe del director jeneral de correos nacionales', in *Memoria del secretario de guerra i marina dirijida al presidente de la Unión para el congreso de 1877* (Bogotá: Imprenta de Medardo Rivas, 1877), pp. 28, 42.

[26]Nine sovereign states: Antioquia, Bolívar, Boyacá, Cauca, Cundinamarca, Magdalena, Panamá, Santander, Tolima. For the number of soldiers, see Patricia Pinzón de Lewin, *El ejército y las elecciones: Ensayo histórico* (Bogotá: Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Colombiana (CEREC), 1994).

[27]*Memoria del secretario de guerra i marina al congreso nacional, en sus sesiones de 1872* (Bogotá: Imprenta de Gaitán, 1872), pp. 15–16; 'Número 7, Relación de los individuos de la División que saben leer i escribir', in *Informe del secretario de guerra i marina al ciudadano presidente de los Estados Unidos de Colombia, para el Congreso de 1874* (Bogotá: Imprenta de Gaitán, 1874), p. 19; Ricardo Donoso (ed.), *José Antonio Soffia en Bogotá* (Bogotá: Instituto Caro y Cuervo, 1976), p. 48.

[28]The federal army maintained public order during the deposition of President Tomás C. Mosquera (1867), the Conservative rebellion (1876–7), and the Radical rebellion in Antioquia (1879). In other cases, however, it contributed to disturbing it, including the overthrow of the governments of Panama (1865, 1875, 1879) and Magdalena (1879).

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Honda, Popayán, Buga and Barranquilla. Their reports paid special attention to descriptions of the acts, gestures, sociability and communications of both his political adversaries and other members of the Guardia Colombiana. These letters reveal the interplay of a diversity of practices (rumours, conversations, letters, printed matter, telegrams) and spaces of sociability (houses, streets and public squares), as well as linkages between oral and written culture. Far from reinforcing the traditional image of isolated communities, Trujillo's correspondence suggests various – and sometimes incessant – contacts.

The officers of the Guardia Colombiana paid special attention to *chismes* (gossip) about elections and conspiracies. This oral information was valuable because it suggested the popularity of a candidate, the likelihood of a rebellion, and the community's consensus toward a local government or political circle. These men gathered *chismes* from their own friends and relations, as well as from passers-by, neighbours and rebels. In addition to suggesting the links between information and sociability, their letters reveal how easily people (and information) passed from oral to written culture, from local to national spheres of interest. The officers retransmitted the gossip gathered from the streets to distant places. For example, in 1880, General Agustín María Venegas, from Buga, Cauca, informed Trujillo in Bogotá of how he and another officer were being discredited by anonymous rumours disseminated in Buga:

> Three people have already told me (although I do not believe anything because this is the land of gossip), that they [people in Buga] are thinking of removing Barreto and me from those usually cheered. Yet I have given credit to nothing because everything is told to me demanding that I do not disclose their names; but I do notice that they hate us.[29]

The Guardia Colombiana's correspondence also shows that military officers were interested in identifying and informing on their political adversaries. At times, the officers presented themselves as impartial barometers of opinion, but their letters often reveal that information was filtered according to their own prejudices and interests. Spying on and profiling both Liberal-Independent and Conservative figures was part of their day-to-day business. In their letters, allusions to rumours, spies and conspirators were repeated; they outlined names, stories and conspiratorial locations. Other Colombians also had a penchant for spying on their neighbours and political enemies. In a letter, Venegas assured Trujillo that the Liberal-Radicals spied on the Liberal-Independents and conspired repeatedly in Buga and in other cities of Cauca: 'You are aware that Ricardo Gaitán, *el negro* [*sic*] Aguilera, Jorge Álvarez and others – all of them revolutionaries of Antioquia – are around here and, without any cover, they attend meetings, like in Cali, in the house of Rafael de la Pedraza; that they spy and conspire; that they wanted to make the troop of the 14th battalion desert.'[30]

[29]Agustín María Venegas to Julián Trujillo, 8 Dec. 1880, AGN, Fondo Enrique Ortega Ricaurte (hereafter FEOR), General y Civiles (Julián Trujillo) (hereafter GCJT), box 94, folder 70, folios 280–415.

[30]Agustín María Venegas to Julián Trujillo, 24 Nov. 1880, AGN, FEOR, GCJT, box 93, folder 65, folios 328–30.

The communications of the Guardia Colombiana, often based on personal observations and oral testimonies, serve as a reminder that the written information that circulated could have a great degree of detail. Venegas, resident in Buga, knew of Conservative and Liberal-Radical meetings in Cali and Popayán. Such espionage also fell on the battalions themselves because the men composing them often had fleeting political allegiances. The Guardia Colombiana started out as mostly being Liberal-Radical but split with the creation of the Liberal-Independent Party, whose first national candidate, Rafael Núñez, aspired to the federal presidency in 1875 following his return from consular duties in Britain.[31] These two Liberal parties diverged on Church matters, order, the size of the federal army, centralisation, suffrage, and individual liberties. Since that 1875 election, which saw the triumph of the Liberal-Radical Parra, an electoral – and sometimes rebellious – competition between these two parties dominated Colombian federal and state politics until 1886, when the Conservative Party rose once again to national power after more than two decades in the shadows. With the presidencies of the Liberal-Independents Trujillo (1878–80) and Núñez (1880–82), the Guardia Colombiana became more Liberal-Independent, although internal divisions proliferated, and no one managed to hold absolute control. These dynamics can be observed in their communication networks. In 1879, officers in Barranquilla warned Trujillo, who was in Bogotá, that some commanders travelling along the Magdalena River posed as Liberal-Independents when in fact they were Liberal-Radicals, threatening to extract valuable information for elections and rebellions.[32] A year later, Venegas compiled useful details (e.g., the political affiliation of local authorities, *vecinos* and subaltern officials) to contribute to an electoral triumph in Cauca for the Liberal-Independents. His letters to Trujillo shared information about his non-commissioned officers: 'Captain Santacoloma is a swellhead, pretentious, and with family here which distracts him from his duties. He rarely stays in the barracks, according to the reports I have, and also does not inspire confidence because of his background [former Liberal-Radical].'[33] In a world where political loyalties were fleeting, spying on subordinates such as Captain Santacoloma was a useful electoral practice for men like Venegas to discern who were really friends or adversaries within the army. These detailed reports depended on a great flow of conversations taking place at the local level: Venegas noted about his informants, 'it is always good to be surrounded by people in whom one has confidence; and above all in Buga where conspiracy is constant'.[34]

The Guardia Colombiana's political communications also allow us to have a different perspective on the spaces which linked oral and written information. In the absence of coffee houses, restaurants and theatres – which in the early twentieth century would become more common in the cities but not in the pueblos – these letters show that private houses and battalions were key spaces of sociability and exchange of political information. News circulated by way of conversations, but

[31]For this campaign, see Eduardo Posada-Carbó, 'Elections and Civil Wars in Nineteenth-Century Colombia: The 1875 Presidential Campaign', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 26: 3 (1994), pp. 621–49.

