

# **War beyond the gun: An investigation into the success of Colombia's 'April 19th Movement'**



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Cover Image: Graffiti of The Jaime Bateman Cayón Movement - a left-wing student group named after the M-19 founder - on the walls of the Universidad Nacional. The graffiti depicts Simón Bolívar, Jaime Bateman and the late Camilo Torres of the ELN.

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## 0. Introduction:

### 0.1 The subject of this thesis

"El poder no nace del fusil" (Power isn't born of the rifle) (GRABE, 1998:78)

In 1990, the April 19th Movement (M-19 / 'Eme') became the first guerrilla organisation of its era to make peace with the Colombian government. Having emerged in 1974, in protest against the perceived electoral fraud of the 1970 presidential elections, the group laid down its arms after sixteen years of armed struggle in what was one of the most violent countries in the world. In contrast to the more widely known Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) and the Ejercito de Liberación Nacional (ELN), who fight on to this day with limited success, the M-19 managed to achieve a number of its goals, including political and judicial reforms, and amnesties for its members. As neither the biggest<sup>1</sup> nor the most bloodthirsty of Colombian guerrilla groups however, the M-19 never threatened the military superiority of the state nor came close to seizing political control. Instead, its members emerged from existing guerrilla groups and political parties and took a different tack from more traditional guerrillas in an effort to revolutionise the way in which the war was fought, tailoring their strategy to the specific circumstances of their struggle and playing to their strengths. In the words of former M-19 guerrilla, René Ramos:

"The Eme was born of a confluence of people from the left, from the Communist Party [...] with training from the FARC, military training, [...] some people from the ELN or [...] from Anapo<sup>2</sup>, [...] not people really from the orthodox left but people with a lot of social awareness, [...who were] very frustrated and indignant about the robbing of the election [...] They got together. [...] At the beginning the direction and the proposals were very much weighted toward the people [...] of [...]a pro-Soviet leftist education. However, very quickly they realised that the proposal of social and political change had to be something much more appropriate for our local conditions [something] very Colombian. So they spoke of Colombian socialism."<sup>3</sup>

Creating a reputation for itself as a Colombian nationalist, urban guerrilla of symbolic spectacles, the M-19 aimed to win over the population and pressurise the government rather than bring down the state. A quarter of a century later, their mention in the company of Colombians is met with smiles and positive anecdotes as often as with scorn. Their image appears to be more lovable rogue than ferocious rebel force. When the M-19 opted to lay down its guns, it did so alone amongst guerrilla groups, and from a comparatively weak military position. Nevertheless, it enjoyed many political gains from the peace process and achieved many of its aims. This thesis looks at how the organisation managed to gain so much in spite of its lack of military clout, asking the question:

“Given that the M-19 had so little power of coercion, and posed a very limited military threat to the Colombian government, how did the organisation gain the capacity to extract so many political concessions during the peace process of 1988 - 1990?”

The aim is to provide an accurate explanation for the M-19's strength, from a largely insider perspective, with strong evidence from group members themselves. Through the lens of collective action theory (CAT), this thesis seeks to explain how the M-19 was able to achieve some of its goals, looking at factors such as opportunity structures, framing and mobilisation strategies, and the strengths of the group's leadership.

Though the M-19 remains relatively unknown outside of Colombia, its significance in the Colombian conflict, and beyond should not be underestimated. There have been a number of studies into the organisation's unusual character, and comparisons have been made with other Colombian guerrillas. Literature on the actions of the M-19, its leaders and the political situation in which it operated is plentiful, however, by using the framework of CAT, the author hopes to provide a new perspective on the organisation.

This thesis contends that the success of the M-19 in gaining concessions from the Colombian government during their transition towards peace is remarkable, considering its lack of military threat to the government at the time. Through innovation, flexibility, symbolic acts of violence and excellent public relations, the M-19 made a significant impact on Colombian politics and achieved a number of its most important goals. It serves as

perhaps Colombia's best example of how symbolic violence and propaganda can be used to take on a much larger enemy, and has wider, global significance, standing testament to how such a strategy can obtain positive results.

The M-19's success, it will be argued, was down to a number of factors including excellent leadership, opportunities that arose at various points during its struggle and the group's impressive ability to frame actors and situations, tapping into the population's psyche and gaining a large body of public support.

Clearly, to look into every potential aspect of the M-19's success is beyond the scope of this thesis, however a number of particularly significant factors have been identified and will be discussed.

## **0.2 Collective Action Theory**

As a multi-causal approach that is ontologically mixed and takes into account both individual actors and structural factors of conflict, collective action theory (CAT) provides an excellent framework for understanding how the M-19 had such a fruitful transition to peace. CAT is therefore the core analytic frame that has guided this research.

Collective action is defined by Tilly and Tarrow as “co-ordinating efforts on behalf of shared interests or programmes”. (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007:5) This does not necessarily involve contention or violence, (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007:5) however Tilly and Tarrow’s theory looks at collective action in contentious political situations, with a view to explaining how groups of people mobilise and, often, turn violent. It brings attention to issues such as human needs, political access and collective grievances. This is very pertinent to the Colombian conflict in general but it is also in keeping with the stated ideology of the M-19, which began as a predominantly left-wing guerrilla and evolved into a pro-democracy movement. The application of the theory in this case is slightly unusual in that, rather than focusing solely on the initial mobilisation of the M-19, it will be applied to the strategies of the M-19

and its ultimate demobilisation. The theory's attention to mechanisms and processes, combined with its broad notion of power, provides a solid basis for such an investigation.