[32]Heraclio D. Osuna to Julián Trujillo, 28 April 1879, AGN, FEOR, GCJT, box 93, folder 65, folios 215–17.

[33]Agustín María Venegas to Julián Trujillo, 24 Nov. 1880, AGN, FEOR, GCJT, box 93, folder 65, folios 328–30.

[34]*Ibid.*

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also through links with written culture: lending and collective reading of letters and newspapers.[35] The Guardia Colombiana's officers also talked to politicians in electoral boards, meetings, dinners, and banquets organised in private homes.[36] At times, when it came to planning elections, solving government affairs, conspiring and escaping from espionage, contemporaries found that conversations in private homes were safer than conversations in streets and letters that were vulnerable to requisitions, theft and espionage.[37] Therefore, it should not surprise us that some officers met in Venegas' home to solve a political quarrel on Christmas Day 1880. 'They came and not without overcoming difficulties, I got them to give each other a hug', Venegas confessed to Trujillo.[38]

The correspondence of the Guardia Colombiana's officers also illuminates how political information circulated in the streets in different ways. Conversations and outdoor readings aloud of pamphlets and decrees proliferated while numerous walls were covered with leaflets.[39] In this society of restricted literacy, links between oral and written communications happened daily and were rarely censored. The freedom of speech and association enshrined in the Liberal Constitution of 1863 encouraged the expansion of oral and written political expression, even including libel and false information.[40] From Buga, Colonel Federico Barreto informed Trujillo how he was forced to tolerate the insults of his political adversaries to avoid further retaliation against the Liberal-Independent government of President Núñez in 1880: 'I have done nothing but ignore them, and watch over them, always trying to prevent an imprudence from causing the government annoyance, because in cases like the current ones, nothing else can be done.'[41] Barreto's attitude to the insults he received on that occasion suggests that federal authorities protected freedom of speech in the streets, even though it was sometimes unfavourable to their political cause and honour.[42]

The Guardia Colombiana's correspondence also points out how oral information spread in public squares and according to the local calendar. Market day was the busiest day in towns and villages, but meetings in the public squares

[35]Rafael Núñez to Luis Carlos Rico, 7 July 1879, BLAA, LRM, Cartas dirigidas por Rafael Núñez al Dr. Luis Carlos Rico, de 1876 hasta 1893 y otras cartas dirigidas a Núñez por diferentes personas de 1878 hasta 1891, folio 17.

[36]See, for example, Francisco Javier Zaldúa to Julián Trujillo, 26 Sept. 1881, AGN, FEOR, GCJT, box 93, folder 66, folio 489.

[37]'General Trujillo does not tell me anything about the ministry, nor does Pablo. Surely they are afraid to include state secrets in a letter.' Rafael Núñez to Luis Carlos Rico, 5 Nov. 1878, BLAA, LRM, Cartas dirigidas por Rafael Núñez […], folio 5.

[38]Agustín María Venegas to Julián Trujillo, 24 Dec. 1880, AGN, FEOR, GCJT, box 94, folder 70, folios 280–415.

[39]Ernst Röthlisberger, *El Dorado* (Bogotá: Biblioteca Colcultura, 1993), pp. 126, 131–2; Alfred Hettner, *Viajes por los Andes colombianos (1882–1884)* (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1976), p. 75; Luis María Mora, *Croniquillas de mi ciudad* (Bogotá: Biblioteca Banco Popular, 1972), pp. 49–50, 258; *El Soberano*, Ocaña, 2 (27 April 1879), p. 5.

[40]For the freedom of speech and association, see Manuel Antonio Pombo and José Joaquín Guerra, *Constituciones de Colombia*, vol. 1 (Bogotá: Biblioteca del Banco Popular, 1986), pp. 132–3.

[41]Federico Barreto to Julián Trujillo, 6 Dec. 1880, AGN, FEOR, GCJT, box 94, folder 70, folio 739.

[42]For broader reflections on freedom of speech in this period, see Jorge Orlando Melo, 'La libertad de prensa escrita en Colombia: Pasado y perspectivas actuales', available at www.jorgeorlandomelo.com/libertad_prensa.htm, last access 10 Feb. 2023; Posada-Carbó, '¿Libertad, libertinaje, tiranía?', pp. 196–7.

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were not limited to those days.[43] In Bogotá, news was discussed in the famous Altozano, the atrium of the cathedral, crowded with politicians, merchants, soldiers, students, women and beggars.[44] The rumours which originated there reached such a degree of diffusion that some Guardia Colombiana high-ranking officers dismissed bits of information during the Conservative rebellion of 1876–7 because they were 'one of the many buffooneries that the Altozano people of Bogotá say'.[45] The Altozano is relevant not only because it shows that conversations in public spaces moved from oral to written culture and circulated to distant places by means of letters, telegrams and travellers (who are discussed in the second section), but also because the information produced in those spaces of sociability had political consequences. In 1885, for example, three Liberal-Radical second-lieutenants of the Guardia Colombiana faced a judicial trial after conspiring with neighbours and women in the Altozano against the second government of Núñez (1884–6).[46]

In nineteenth-century Colombia, the flow of political information was so widespread that contemporaries resorted to using secret codes. Throughout this period, the correspondence of politicians, merchants and the Guardia Colombiana was spied on, opened and, in electoral and revolutionary periods, intercepted. In this context of insecurity, many were forced to modify their oral and written practices of communication. For politicians and military figures, secret codes were key to developing successful plans amid espionage. During the election campaign for the federal presidency in 1879, the Liberal-Independent Núñez planned to overthrow the Liberal-Radical government of Luis A. Robles, president of Magdalena state, with the help of the Guardia Colombiana. Núñez took care that the plan, discussed in writing, did not fall into the wrong hands. For this, Núñez used a numerical series in his letters. Referring to Robles' successful overthrow, Núñez confessed to his friends under the cover of secret codes: 'The plan was infernal, and only God has saved us.'[47] These practices of secret written communication were widespread. At the height of the Conservative rebellion of 1876–7, Liberal telegraphers left traces of another type of code in the telegrams, which remain undecipherable, addressed to the federal government: 'The peach previously obtained would be almost fruitless. Chirimoya again sends to the Tambo. From Popayán two battalions have left without order on their way to balcony. There is (says the letter) enough Tumaco between Chirimoyas of Boston the apostles that have been started although the public does not know the gospels.'[48]

Another way of protecting written information that emerged from the correspondence of the Guardia Colombiana's officers was the use of pseudonyms. This widespread practice among newspaper writers was also embraced in electoral and

[43]Castro Carvajal, 'La vida pública', pp. 256–8.

[44]Röthlisberger, *El Dorado*, p. 132.

[45]Santos Acosta to Aquileo Parra, 10 Dec. 1876, BLAA, LRM, AHAP, box 4, folders 20–6, folio 609A.