Charles King, whose work forms an important link in the theoretical framework, expands on the work of Tilly and Tarrow and makes connections between the thesis' main sensitising concepts, looking at power dynamics through the lens of opportunities, organisations and frames. (King, 2007:116)

Though King mentions framing in his work, Benford and Snow examine the issue in far more depth and detail. They describe framing as “the production of...ideas and meanings” (Benford and Snow, 2000:613) or, more simply, ‘reality construction’. (Benford and Snow, 2000:614) It is “a crucial aspect of...mobilisation...” (Snow, Rochford, Worden and Benford, 1986:476) and it offers some possible explanations of how power balances can be tipped by militarily weak actors. It is closely connected to opportunities and events, which are often framed so as to benefit particular actors. Benford and Snow’s identification of three core framing tasks - diagnosis, prognosis and motivation - (Benford and Snow, 2000:615) help to identify the reasons behind some of the framing actions of the M-19 and how those frames might have fit into wider strategies.

Frame alignment - defined by Benford and Snow, Rochford and Worden, as “the linkage of individual and social movement organisations’ ...individual interests, values and beliefs and...[group]...activities, goals and ideology [so that they] are congruent and complementary,” (Snow, Rochford, Worden and Benford, 1986:464) offers some explanations of how frames are created and gives an insight into the thinking behind some of the M-19's actions.

Benford and Snow also talk about the importance of frame resonance, which can offer some indications as to how the M-19 managed to remain so cohesive throughout its transition. Well respected leadership, consistency, evidence and experience (Benford and Snow, 2000:619) are all factors which help frames to resonate with the group, and which could



help to explain how the M-19 was able to gain power from its framing of events and opportunities.

In addition to the core theoretical concepts discussed above, a number of secondary concepts and terms will be introduced at relevant points in the thesis, including Pierre Bourdieu's notions of 'symbolic power' (Bourdieu, 1986, in 2009:80) and 'symbolic capital', (Bourdieu, 1986:4), and William Zartman's concepts of 'Mutually Hurting Stalemate' (MHS) and 'ripe moments'. (Zartman 2001:22) Brief connections are also made with other theorists and their concepts, such as Thomas Hobbes and his notion of the equality of strength, (Hobbes, 2012:188) and Stephen John Steadman with his work on spoilers in peace processes (Stedman, 1997:5). These have relevance to the tactics of the M-19 and problems in the peace process respectively.

### **0.3 Methodology**

#### ***0.3.1 Research methods***

In attempting to understand and explain how the M-19 gained an advantageous position in their power balance with the Colombian government, research was carried out based on four main operationalising questions. These were:

What opportunity structures are identifiable in the political context of late 1980s Colombia that allowed for diagnostic, prognostic or motivational framing by the M-19?

What power shifts can be identified between the M-19 and the government in particular areas during the M-19's transition?

What short-term opportunities arose that were framed by the M-19 (diagnostically, prognostically or motivationally) in order to gain a more powerful position during their transition period?

How did the M-19's strategic framing of such opportunity structures and opportunities, resonate with target groups?

From these core operationalising questions, further lines of enquiry on more specific issues emerged. The methods used to investigate each aspect of the research and operationalising questions was generally the same in each case, being based on reviews of academic literature, studies of first hand accounts and primary sources, and in-depth interviews followed by data analysis.

As this thesis investigates historic events, and it was not possible to observe actions as they occurred, interviews and first-hand accounts were indispensable to the research.

The first stage of the research involved reviewing academic literature on the M-19 and developing the theoretical framework for the thesis. Further literature research on the empirical aspects of the thesis, carried out during fieldwork in Bogotá greatly strengthened this, as far more material on the subject is available within Colombia.

During preparations for interviews, potential interviewees generally fell into one of three main categories: former members of the M-19, former politicians, and academics. As a network of contacts built up however, other relevant individuals also provided interviews. These included family members of M-19 combatants and former members of other guerrilla organisations. Snowball sampling was therefore an important aspect of the research method.

Though for some forms of research, this can cause the problem of interviewing too many like-minded people from the same social circles, in this case it was desirable for three main reasons. Firstly, on a very practical level, it enabled communication with a larger group of people and resulted in a deeper understanding of the relevant issues. Secondly, the aforementioned three main groups of interest were initially targeted through purposive sampling, allowing for at least three different angles on the events of the research. Lastly, as the research is focused on past events, interviewing multiple individuals from the same

categories made the triangulation of information possible and offset some of the issues that can arise from memory distortion. This will be discussed in greater depth below.

Curtis and Curtis make clear the importance of documenting the content of interviews as quickly and effectively as possible. (Curtis B. Curtis C. 2011:43) With the permission of the interviewees therefore, all interviews were tape recorded, in addition to the author's note taking during the interview process. Immediately after the interviews, transcripts were created and the gathered data was journaled, along with any important thoughts or observations that might have arisen at that time. Such written records were crucial in the organisation of the data that was gathered but, as Curtis and Curtis note, it also gave the author a sense of how the interview process could be improved (Curtis B. Curtis C. 2011:43) over the course of the fieldwork.

Due to the large amounts of data gathered, a coding system was used, based on the operationalising questions and the main theoretical components of the thesis.

Most of the research was conducted within the city of Bogotá, though one interview, with the Colombian ambassador to the Netherlands, Eduardo Pizarro Léongómez, was carried out before departure, in The Hague. A number of other interviews were conducted via Skype between Bogotá, Cartagena and Cali.

The author contacted three of Bogotá's largest universities - La Universidad Nacional, La Universidad Javeriana and La Universidad de los Andes - prior to departure, securing access to the library of the Javeriana and gaining meetings with relevant academics at all three institutions. The Javeriana and the Nacional, also have particular relevance to the subject matter, having both produced a significant number of the M-19's members. The Nacional, a public university known for its predominantly left-leaning student body remains a source of resistance to state authority and is the site of regular riots against the police force, two of which were personally witnessed by the author.

### ***0.3.2 Challenges and ethical dilemmas***

As the thesis topic investigates historic events, there were no security issues attached to the information and nothing was confidential, however in certain instances where potentially incriminating remarks were made about individuals who were not present, names have been removed.

Due to the openness of interviewees, gaining access to large quantities of first hand information was relatively straightforward. The issue of bias or memory loss over time was a problem that the author had to bear in mind however. The aim of this thesis is not to pass moral judgement on the M-19's campaign, but bias can skew information in many ways, particularly when investigating strengths and weaknesses of an organisation. As the events being investigated occurred some twenty-five years ago, it is only natural that memories may have become blurred or embellished. The research methods had to take this into account.

Daniel Bernstein's and Elizabeth Loftus' work on memory distortion highlights a number of issues that were important during the formation and presentation of interview questions. Two that could have presented particular threats to the research were hindsight bias – when subjects subconsciously adapt their memories of a judgement to concur with a particular outcome (Bernstein and Loftus, 2002:140) – and suggestion – when a researcher distorts a subject's memory by talking about particular events that have not happened. (Bernstein and Loftus, 2002:140)

In order to avoid this, the author took care not to voice any assumptions or suggest any possible scenarios to interviewees. Such difficulties were also tackled by interviewing multiple people with the same questions in order to triangulate the information that was vital to the research. Interviews with observers from outside of the M-19, and academic research further helped to identify reliable information, going some way to tackling not only memory issues, but also bias.

As certain significant individuals now hold positions of high office in government, it was particularly difficult to arrange interviews, especially as presidential elections were taking place during the fieldwork period. Former government negotiator Rafael Pardo and former M-19 member Gustavo Petro at the time of fieldwork were caught up in a major controversy that saw Petro briefly lose his position as Mayor of Bogotá to Pardo, only to be reinstated again. Whilst such incidents are useful illustrations of the continuing tensions between the right and former M-19 members, it did make speaking to these individuals impossible. Former AD/M-19<sup>4</sup> leader Antonio Navarro Wolff, and former M-19 commander Rosenberg Pabón Pabón, amongst others, also proved impossible to reach due to their current political commitments. Nevertheless, many of the former M-19 high command were available for interview, along with a number of other significant individuals.

#### **0.4 Outline**

The structure of the thesis divides the argument into three main chapters based on the principle theoretical concepts of opportunity structures, framing and leadership. Though the success of the M-19 in achieving its ultimate goals came at the end of its existence, the fundamental character of the group and a number of events from the earlier days of the struggle must be discussed in order to fully understand how the strength of the group developed to give it power in negotiations. The thesis therefore begins with a discussion of the birth of the organisation and the environment from which it emerged.

Chapter one focuses initially on opportunity structures: the opportunity to create a unique and modern guerrilla that set itself apart from those that already existed, in its strategy, and in finding a way to impact society through communication and targeted symbolic acts. The focus the chapter then turns to framing, looking firstly at the group's framing of its own collective personality before discussing its framing of the enemy. The unique ideological character of the M-19 is discussed, before an investigation into the M-19's efforts to connect with the general public are highlighted, with insights into the group's attempts to help the poor and take the moral high ground in the conflict. In the final section of the first

chapter, a number of examples of the M-19's actions illustrate the organisation's attempts, to frame their enemy as weak, stupid and criminal.

The second chapter of the thesis begins with a continuation of the framing theme, this time looking at how the M-19 attempted to change the perception of the war itself. It then leads on to a discussion of one of the pivotal moments in the life of the group - the kidnapping of Álvaro Gómez - and how that opportunity opened the way for peace negotiations.

Leadership is the theme of the second half of chapter two, which hones in on two leaders in particular - Jaime Bateman and Carlos Pizarro León Gómez - and how they influenced the course of events that lead to peace. An insight into the relationship between government negotiator Rafael Pardo and Carlos Pizarro is also highlighted as having been a significant factor.