[46]'Causa criminal contra los subtenientes Cayo Forero, Lisandro Pérez, y Carlos Copete, por espías, rebelión y sedición (1885)', AGN, Fondo Asuntos Criminales, folder 73, folios 955–1049.

[47]Rafael Núñez to Luis Carlos Rico, 7 July 1879, BLAA, LRM, Cartas dirigidas por Rafael Núñez […], folio 17.

[48]Enrique Cortés and Francisco Marulanda to Aquileo Parra, 14 Dec. 1876, BLAA, LRM, AHAP, box 1, folder 8, folio 53.

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revolutionary periods by the military, rebels and politicians in their letters well into the late nineteenth century.[49] However, pseudonyms were not used to avoid censorship but rather to cover up individual identity. During rebellions, these practices were key to transmitting written messages, infiltrating the enemy camp, spying and gathering information about armies.[50] At other times, such as elections, they were used to spread false news stories or slander political opponents. In several cases, the pseudonyms jeopardised candidacies, friendships and reputations, as illustrated in the case of some officers of the Guardia Colombiana, accused of being Liberal-Radicals by an anonymous letter of 1880. Faced with Trujillo's concern about his loyalty to the Liberal-Independent cause, Venegas sought to undermine the credibility of the person writing the anonymous letter: 'Nothing will suffice to obscure my name, enveloping it with treason, for I have never been a man to hold two different opinions and there is no gold in the world with which I can be bought.'[51]

As we have seen, the Guardia Colombiana correspondence has shed light on the flow of political information in Colombia through state and political channels of communication in the second half of the nineteenth century. Depending on the context, epistolary customs, and material and cultural constraints, officers used different written and oral practices and spaces of sociability to inform and be informed. President Parra's telegrams and official reports further nuance ideas about the 'lack of communication' reproduced in much of Colombian historiography, especially in a period of growing circulation of the press, correspondence, and the expansion of the telegraph. However, if we are to fully understand how political information was gathered and transmitted in nineteenth-century Colombia, we must also look at commercial and family networks for another part of the answer.

Commercial and Familial Channels of Information

Oral and written political information in Colombia was not only limited to state and political channels in the second half of the nineteenth century, such as those of the Guardia Colombiana, but also circulated through commercial and familial networks. Politicians and public employees were themselves engaged in import, export and retail businesses.[52] This intersection is meaningful because the communication channels that we might classify as 'political' were often enmeshed with 'commercial' ones and, conversely, disentangling them would offer a misleading picture not only of communications, but also of Colombian society. Politicians in

[49]See the series of letters between 'Fabio', 'Marcelo' and 'Rodríguez' with 'Lunes' in the Thousand Days War (1899–1902). See box 2, folders 10 and 11 of BLAA, LRM, AHAP. For the relationship between politicians, the press and literature, see Rubén Pérez Ortiz, *Seudónimos colombianos* (Bogotá, Instituto Caro y Cuervo, 1976).

[50]Enrique de Narváez, *Los mochuelos: Recuerdos de 1877–1878* (Bogotá: Caja del Crédito Agrario Industrial y Minero, 1973), pp. 39–40; 'Un Rojo' to 'Un Amigo', 6 Sept. 1876, BLAA, LRM, AHAP, box 2, folder 9, folio 46.

[51]Agustín María Venegas to Julián Trujillo, 8 Dec. 1880, AGN, FEOR, GCJT, box 94, folder 70, folio 354.

[52]For some pioneering reflections on the link between politics and trade in Colombia, see Safford, *Aspectos del siglo XIX*, pp. 52–3.

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Magdalena state, such as Tomás Abello and Manuel Abello, were also merchants; in Honda and Cauca, the Pereira Gambas; and in Antioquia, the Ospinas, among other families. This interconnection between politics and commerce was not a peculiarity of the wealthiest merchants. On the contrary, small commercial interests helped to pave the way into local politics. For example, before standing out among the Liberal-Radicals, Parra achieved notoriety as a peddler at the fairs of Magangué.[53] Likewise, many Conservative politicians in Antioquia began as local retail traders.[54] These men had a keen interest in political information not only because they were often military, politicians or public employees, but also because politics and war affected their businesses. Information relevant to and about their commercial channels (fincas, merchant trading houses and retail shops) was important in both economic and political activities, even at the local level. Thus, in contrast to traditional approaches to nineteenth-century communications, this section emphasises the important place of trade and family networks (actors, routes and spaces of sociability) in the circulation of political information, while still emphasising new links between oral and written practices.

Various archives show how merchants and their families spread oral and written political news. These merchant families frequently wrote to their friends, clients, relatives, dependents and workers about political and economic events.[55] While busy with his commercial affairs, Samper – then a Conservative politician and editor of *El Deber* (1878–81) – found time to address letters to other politicians in 1879: 'Today I am writing at length to [Carlos] Martínez Silva; I had written to [Carlos] Holguín, D. Sergio and others and I will continue with everyone in turn, depending on the available time.'[56] The Liberal merchant Samuel J. Lemus, for example, wrote letters to political figures shortly before the Thousand Days War (1899–1902), the biggest and deadliest civil war between nineteenth-century Liberals and Conservatives in Colombia: 'Your prestige', he said to the Liberal politician Parra, 'well deserved by the way, is noticeable in these towns and the correspondence I brought has been read by the most notable of our party.'[57] By sharing letters and newspapers, merchants like Lemus further reached an audience beyond the original recipient. These information channels were supplemented by the merchants' wives, who also disseminated both oral and written political information. Francisco de Paula Borda, the Liberal-Radical diplomat and politician, recalled their important role during General José María Melo's coup in 1854, which was triggered by congressional moves to reduce the size of the army and the national guards under José María Obando's Liberal government: 'The unrest in the city was unprecedented. Buying arms, transporting them, hiding them; agitating public opinion, causing alarm and sending fake news all over the country, was the constant activity of women.'[58]

[53]Aquileo Parra, *Memorias* (Bucaramanga: Gobernación de Santander, 2000), pp. 39–42.

[54]Roger Brew, *El desarrollo económico de Antioquia desde la independencia hasta 1920* (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1977), pp. 41–2, 77.

[55]See, for example, Fernando Vallejo (ed.), *José Asunción Silva: Cartas (1881–1896)* (Bogotá: Ediciones Casa Silva, 1996), pp. 7–52.

[56]José María Samper to Soledad Acosta, 3 May 1879, Archivo del Gimnasio Moderno, Bogotá (hereafter AGM). This archive was not catalogued by boxes, folders or folios when I visited in 2017.

[57]Samuel J. Lemus to Aquileo Parra, n.d. (probably 1899), BLAA, LRM, AHAP, box 2, folder 11, folio 41.