Chapter three, bookends the discussion of the M-19 and its capabilities with a return to the theme of opportunity structures. The rise of violence in the country is discussed, along with growing civil unrest and the impact of the student movement - all factors which helped to change the dynamic of the conflict and provided the M-19 with opportunities to pursue their aims. Finally the changing position of the government will be investigated, raising questions as to how much the rebels actually had to forcibly extract from their enemies, and how much the government's own needs came to align with those of the guerrilla.

The final section of the thesis draws together the various aspects of the investigation to present a number of findings, and reaches a conclusion regarding the main thesis question.

## **1. A different type of rebel**

### **1.1 A niche in the market (Opportunity structures)**

"We have a saying here in Colombia [...] We talk about the bottomless barrel. If you fall, in the end you hit the ground, but we don't. We keep falling. We never hit the bottom [...] It's terrible."<sup>5</sup>

Though this metaphor may not be entirely accurate nowadays, considering the apparent reduction in violence in Colombia over recent years, the democratic progress that has been made since the Constituent Assembly of 1991, and the peace talks that are currently in progress, it is an example of a common pessimism found in many Colombians' descriptions of the political situation in their country. That bleak attitudes towards politics abound in the country is perhaps unsurprising given its decades long conflict. No living Colombian has witnessed a time of peace in their homeland and arguably, such a time has never occurred. The political history of Colombia has been marked by instability and near unbroken periods of bloodshed. For whatever reason, the gun has always been a feature of Colombian politics.

This environment not only resulted in a normalisation of violence generally, but also saw the emergence of a certain continuity in the tactics and styles of violent action that were used. Such entrenched habits of warfare presented the M-19 with opportunities to make an impact and carve out a niche for itself through a departure from traditional armed strategies.

### ***1.1.1 Violence, the traditional guerrilla and the conflict as everyone knew it***

Through the lens of CAT, Colombia's backdrop of violence could be viewed as a self-perpetuating opportunity structure against which guerrilla movements could attract new members and grow in strength. This applies to guerrillas generally and can also be said to have been true to some extent for the M-19, although physical growth was not the principle aspect of the opportunity structure of which the M-19 took advantage. Nevertheless, it is important to flag up this aspect of the context in which the organisation emerged. In 1970s Colombia, a level of violence normalisation made guerrilla activity relatively uncontroversial and may have helped to channel people down that path.

Charles Tilly's work on 'repertoires of collective action' is relevant here. He notes that while there are many ways in which people could carry out collective action, at any given

moment in time, "the repertoire of collective actions available to a population is surprisingly limited." (Tilly 1978:5-14) This is due largely to norms of behaviour. Tilly gives the example of twentieth century Americans, saying that whilst strikes, petitioning and pressure groups form part of the American collective action repertoire, the hijacking of an aircraft, though possible and potentially very effective, would lie outside that repertoire. (Tilly 1978:5-15) Hijacking, is not a common recourse for Americans, even in a contentious situation, nor is the creation of a guerrilla movement. Against the backdrop of prolonged violence in Colombia however, guerrilla violence was very much part of the collective action repertoire. It was unquestionably normal. Jesuit priest and academic Muricio García Durán supports that idea, saying:

"[...] the recourse to violence was a point [...] that just wasn't discussed [...] It was normal. Even within the peace movement there was great resistance to debating the war because that would imply that one was questioning the armed struggle [...] In the 70s 80s and [...] 90s there were questions over how to value [...] the non-violence movements [...] Recourse to violence was viewed as legitimate [...] It should be seen in this context."<sup>6</sup>

One can easily claim, that such a context of normalising violence would be an opportunity structure for the creation of a rebel group, but it also provided an opportunity for the M-19 to go against type. By bringing a new style of more symbolic violence to the table, the M-19 would break the mould of Colombian revolutionary behaviour, broaden Colombia's collective action repertoire, and make a name for itself as a unique guerrilla organisation. What is relevant at this stage however, is that, combined with features of the international political environment in the early to mid Cold War era, the conditions for the emergence and development of guerrilla movements became ripe.

The ideological struggles of the post-war era coloured the course of history across most of Latin America and much of the rest of the world, and Colombia was no exception to this trend. Whilst a right-wing elite was attempting to defend the status quo, armed opposition groups cropped up proclaiming their visions of a different future. Left wing organisations



laid out competing visions of a Colombia based on the models of the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, or Albania. It was an age of revolution, and of dreamers, in which insurrection was a fact of life. As Fabio Mariño, a former M-19 and, Nicaraguan, Frente Sandanista de Liberación Nacional (F.S.L.N) member put it:

" [...] I was a combatant in the Sandanista Revolution because the world in that moment called on us [...] Here in Colombia, the guerrilla was [...] necessary. These were the instruments that were necessary to do politics at that time."<sup>7</sup>

Eduardo Pizarro Léongómez: Colombian Ambassador to The Netherlands and brother of the late M-19 leader, Carlos Pizarro Léongómez backs up this viewpoint, saying:

"It was inevitable, the emergence of guerrilla groups in Colombia. After the Cuban Revolution there was the 'guerrilla myth' - the possibility of taking power by armed means, even up to 90 miles from Miami [...] There were guerrilla groups all over Latin America."<sup>8</sup>

Diverse visions for the future, combined with a perception of violence as a necessary tool for political change, were therefore further opportunity structures for those who wished to develop rebel movements. Again however, as will be discussed in chapter 1.2, traditional ideological standpoints of the left and the ideological image attached to existing guerrilla organisations, also provided the M-19 with the opportunity to make a name for itself by doing things differently.