[58]Francisco de Paula Borda, *Conversaciones con mis hijos*, vol. 1 (Bogotá: Banco Popular, 1974), p. 61.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, growing trade routes expanded the channels through which political information circulated. Merchant houses (*casas comerciales*) were key because they increasingly moved goods, national and foreign newspapers, and correspondence to the pueblos.[59] We still do not have precise data, but several dozens of them were operating at the end of the century. An 1887 brochure from Bogotá lists 71 Colombian and foreign merchant houses.[60] A provincial city like Bucaramanga, which enjoyed economic prosperity attributable to coffee cultivation, had 31 merchant houses from businesses based in Colón, Bogotá, Ocaña and Rionegro in 1890.[61] Other studies show that the trading house of General Rafael Reyes, 'Elías Reyes & Hermanos' of Popayán, had business in Pasto and agencies in the towns of Cauca.[62] Francisco Vargas, a powerful merchant from Bogotá, sold a substantial part of his goods to the smaller retailers of the provinces. His trading house had agents on the Atlantic coast and Honda. Most of his sales took place in Bucaramanga, but he sold in several pueblos across different regions: Puerto Nacional, Moniquirá, San Gil, Socorro, Neiva, La Palma, Anapoíma, Cali and Garagoa.[63] Landowners, priests, carpenters, tailors, muleteers, peons and blacksmiths were included among his customers.[64] Despite geographic fragmentation, these merchant houses remind us that goods, and with them communications, increasingly reached the towns and remote pueblos.

The emergence of new provincial and local trade routes was also fundamental to spreading political information to the towns. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, new agricultural colonisations (e.g. tobacco in Ambalema; quinine in Santander; coffee in Antioquia and Caldas) fostered shifting connections and movement of people. For example, in the 1850s–1860s, Ambalema's tobacco fields brought together many people who exchanged oral news and written material. While in Ambalema, at the height of the tobacco boom, the merchant and Liberal politician Samper received newspapers published in Santander and decided to contribute to *El Cabrión* of Ocaña, a political and literary newspaper. In 1853, he wrote to the editor: 'If by chance my activities allow me to do so and I am in the mood, I will send you something for your wonderful newspaper. The article "Las Coquetas" [*sic*] is a masterpiece.'[65] The people and information that Ambalema once attracted began to wane in the 1860s due to Europe's growing preference of

[59]See Baldomero Sanín Cano, *De mi vida y otras vidas* (Bogotá: Ediciones Revista de América, 1949), pp. 44–5, 220; Bauer, *Goods, Power, History*, pp. 129–64.

[60]Excluding those from Bogotá: three from Panama, nine from Barranquilla, seven from Cartagena, 15 from Medellín, 35 from Bucaramanga, seven from Ocaña, five from Pamplona and 20 from Cúcuta. Brochure included in *Catálogo de la Librería Colombiana* (Bogotá: Camacho Roldán & Tamayo, 1887).

[61]Amado Antonio Guerrero Rincón and Maribel Avellaneda Nieves, 'La élite empresarial de Santander (1880–1912)', in Carlos Dávila Ladrón de Guevara (ed.), *Empresas y empresarios en la historia de Colombia: Siglos XIX y XX*, vol. 1 (Bogotá: Norma; CEPAL; Ediciones Uniandes, 2002), pp. 150–1.

[62]María Mercedes Botero Restrepo, 'Casas comerciales y circuitos mercantiles. Antioquia: 1842–1880', *Sociedad y Economía*, 12 (June 2007), p. 101.

[63]Frank Safford, 'El comercio de importación en Bogotá en el siglo XIX: Francisco Vargas, un comerciante de corte inglés', in Dávila Ladrón de Guevara, *Empresas y empresarios*, p. 393; Botero Restrepo, 'Casas comerciales', pp. 104, 107–8.

[64]Botero Restrepo, 'Casas Comerciales', pp. 104, 107–8; Otero-Cleves, 'Jéneros de gusto'.

[65]José María Samper to *El Cabrión* editor, 6 April 1853, BLAA, LRM, Archivo de Lázaro María Pérez, box 2, folder 3, folio 22.

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Java's and Sumatra's cheaper tobacco production. Other commercial centres, however, took off in Colombia, opening new regional trade and communications. Tobacco production in Carmen de Bolivar doubled the population of several districts and brought together harvesters, politicians, merchants and local traders.[66] Commercial agents then went up and down the villages buying and selling goods and gathering and passing on information.[67] Nonetheless, these trade routes were unstable and subject to different social, environmental, political and economic conditions. Rainy seasons bogged down the roads of Quindío, Cauca, the Atlantic coast, and *llanos* (plains) of San Martín, causing the delay of goods, mules, cattle, crops and post for days and weeks.[68] But by the end of the century, other trade routes emerged with the potential to carry more political information: the Atlantic coast cattle routes, the region's most important business, found consumers in the towns and haciendas of Antioquia, Cauca and Tolima, and to a lesser extent Boyacá, Cauca and Nariño; the old routes of Antioquia that had bought tobacco, mules, horses, cocoa and woollen cloth southward from Ambalema, Cauca, Cundinamarca, Socorro and Boyacá revived with the cattle trade; to the south-east, Antioquia's agricultural settlements opened up new exchanges with Nariño.[69]

The Magdalena River was, in fact, the trade lane and news route par excellence. It brought together the surrounding valleys with close to 3 million inhabitants out of a national population of approximately 3.6 million in 1887. Nearly 700,000 Colombians settled within 50 kilometres of the Magdalena River; almost a third of the country's population.[70] The numerous stops along the river were ports of entry for goods, communications and travellers heading to Cundinamarca, Santander, Antioquia, Boyacá, Cauca and Tolima.[71] People distributed leaflets and transmitted oral news during elections, while peons, muleteers, travellers and a handful of railroads carried news into the inland regions.[72] From 1848 onwards, the beginning of steam navigation on the Magdalena River accelerated not only international and provincial trade but also political communications between the ports of Sabanilla and Honda. Gone were the two-month voyages on *champanes* (large wooden boats), small canoes and *bongos* (local large canoes); now trips generally took between eight days up and four days down, the mail-steamer being the fastest of all.[73] About 15 domestic and foreign steamer companies operated between

[66]Posada-Carbó, *The Colombian Caribbean*, pp. 43–4.

[67]Sergio Paolo Solano, 'Ganaderos y comerciantes: El manejo del poder político en el Estado Soberano de Bolívar (Colombia), 1857–1886', *Historia y Sociedad*, 18 (Jan. 2010), pp. 15–42.

[68]For the Atlantic coast, see Posada-Carbó, *The Colombian Caribbean*, pp. 155–7.

[69]Eduardo Posada-Carbó, 'Empresarios y ganaderos en la Costa Atlántica (1850–1950)', in Dávila Ladrón de Guevara, *Empresas y empresarios*, p. 68; Botero Restrepo, 'Casas comerciales', p. 102.

[70]Salvador Camacho Roldán, *Notas de viaje*, vol. 1 (Bogotá: Talleres Gráficos del Banco de la República, 1973), pp. 44–5, 50–2.

[71]Stops included Nare, Calamar, Barrancabermeja, Simití, Puerto Berrío, Puerto Wilches, Puerto Santos, Tamelameque, El Banco, Magangué and Tenerife. Camacho Roldán, *Notas de viaje*, pp. 174–87.

[72]Francisco J. Gómez, *Los electores del Cerro de San Antonio a sus conciudadanos* (Barranquilla: Imprenta de los Andes, 1868).

[73]Frank Safford, 'El problema de los transportes en Colombia en el siglo XIX', in Adolfo Meisel and María Teresa Ramírez (eds.), *Economía colombiana del siglo XIX*, vol. 1 (Bogotá: FCE; Banco de la República, 2010), p. 527. For shorter trips, see Julio H. Palacio, *Historia de mi vida* (Bogotá: Editorial Incunables, 1982), p. 180; Camacho Roldán, *Notas de viaje*, p. 84; Wirt Robinson, *A Flying Trip to the*

1850 and 1900, surrounded by *bongos* and canoes.[74] The growing number of steamers multiplied from ten in 1873 to 38 in 1913.[75] The journey time nonetheless depended on the captains' punctuality, the purchase of goods, local festivities, the tropical summer and the rainy currents that knocked down the trees and jammed them in the river bed, stranding the steamers and delaying the voyages up to 15 days.[76] Despite these delays, at the end of the century, the port of Honda came to be recognised as a commercial and political information hub between Barranquilla and the inland regions, receiving goods, correspondence, newspapers and travellers from Europe, the United States, the Caribbean and provinces such as Cundinamarca, Caldas, Cauca and Antioquia.[77]

From the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, the growing import and local trade routes serve as a salutary reminder that export routes – until recently the predominant subject of study in Colombian economic history – represented a limited part of both the economies of this period and the trade channels through which Colombians circulated political information.[78] Local and import trade provide new insights into connections in Colombia. Peasants, muleteers, peddlers, retail traders, steamer captains, and trading houses moved goods to pueblos, bringing a tidal wave of oral and written news. These were not necessarily small economic markets and information channels. Imports doubled the volume of exports; in fact, the great fortunes of the time were rooted in the import trade.[79] These commercial networks deserve further study in connection with the circulation of information.

By focusing now on steamers, roads, shops, stores and fincas as spaces of sociability along commercial routes, we can see in greater detail different links between oral and written practices of communication. On the Magdalena steamers, for example, travellers on board exchanged both domestic and foreign news, as the Liberal politician José María Quijano Wallis recalled: 'He [Núñez] almost always came over to talk to me about politics, finance and literature. He once asked me: "What interesting books have you brought?"'[80] On the other hand, the steamers' captains also reveal the importance of these commercial channels in the flow of political information. Some of these captains, also merchants, moved goods, correspondence, and talked with passengers.[81] During the Conservative rebellion of

Tropics: Record of an Ornithological Visit to the United States of Colombia, South America and to the Island of Curaçao West Indies in the Year 1892 (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1895), p. 122.

[74]Eduardo Posada-Carbó, 'Bongos, champanes y vapores en la navegación fluvial colombiana del siglo XIX', *Boletín Cultural y Bibliográfico*, 21: 26 (1989), pp. 7–13.

[75]Posada-Carbó, *The Colombian Caribbean*, p. 150.

[76]Safford, 'El problema', p. 529; Röthlisberger, *El Dorado*, p. 61; Pierre D'Espagnat, *Recuerdos de la Nueva Granada* (Bogotá: Editorial ABC, 1942), pp. 20, 25; Marie Saint-Gautier, *Voyage en Colombie: De soeur Marie Saint-Gautier de novembre 1890 à janvier 1892* (Paris: Bardot-Berruer, 1895), pp. 33–7.

[77]Palacio, *Historia de mi vida*, pp. 182–3.

[78]A recent example still focusing predominantly on export rather than local and import trade is Meisel and Ramírez (eds.), *Economía colombiana*.

[79]Melo, 'Vicisitudes del modelo', pp. 139–73; Brew, *El desarrollo económico*, p. 77; Frank Safford, *Commerce and Enterprise in Central Colombia: 1821–1870* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1983), p. 376.

[80]Quijano Wallis, *Memorias autobiográficas*, p. 407.

[81]Palacio, *Historia de mi vida*, p. 257.

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1876–7, some captains served as political informants for the Liberal-Radical President Parra. From Honda, Captain A. O. Navarro reported news and gathered information for the Liberal army sent in by telegraph.[82] In those years, the collaboration between the steamer captains and the Liberal telegraphers in Honda was key to beating the Conservatives in the information war. In 1877, steamer captains and telegraphers followed the movements of Mariano Ospina Rodríguez and his relatives, who comprised one of the important Conservative families of this period. 'Dr Mariano Ospina Rodríguez arrived by canoe at the bodegas of Bogotá', P. A. Francevedo informed President Parra. 'His son who came on the steamer followed this morning to go over there [Bogotá].'[83] Several governments, aware of the political significance of the steamers' captains, crews, and their ties with the Honda telegraphers, forbade local populations from communicating with people aboard the ships during the rebellions.[84]

The key link between trade routes and the circulation of political information can also be appreciated through a discussion of the roads. Muleteers spread oral news and, on occasions, sent letters to their employers.[85] Even though the roads were generally tortuous and sometimes lonely, they were also frequented by travellers and peasants who carried oral news, especially exchanged in the inns and on market days.[86] Far from being neutral spaces of commerce, municipal and regional roads interconnected with various political events. On occasions, roads became very dangerous places because of requisitions, seizures of correspondence, and mail theft to the extent that the Liberal and Conservative armies protected messages by sending them with peasants, labourers and beggars. These new links among different forms of written culture included the retransmission of documents and telegrams delivered by these unofficial mail carriers. During the Conservative rebellion of 1876–7, for example, a zealous Liberal commissioned a beggar to circulate valuable documents to the Liberal army: 'Eagerly waiting for you to receive the enclosures, despite the risks on the way, I had to trust the honesty of a beggar hoping he would deliver them to Mr Novoa, the telegrapher in Zipaquirá; I hope my wish will be fulfilled and you will get hold of such important telegrams.'[87]

Another way in which political information circulated through commercial networks was through shops. Censuses recorded *comerciantes*, *negociantes* and *venteras* living in the districts.[88] The shops were spaces of sociability where customers and owners talked about the condition of the roads and provincial

[82]Captain A. O. Navarro to Aquileo Parra, 1 Nov. 1876, BLAA, LRM, AHAP, box 3, folder 20, folio 6.

[83]P. A. Francevedo to Aquileo Parra, 23 Oct. 1877, BLAA, LRM, AHAP box 1, folder 4, folio 116.

[84]Camacho Roldán, *Notas de viaje*, pp. 178–9.