Though Colombia was not a dictatorship like many other countries in Latin America at the time, the country's two party 'National Front' (NF) system, which saw the Conservative and Liberal parties agreeing to share power between themselves, meant that its democratic credentials were questionable. Carlo Nasi, professor of Political Science at the Universidad de los Andes speaks positively about Colombia's politics, saying that its flaws,

"[...] do not suffice to disqualify Colombia as a mere democratic façade. Even [...] the NF elections were free and fair [...] There were some important pockets of corruption, especially in rural areas, but these rarely [...] thwarted electoral results to the point of casting doubt on the democratic credentials of elected incumbents at the national level."  
(Nasi, 2002:276)

His view is not shared by all however, and it was clearly felt in some sectors of society, that political influence could only be achieved by the gun. Indeed, the allegedly fraudulent presidential election of the 19th April 1970, which saw General Rojas Pinilla of the Alianza Nacional Popular (Anapo) narrowly lose to Conservative candidate Misael Pastrana Borrero, became the declared trigger of the foundation of the M-19, giving the organisation its name. (Vásquez Perdomo, 2005:60) One could view the corruption allegations as the proverbial 'straw that broke the camel's back', leading to the formation of the M-19, three years later.

Former ELN and Corriente de Renovación Socialista (CRS) member, Carlos Alberto Garzón blames the political system for the violence of the Cold War era generally, saying that a, "[...] hegemonic state that didn't allow other forces, distinct from the Conservatives and Liberals, to participate generated a political exclusion which expressed itself militarily."<sup>9</sup>

Tilly's argument that recourse to armed action is logical when other channels of expression are denied is pertinent here. (Tilly 1978, in Chernick 1999:170) As the government came down hard on popular protests, often crushing them violently, it was difficult for popular movements to gain momentum. (Pearce, 1990:178) This is not to say that, despite the dangers of repression, Colombians could not turn to mass protest instead of guerrilla warfare, but the dangers of popular protest, combined with norms of violence made guerrilla warfare an attractive option for many. Mauricio García Durán agrees with this, saying of the M-19's recourse to violence:

"I think that in the context of those years, it would have been very difficult to do it any other way: basically because the mechanisms of political participation were practically

shut to anyone but the traditional parties. There was a tightly closed political regime, an exclusion of all political expression that wasn't connected to the two traditional parties: the Liberals and the Conservatives. So, in the years of the National Front, pretty much only the Liberal and Conservative parties were legal [...] This atmosphere [...meant] that the recourse to violence was both very easy and a route that people were pushed down."<sup>10</sup>

However much it can be blamed for the wider violence of the time, the political system is certainly viewed as central to the creation of the M-19. In the words of René Ramos, the organisation looked to "[...] the possibility of creating an opposition in this country that was effective without the use of arms [...]"<sup>11</sup> To get to that point however, arms would be necessary.

From the point of view of CAT then, we see three strong, and closely interrelated, opportunity structures that encouraged the development of armed rebel groups. Firstly, a society in which violence was viewed as legitimate and normal. Secondly, a fermenting culture of dissent, fuelled by international ideological struggles, created an extremely fertile environment for the development of armed groups. Thirdly, an undemocratic state, characterised by long-term political exclusion and poor governance, created a sense of grievance amongst would be rebels, along with a feeling that violence was the only way of executing political change. As María Eugenia Vázquez Perdomo explains:

"In Colombia, you had to shoot to be heard." (Vásquez Perdomo, 2005:xii)

The situation was explosive. Under these circumstances, the decision of the founding members of the M-19 to take up arms was hardly surprising. Such opportunity structures help to explain the group's creation, its attractiveness to potential members, and therefore aspects of its strength, though only in part.

One could ask why the creation of a new organisation was necessary given the numerous other groups that already existed at the time and which had similar grievances. Indeed, co-

founder, Jaime Bateman himself had already been a member of Colombia's largest guerrilla force - the FARC - and could have pursued political change with them. The real opportunity structures that emerged from the circumstances of the time however, lay not in doing what existing guerrillas were already doing, but rather in surprising people. Within the busy market of conventional armed insurrection, there was a niche waiting to be filled, which could give a new organisation both strength and purpose.

### ***1.1.2 A symbolically driven rebel: Insurgency as theatre***

"Bolívar, your sword returns to the struggle" (In Villamizar, 1995:53)

On the 17th January 1974, the M-19 burst onto the political scene with the theft of Simón Bolívar's sword from the Quinta de Bolívar in Bogotá. It was a well-planned and well-executed action, producing spectacular shock value that would become characteristic of many of the M-19's missions. In place of the sword, the rebels left their first public proclamation (Villamizar, 1995:53): a statement of intent and reasoning that introduced the M-19 to the public.

The symbolic importance of Simón Bolívar in Colombia and beyond cannot be understated. Statues and paintings of the great liberator are abundant. Squares are named after him in dozens of Latin American cities. Regions bear his name. Indeed, the entire state of Bolivia is named after the hero who is credited with liberating six countries from Spanish rule. To take his sword, and claim that it was returning to the struggle, was a symbolic masterpiece, which put the M-19 firmly on the map, and in the minds of many, put Colombia's greatest national hero firmly on the side of the M-19. Pierre Bourdieu states:

"There is no symbolic power without the symbolism of power. Symbolic attributes [...] are a public display, and thereby an officialisation of the contract of delegation: the ermine and the robe declare that the judge or the doctor is recognised as having a just cause (in the collective recognition) for declaring himself judge or doctor, that his

imposture - in the sense of the pretention expressed by his appearance - is legitimate."  
(Bourdieu, 1991:75-76)

Bolívar's sword was the M-19's ermine and robe. They were self-declared fighters for the Colombian people and they had the sword to prove it. It gave the organisation symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991:14) in the form of respect and recognition from sectors of the populace, which in turn provided their future claims with a level of legitimacy and clout. This was indispensable in communicating the messages that lay behind the many spectacles they created from that point on.

It has been said that, "terrorism is theatre." (Jenkins, 1974:4) Though the M-19 was not a clear-cut, unequivocal terrorist organisation, and it never aimed to provoke widespread fear, the above observations regarding terrorism can be applied to its tactics. Perhaps in this case we could paraphrase: insurgency is theatre. In Colombia, the M-19 made it so.

The theft of Bolívar's sword represented a break with traditional tactics of the Colombian guerrilla. There was no direct, physical attack on the state or the armed forces and the M-19 gained no significant, material advantage from the action. It was, however a symbolic triumph. The M-19 had noticed a huge opportunity structure - the nationwide neglect of the symbolic struggle. The stagnant predictability of traditional guerrilla insurgency was failing to effectively convey a message. Whilst other guerrillas were targeting the state with conventional acts of violence, and largely ignoring public opinion, the M-19 would target the minds of the people through symbolic attacks on the state.

Former government minister Jaime Castro, downplays the impact of the strategy, saying:

"They had a capacity to disturb public order but they were never close to taking power. Even though they thought they were. But we [the government] we never thought, 'oh they're going to take power in two months, in three months. We need to do whatever to avoid it', no. They were just an urban guerrilla movement with a lot of shock value. It was a guerrilla of spectacles."<sup>12</sup>

Castro's comments, though accurate, betray his traditional outlook on the conflict. He applies conventional assumptions about warfare to an unconventional guerrilla. Through his view, one would certainly judge the M-19 to have been a failure, however the former politician largely misses the point of the group's struggle and misunderstands the very nature of their aims. Rather than taking control and imposing a specific, dogmatic politics on the country, the M-19 aimed to break open the political system to democratic competition. Impressing the public with memorable spectacles was therefore very important - arguably more important, than any military capacity.

Bourdieu takes a broader view of power than that of Castro, saying that, "we have to be able to discover it in places where it is least visible, where it is most completely misrecognised." (Bourdieu, 1991:163) Bourdieu is not referring to spectacles here, which by their nature are very visible and recognisable. In this case, Bourdieu is referring to the power of discourse and being able to shape opinions subtly, through language. He describes, "a power of constituting the given through utterances, of making people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world and thereby action on the world and thus the world itself, an almost magical power which enables one to obtain the equivalent of what is obtained through force (whether physical or economic), by virtue of the specific effect of mobilisation [...]"(Bourdieu, 1991:170)

One can also apply aspects of this idea of symbolic power to spectacles however. The extent of the power that lies behind a spectacle is not always as obvious as the spectacle itself and can certainly go some way to transforming the ways people view the world, or a particular situation.

We see this effect in the Nazi rallies where, ever growing spectacles of well-dressed Germans, marching proudly to rousing music in surroundings draped with the stunning image of the swastika, tapped into the hopes and pride of a broken nation, and transformed their aspirations for the future. One could say that for much of the 1920s the Nazis were just an annoyance that created spectacles, but the power behind those spectacles was

immense.

The M-19 was a completely different entity, to that of the Nazi party in the German inter-war period, however similarities exist in their awareness of the importance of symbolism and spectacle. It could be argued, that dismissive attitudes to the M-19 on the part of enemies who underestimated their impact, ironically added to the organisation's strength. Symbolic power, Bourdieu states, "is that invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it [...]" (Bourdieu, 1991:164)

Although, as with most guerrilla organisations, taking control of the state was an initial goal of the M-19 - a fact illustrated by their early slogan, 'With the people, with arms [...] to power,' (Villamizar, 1995:53) - it was later dropped as the practicalities and necessity of doing so came into question. Dr Mario Aguilera of the Instituto de Estudios Políticos y Relaciones Internacionales (IEPRI) at the Universidad Nacional explains:

"I think that all the guerrillas talked about taking power but [... there is a] distance between proposing it on paper, or proposing it in speeches at conferences [...] and generating a process of insurrection and managing a country with so many ethnic, regional, political, social differences, so [the idea of] taking power weakens itself a bit when one thinks of how exactly to do it [...] I think that one of the first [groups] to realise that taking power would be really difficult was the M-19." <sup>13</sup>