[85]Medardo Rivas, *Los trabajadores de tierra caliente* (Bogotá: Editorial Incunables, 1983), pp. 50–1; Luis Striffler, *El río César, relación de un viaje a la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta en 1876* (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, Senado de la República, 1986), pp. 47–51; Safford, 'El comercio', p. 400; Botero Restrepo, 'Casas comerciales', pp. 104, 107–8.

[86]Jiménez, 'La vida rural', pp. 163, 182–3.

[87]A. Andrade to Aquileo Parra, 26 (without exact month and year but surely 1876–7), BLAA, LRM, AHAP, box 1, folder 8, folio 12.

[88]Miguel Leonidas Gutiérrez and Manuel Briceño, *Informe de la comisión general para el levantamiento del censo de la población del estado* (Bogotá: Imprenta de Ignacio Borda, 1882), pp. 15–23.

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taxes, among other political matters.[89] At the end of the nineteenth century, the German traveller Alfred Hettner analysed their central place in the circulation of public opinion and information gathering among Colombians: 'You go to a friend's shop, not thinking of buying or closing a deal, but simply to spend an hour chatting.'[90] Oral opinions circulating via conversations in these commercial spaces could travel far and be valuable for politicians. While residing in Cartagena, President Núñez (1892–4) showed interest in knowing the political gossip of the Calle Real, the hub of the Liberal and Conservative merchants of Bogotá. In 1892, Núñez's private secretary, who had just arrived in the city, brought with him news from the commercial streets of the capital about the 'Petit Panama scandal', an exposure of corruption and mismanagement in the French Panama Canal Company (sponsored by Ferdinand de Lesseps), which allegedly included the bribery of 150 French parliamentarians who voted in favour of a lottery loan to raise money for the company: 'I noticed that [Núñez] was eager to know details about the Petit Panama scandal and I could not give him anything other than the street gossip, not only that coming from the Calle Real but that of all the streets of Bogotá, and tell him that I had seen Pérez Triana in Honda.'[91]

The haciendas and fincas that supplied local and international markets with tobacco, coffee, quinine and other goods were rural spaces of sociability where political information also circulated. This was partly possible because contemporaries did not conceive of agricultural ventures as separate from politics; on the contrary, many believed that agricultural activity helped build political reputations and win elections. 'I think you would do a lot in politics around here. Nobody will dispute the future presidency because, despite ingratitude, many people do justice to your administration and at the same time you would do a lot of business in the province of Mariquita', Conservative General Ramón Espina said to former President Tomás C. Mosquera (1845–9) from his plot of land in Ambalema in 1853.[92] A few years earlier, in 1849, Espina – who subleased a plot of land in the hacienda Las Monjas, Facatativá – had already suggested to President Mosquera that living in rural communities while engaging in agricultural activities could be helpful in electoral politics:

> I am very happy over there [Las Monjas] both because that one [plot of land] is superior and because I am in contact with the neighbours of Facatativá who previously had wrong opinions and today they have changed absolutely because Agudelo and I, we treat them differently and we spend all day in *parrandas* [parties] with them; therefore, from the point of view of speculation in the countryside and politics, it is very important for me to stay there.[93]

[89]Carlos Martínez Silva, *El gran ciudadano: Artículos biográficos y necrológicos referentes a D. Miguel Samper* (Bogotá: Imprenta Departamental Antonio Nariño, 1970), p. 23.

[90]Hettner, *Viajes por los Andes colombianos*, p. 85.

[91]Palacio, *Historia de mi vida*, pp. 263–4.

[92]J. León Helguera and Robert H. Davis (eds.), *Archivo epistolar del general Mosquera: Correspondencia con el general Ramón Espina, 1835–1866* (Bogotá: Editorial Kelly, 1966), p. 244.

[93]*Ibid.*, p. 219.

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The cadastre of the state of Cundinamarca for 1877 and contemporary memoirs show that many other politicians and merchants owned land during the agricultural colonisations and export boom in Cauca, Antioquia, Magdalena, Tolima and Cundinamarca.[94] These socio-economic and political processes, some of the most important of nineteenth-century Colombia, suggest the emergence of new spaces of sociability and circulation of political information in the rural world in the later part of the century.[95] Although these landowners did not primarily live in their country houses – and their fincas were prone to debt, the fluctuations of international markets, bankruptcy, shortage of capital, and short-term tenure – the seasonal time spent on their properties still allowed them to be involved with village politics and bring political information to local territories.[96] Luncheons, balls, picnics by the river and get-togethers in the fincas were occasions for many people, including officers of the Guardia Colombiana, to exchange correspondence, printed matter and oral news.[97]

The correspondence of Camacho Roldán, Liberal politician and owner of one of the most important and biggest bookshops in nineteenth-century Colombia, the Librería Colombiana in Bogotá, illustrates in greater detail how political information circulated in rural properties. In 1895, Camacho Roldán resided in his finca El Ocaso writing his memoirs. His property was located near the pueblo of La Mesa, Cundinamarca, a crossroad of provincial and local trade routes and sociability between Bogotá and Neiva.[98] From there, he corresponded weekly with his son Joaquín, a resident of Bogotá, and other relatives. This family and commercial network was key to informing Camacho Roldán about politics and business. His letters reveal that local and international politics occupied a central place in his reflections. Colombian newspapers made him lose his faith in the Liberal rebellion against the

[94]For Julio Barriga, Miguel Samper, Miguel L. Gutiérrez, Rafael G. Mogollón, José María Rubio Frade, Mariano Tanco, Eustorgio Salgar, Carlos Martín, Aquileo Parra and Jacobo Sánchez, see *Catastro de la propiedad inmueble del Estado de Cundinamarca: Formado por la comisión de revisión nombrada por la asamblea lejislativa en el año de 1878* (Bogotá: Imprenta de Medardo Rivas, 1879), pp. 178, 254, 270–1, 284, 290, 371–3, 379. For Aníbal Galindo, Emiliano Restrepo, Antonio B. Cuervo, Wenceslao Ibáñez, Ignacio Gutiérrez Vergara, Joaquín Acosta, Medardo Rivas, José María Samper, Francisco G. Mogollón, Manuel Murillo Toro, Medardo Rivas, Fernando Ponce and Lucio Moreno, see Rivas, *Los trabajadores*, pp. 57, 119–20, 147–8, 167, 259; Safford, *Aspectos del siglo*, pp. 52–3; Helen Delpar, *Red against Blue: The Liberal Party in Colombian Politics, 1863–1899* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1981), p. 51; John Potter Hamilton, *Viajes por el interior de la provincias de Colombia* (Bogotá: Banco de la República; Colcultura, 1993), pp. 172–3. For José María Obando, Rafael Uribe Uribe, Benjamín Herrera, los Cosme Marulanda, Camilo Antonio Echeverri, Pedro Justo Berrío, Juan De Dios Aránzazu, Tomás C. Mosquera and Sergio Arboleda, see Roger Brew, *Aspectos de la política en Antioquia 1850–1865* (Medellín: Fundación Antioqueña para los Estudios Sociales, 1984), pp. 16, 22–3, 34; Hamilton, *Viajes por el interior*, p. 244; William Lofstrom, *La vida íntima de Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera (1798–1830)* (Bogotá: Banco de la República; El Áncora, 1996), p. 14.

[95]For these socio-economic processes, see Palacios, *El café en Colombia*, pp. 113–14.

[96]For the economic fragility of these fincas, see *ibid.*, pp. 127, 140–1; Rivas, *Los trabajadores*, pp. 147, 256, 272; Hyland, 'A Fragile Prosperity', pp. 369–406.

[97]See, for example, Ángel Cuervo, *Cómo se evapora un ejército* (Bogotá: Editorial Incunables, 1984), pp. 22, 37–8; Rivas, *Los trabajadores*, p. 50; Alejandro Galvis Galvis, *Memorias de un político centenarista* (Bucaramanga: n.p., 1975), pp. 8 and 14.

[98]Salvador Camacho Roldán, *Escritos varios*, vol. 1 (Bogotá: Editorial Incunables, 1983), p. 577; Rivas, *Los trabajadores*, p. 40.

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Conservative government of Vice-President Miguel Antonio Caro initiated in Bogotá on the 23 January 1895, while the English newspapers, also sent by his son Joaquín, fuelled his admiration for the British prime minister, William E. Gladstone (1892–5).[99]

As in the case of the Guardia Colombiana, espionage was a noteworthy concern of Camacho Roldán's letters, albeit in the more rural setting of La Mesa. On 9 March 1895, he confessed to Joaquín that neighbourhoods were being threatened by conscription parties and Conservative spies. 'We have not been able to walk for fear of attracting the attention of the conscription parties with our horses. They say there are three spies in these whereabouts: the toll collector Alejandro Castellanos, Silverio Camargo and Vicente Trompa, the blacksmith.'[100] A week later, Camacho Roldán reiterated to Joaquín the difficulties of travelling on foot and on horseback.[101] Far from cut off, his correspondence reveals his fear of spies and a rural population in search of information.

Rural sociability allowed Camacho Roldán to keep up with political news beyond his finca through links between the oral and written culture. Communications with his son Joaquín were not the full extent of his social universe. Meriendas and lunches in other rural properties supplemented the information from newspapers dispatched by his son Joaquín. In an effort to keep track of events in other parts of Colombia, Camacho Roldán listened to his neighbours and read what they read, as he indicated to his son on 23 March 1895: 'According to an issue of the *Correo Nacional* of the 20th that I caught sight of yesterday in the hands of a young Abondano, who lives near here, I learned of the death of Emilio Pardo, and from another passenger I learned of the death of Nicolás Pinzón.'[102] Camacho Roldán, however, did not always give the same degree of credibility to oral information, especially arriving from Bogotá, after contrasting it with the newspapers sent by his son.[103]

Family and friends sent Camacho Roldán written political news in letters and newspapers, while the workers he employed brought him correspondences and provided him with oral news. His letters allow us to see how politicians and merchants residing in rural properties had multiple channels of oral and written information. Camacho Roldán gave special credit to oral news brought by workers from his finca about the defeat of the Liberal rebellion: 'A bricklayer who just arrived from La Mesa at this very moment tells me that everything must be concluded because they are already releasing recruits in Bogotá, more than a hundred passed through La Mesa yesterday, all by themselves and with marching aids.'[104] These seasonal

[99]Salvador Camacho Roldán to Joaquín Camacho, 23 March 1895, AGN, AACH, Archivo de Salvador Camacho Roldán (hereafter ASCR), box 3, folder 16, folio 5.

[100]Salvador Camacho Roldán to Joaquín Camacho, 9 March 1895, AGN, AACH, ASCR, box 3, folder 16, folios 1–2.

[101]Salvador Camacho Roldán to Joaquín Camacho, 16 March 1895, AGN, AACH, ASCR, box 3, folder 16, folios 3–4.

[102]Salvador Camacho Roldán to Joaquín Camacho, 23 March 1895, AGN, AACH, ASCR, box 3, folder 16, folio 5.

[103]Salvador Camacho Roldán to Joaquín Camacho, 26 March 1895, AGN, AACH, ASCR, box 3, folder 16, folios 6–7.

[104]Salvador Camacho Roldán to Joaquín Camacho, 23 March 1895, AGN, AACH, ASCR, box 3, folder 16, folio 5.

workers therefore enriched the sources of information available to politicians and merchants like Camacho Roldán. On 23 March 1895, far from questioning the word of the bricklayer, he confidently declared in a letter to his son regarding the alleged defeat of the Liberal rebels in Santander: 'I had no confidence in what was going on in the North [Santander].'[105]

Camacho Roldán's correspondence further invites us to consider how popular groups associated with commerce, family, and local economies played an important role in the circulation of political information.[106] Despite their restricted literacy, labourers, gardeners, carpenters and seasonal workers engaged with the written and political culture of their time, notably as *postas* (messengers). These people delivered correspondence as well as oral news.[107]

Domestic servants and peons played a significant role in the circulation of political information during nineteenth-century rebellions. In the 1850s, the French geographer and anarchist Élisée Reclus recalled of his time on a hacienda in Magdalena that 'every three or four days, a peon went to town to look for newspapers, letters and provisions'.[108] Peons collected, exchanged and delivered political information in village markets, warehouses, streets and haciendas.[109] The relationship of peons and domestic servants with the oral and written culture was diverse and changing, depending on political, emotional and material conditions. At times, oral news spread by domestic servants circulated widely. 'The servants knew all the secrets. Rumours and intrigues from female friends were rampant in the city: that "they took Tom, Dick and Harry prisoner"', de Paula Borda recalled about the agitation created by these people after General Melo's coup of 1854.[110] At other times, such as the Thousand Days War, contemporaries were more concerned with the ability of maids to go unnoticed and act as couriers, prompting Conservative militaries to confiscate letters, papers and objects carried by them.[111] The Liberal and Conservative armies also recruited peons and labourers as *postas*, partly because of their local and geographical knowledge acquired during work and leisure.[112] These men and women also transmitted political information guided by their own emotions, and social and party relationships.[113] In the Thousand Days War, a French colonel recalled about the Liberal rebels: 'Women, beggars at the edge of the fields, shepherds, and people who sell food to the military on the march served as spies and *postas*.'[114] These people carried messages of vital importance to the armies, warned about ambushes, offered escape routes and spied

[105]*Ibid.*

[106]Other forms that I do not analyse on this occasion include petitions from Indians and slaves. See, for example, Sanders, *Contentious Republicans*, pp. 58, 67.

[107]Julián Trujillo to Dolores Carvajal de Trujillo, 1 Nov. 1875, AGN, FEOR, Generales y Civiles (Dolores Carvajal de Trujillo) (hereafter GCDCT), box 92, folder 63, folio 267.

[108]Eliseo Réclus, *Viaje a la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta* (Bogotá: Colcultura, 1992), p. 135.

[109]José María Samper to Manuel, Rafael and Ancízar Samper, 8 May 1865, AGM.

[110]Borda, *Conversaciones con mis hijos*, p. 61.

[111]Mora, *Croniquillas de mí*, p. 201.

[112]Tulio Arbeláez, *Episodios de la guerra de 1899 a 1903: Campaña del general Cesáreo Pulido por su primer ayudante general* (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1936), p. 80.

[113]Cuervo, *Cómo se evapora*, p. 30.

[114]Jorge Brisson, *Memorias militares campaña del norte (1900)* (Medellín: La Carreta Editores; Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia, 2011), p. 25.

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on their enemies. On many occasions, their oral information went beyond the local sphere. During the Conservative rebellion of 1876–7, the Liberals gave so much credit to the oral information of the peons that it was later retransmitted to Bogotá by the telegraphers in Cauca, Tolima and Cundinamarca: 'The guerrilla [group] of Fusagasugá has arrived with part of that of Guasca and Mochuelo. This, a message from García, a Liberal peon of Fusagasugá, claims there are 1,000 men […] trying to move to Tolima.'[115]

Conclusion

By examining the letters, telegrams and memoirs of Guardia Colombiana officers, politicians and merchants, this article has offered fresh insights into the circulation of political information in Colombia in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Guardia Colombiana correspondence shows diverse linkages between oral and written practices: oral *chismes* were included in military reports; conversations retransmitted in different spaces of sociability, which included private houses, battalions and public squares; and correspondence and telegrams exchanged between militaries and politicians. The manuscript archives of Samper, Parra and Camacho Roldán, among those of other politicians and merchants, reveal that political information spread through commercial and family networks. As we have seen, written news was extracted from newspapers and later poured into letters; oral news was discussed in familial correspondence; oral sociability took place in fincas, shops, inns, roads and haciendas in the rural world; and letters were copied into telegrams. While older scholarship has traditionally emphasised the 'geographical isolation' or 'lack of communication' of nineteenth-century Colombia, this article builds on more recent scholarship, suggesting instead that the second half of the century was a period marking significant expansion of communication in comparison with earlier times. New agricultural settlements, trade routes, the busy national and local electoral calendar, the expansion of the press and correspondence, and the introduction of steam navigation and the telegraph fostered new connections and communication practices. The Guardia Colombiana correspondence and the manuscript archives of politicians and merchants not only nuance the narratives emphasising the lack of communication, but also shed light on the original and often-overlooked ways – links between oral and written culture, trade routes, local spaces of sociability, and commercial actors – through which Colombians overcame conditions of low literacy and geographic fragmentation to communicate with each other.

These conclusions based on the Colombian case may stimulate further reflection about similar questions in Latin American political history. This article has illuminated how a society of restricted literacy – one among many in Latin America – produced, circulated and gathered oral and written information in the late nineteenth century. It has shown how old communication practices (letters, rumours, conversations) intertwined with new ones (telegraph) and spaces of sociability (steamers, haciendas, shops). While the press was an important political actor and means of communication, it must be placed in a broader web of oral and written practices. Moreover, political information was circulated by different

[115]M. J. Moreno to Aquileo Parra, 11 Nov. 1876, BLAA, LRM, AHAP, box 4, folders 20–6, folio 154A.

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people in various spaces of sociability, including commercial ones. More detailed studies on correspondences and the telegraph are still needed, but this article has shown that muleteers, peons, women and labourers related to the nineteenth-century written culture according to their own possibilities and constraints, crossing any simple dichotomy such as literate/illiterate. The letters and telegrams analysed reinforce the image of broad political mobilisation in nineteenth-century Latin America, one in which public opinion was often changing and found expression beyond the press and a small *letrado* (well-educated) circle. While being traditionally considered as economic agents, Colombian peons, merchants, shopkeepers and steamer captains also served as correspondents, spies or *postas*, with meaningful consequences in the world of politics. Consequently, the places they frequented should be conceptualised as other spaces of sociability where political information circulated, especially in rural and village settings. With very few coffee houses, restaurants, hotels and theatres available, Colombians' social gatherings and exchanges of information predominantly took place in private homes, streets, public squares, ports, roads, shops, fincas and haciendas.

There remains a great amount of correspondence and telegrams from politicians, military figures, and merchants to be explored in Colombia, seeking further interconnections between the oral and written culture, between politics and commerce, between social elites and popular groups. Such histories, however, should be placed in a broad historical horizon where political history goes hand in hand with social and cultural history.

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Circulando información política en Colombia: Prácticas de comunicación escrita y oral en la segunda mitad del siglo XIX

Este artículo examina cómo la gente reunía y transmitía información política en Colombia durante la segunda mitad del siglo XIX. Los trabajos académicos existentes se han centrado predominantemente en el estudio de la prensa en Colombia y Latinoamérica. Sin embargo, pocos historiadores han explorado otras formas de información, como telegramas, rumores y cartas, o cómo los colombianos combinaban todo ello. Al centrarse en cómo variadas formas de información circularon a través de las redes políticas, familiares y comerciales, este estudio ofrece una dimensión nueva a nuestro entendimiento de las comunicaciones en Colombia. Se argumenta que éste fue un periodo de creciente circulación de información dados los cambios sociales, políticos y económicos existentes, así como nuevos vínculos entre las prácticas orales y escritas. Por lo tanto, este artículo da luces sobre cómo los colombianos circularon información política en una sociedad de alfabetismo restringido en una Latinoamérica postcolonial, ofreciendo nuevos entendimientos sobre la política, comunicación y el relevo entre la cultura escrita y la oral.

Palabras clave: comunicaciones; cultura oral y escrita; circulación de información; Colombia; política; siglo XIX

A circulação da informação política na Colômbia: Práticas de comunicação escrita e oral na segunda metade do século XIX

Este artigo examina como as pessoas coletavam e transmitiam informações políticas na Colômbia durante a segunda metade do século XIX. Os trabalhos acadêmicos existentes concentram-se predominantemente no estudo da imprensa na Colômbia e na América Latina. No entanto, poucos historiadores exploraram outras formas de informação, como telegramas, rumores e cartas, ou como os colombianos combinaram essas diferentes formas. Ao focar em como várias formas de informação circularam através de redes políticas, familiares e comerciais, este estudo oferece uma nova dimensão para nossa compreensão das comunicações na Colômbia. Argumenta que este foi um período de crescente circulação de informações devido a mudanças sociais, políticas e econômicas, assim como novos vínculos entre as práticas orais e escritas. Assim, este artigo ilumina como os colombianos circulavam informações políticas em uma sociedade de alfabetização restrita na América Latina pós-colonial, oferecendo novos insights sobre política, comunicação e a interação entre a cultura escrita e oral.

Palavras-chave: comunicação; cultura oral e escrita; circulação de informação; Colômbia; política; século XIX

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