History has illustrated that difficulty even for the largest of guerrilla groups, but as a comparatively small organisation, the M-19 was also one of the groups for whom taking control of the state would be most difficult. Lacking a huge fighting force, the organisation had to put brains over brawn, political messages over physical destruction. Carlos Alberto Garzón says:

"... when a group is politically weak and militarily strong, obviously it's the arms that take precedence and when it's the other way round the logic is with politics rather than war."<sup>14</sup>

Whilst the M-19 were characterised by their flexibility and adaptability, Castro applies old rules to a new game. They didn't need to topple the government or crush the military power of the state. By understating the power of the spectacle he appears to have misunderstood their thinking. Not only were huge displays of military strength unnecessary for the rebels' purposes, they may even have proved counter productive. As María Eugenia Vásquez Perdomo states:

"Gunfire silences the political objective."<sup>15</sup>

In some respects the theft of Bolívar's sword could be seen as a metaphor for the M-19's wider strategy. The sword, like violence in general, was physically useful for a fight, but the value of the symbolism it offered when used cleverly to communicate a message was worth so much more.

Such symbolic warfare became a speciality of the M-19, with high-impact, low casualty attacks being carried out throughout the group's existence. It was a strategy that was somewhat unique in the Colombian context but which was ideal for the M-19's unusual circumstances. It was a modern strategy for a modern Colombia, perfectly adapted to take advantage of another untapped opportunity structure: the expansion of the cities.

Walking through the streets of Bogotá, beyond La Candelaria, there is a marked change of architectural style. Much of the capital is characterised by vast neighbourhoods of 1970s housing - streets of concrete modernity in grid formations. That decade saw mass migration to the cities and a rapid urbanisation of the Colombian population. It changed the face of Colombia, and with it, the country's conflict.



Urbanisation was an opportunity structure that passed largely unacknowledged by the existing, major guerrilla groups, who were comfortable with rural warfare. Though the M-19 maintained a notable rural presence during their struggle, it was their urban character that was innovative and set the group apart. The M-19's founders recognised that as the character of the country was evolving, the character of the war must evolve with it. Taking inspiration from foreign urban guerrilla groups such as the Tupamaros in Uruguay and the Montoneros in Argentina, the M-19 moved the Colombian fight to the city. Dr Aguilera says:

"The M-19 was different in that they had [...] a strategy of urban warfare. That broke with what was happening in Colombia in those years [...] the predominance of the rural guerrilla and the lack of effectiveness of the urban networks of the ELN and the FARC in penetrating the cities. The EPL didn't penetrate much either [...] between the guerrilla groups of that era there was a disarticulation between the urban networks and the rural guerrilla [...] these rural guerrillas in Colombia [...] didn't understand the importance of the urban struggle [...] They didn't understand, or they hadn't taken on board the changes in the country [...] Colombia had stopped being a rural country and had become very urban."<sup>16</sup>

Taking the guerrilla to the cities brought challenges as well as opportunities. Though it may be more difficult to hide operations, carry out large scale fighting and avoid collateral damage within towns, urban warfare also offers close proximity to the seat of power and possibilities of large audiences for one's actions. It was perfectly suited to symbolic action. Vazquez Perdomo emphasises the importance of having an audience:

"[...] it wasn't just bringing the guerrilla to the city to be closer to power [...] to confront power, but rather that communication had a very important role [...] being able to communicate a political message from military actions. Knowing how to do that gave us a favourable political opinion [...] that was the great vision of Bateman. We wouldn't have achieved that with a rural guerrilla like the FARC. That's why he said, 'Let's go to the city.'"<sup>17</sup>

The M-19 saw both the need for, and the potential of urban warfare and they seized the opportunity. For a relatively small and militarily modest guerrilla, the urban environment made symbolic warfare simultaneously both more possible, and more useful. It is said that necessity is the mother of all invention, and the M-19's positioning nurtured innovation.

### ***1.1.3 A media rebel***

" those who were there at the founding of the M-19 already had, as lots of people would say nowadays, the communication 'chip' installed,"<sup>18</sup>

While the violence of Colombian politics had led to a culture of taking things by force and imposing policies on others, the M-19 placed great importance on symbolism and the communication of messages. Aiming from very early in its existence to get into people's heads, the group communicated direct messages but also stimulated interest and thought processes in the population.

The days immediately preceding the M-19s first 'attack' at the Quinta de Bolívar provide a fine example of this strategy, with the series of cryptic notices that appeared in major Colombian newspapers alluding to the problems of society, implying that something major was about to happen and creating a sense of suspense:

" 'parásitos ... gusanos? espere' M-19" (parasites ... worms? just wait) (El Espectador, 15/1/74:1C)

" 'decaimiento ... falta de memoria? espere' M-19" (decay ... forgetfulness? just wait) (El Espectador, 15/1/74:14A)

" 'falta de energia ... inactividad? espere' M-19" (lack of energy ... inactivity? just wait') (El Espectador 16/1/74:13A)

" 'ya llega' M-19 " (It's coming) (Villamizar, 1995:52)

Such adverts prepared the ground for the organisation's launch and added to the psychological impact of its eventual public unveiling:

"Before the M-19 was born, the first thing they did was that propaganda [...] to animate opinion: 'What's this M-19?' [...] 'It's coming,' it says'. What is it that's coming?' [...] We hadn't even said we existed [...] it was the first appetizer..."<sup>19</sup>

Though Tilly and Tarrow speak of repertoires as characteristics of societies, cultures or political regimes, the definition is generally extended to 'sets of political actors' (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007:49) and there is no doubt that the guerrillas in Colombia were political actors with established norms. Just as societies, cultures or regimes have repertoires of action, so do guerrillas. These repertoires consist of 'contentious performances' - "relatively familiar and standardised ways in which one set of actors makes collective claims on [...another]". (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007:202) Various forms of propaganda, including the print media were long established aspects of Colombian guerrilla strategies. It is therefore perhaps a step too far to claim that the above action was a new repertoire, however by designing propaganda in this way, the M-19 pushed the boundaries of established repertoires into the unfamiliar, and simultaneously broke free from societal advertising norms. It was a masterstroke in misdirection, giving a bigger impact to their eventual unveiling and setting the scene for the innovative campaign that was to come. Former M-19 commander Vera Grabe remarks:

"In those days people didn't do advertising that way [...] there are people who say that the M-19 innovated publicity because it was a campaign that launched [...] the name 'M-19' [...] People were saying that it was a remedy for sluggishness, or for parasites and things and it generated the idea that the Eme was a worms remedy [...] and then it turned out to be a guerrilla group [...] These expectation campaigns are very normal nowadays, to announce a product and people don't know what it is and then later they find out [...]"<sup>20</sup>

Whilst many guerrilla groups made use of the print media, the M-19 prided itself on innovation, raising the bar and producing quality material that would attract people. The

poor communication skills of other guerrilla groups, was an opportunity structure that provided the M-19 with another niche they could fill. What the group lacked in military strength, it made up for in its communication prowess. Aguilera, notes:

"For the first time there was a nice, well-designed guerrilla newsletter. We were used to mimeographed pamphlets [...] that the ink came off leaving stains [...] this was a brochure with a very attractive, up to date design, with photos. "<sup>21</sup>

Darío Villamizar highlights the straight-talking style of the communications, saying that the M-19, "didn't talk in a different language from the people [...]"<sup>22</sup> and that the pamphlets were light on left-wing revolutionary terminology.<sup>23</sup> This often had a positive effect on the group's relationships with the press, with the lack of revolutionary seriousness appealing to many middle class reporters. (Carrigan, 1993:34) Villamizar emphasises the strong relationship that developed over time, between late M-19 leader Jaime Bateman and particular members of the mainstream press, saying:

"[...] he was permanently in contact with the people through the media. The communication of ideas was a constant from 1980, through journalists who were generally friends, people who sympathised or who had some great knowledge [...] they were the ones who took the interviews to the press [...] they sent out the ideas about what the M-19 was. Communication became a very important element, fundamental to the M-19."<sup>24</sup>

Such emphasis on the importance of communication was not seen across the board in the Colombian guerrilla movements. Though many groups produced newspapers and propaganda, it was rare for guerrillas to take communication as seriously as the M-19.<sup>25</sup> Grabe claims:

"The Eme were vanguards [...] we didn't have 'Macs' but I think if they'd existed at the time, we'd have used them. We tried to do something very modern, especially in the area of communication [...]"<sup>26</sup>

Villamizar highlights this fact, giving some more hi-tech examples of the M-19's communication techniques:

"Around 1986 or 85, we started making [...] transmissions on short wave, on the radios. We'd put on a cassette with a recording. That was another form of communication, and another that we used for a long time was pre-recorded cassettes [...] we made large quantities [...] and we distributed them all over the country [...] It was new. The other guerrillas continued publishing [...] the ELN published a little booklet [...] 'La Insurrección'. The FARC [...] published a small newspaper [...] 'La Resistencia' I think. The EPL<sup>27</sup> published a little newspaper called 'Liberación'. Each [...] had something but [...] the M-19 innovated. [...] We took radio stations [...] That was also an effective method of communication [...though] the FARC and the ELN have broadcasting stations too [...]"<sup>28</sup>

Whilst there is no denying that other Colombian guerrillas made use of print and radio technology, the M-19 are widely considered to have had a hunger for innovation and bringing new technologies into the conflict to communicate with larger groups of people. In many areas of communication and propaganda then, the M-19 was enthusiastically broadening the traditional guerrilla repertoire. In a 1988 interview, Carlos Pizarro Léongómez demonstrated that zeal saying:

"We've got to flood the country with Betamax, televisions, cassettes, with slogans, symbols, figures, and we can do that by handing it over to the people, sharing with the people the task of developing modes of communication that will allow [people to] hear not only the ideas of the M-19 but hear amongst themselves [...]" (Pizarro in Alzate Castillo, 1988:126)

The Arab Spring has turned the notion of the 'Facebook revolution' into something of a modern cliché, however that perhaps illustrates what the M-19 wanted to achieve: not necessarily pulling down the government, but certainly cracking open communication channels to bring about democratic reforms. The group thus used state of the art technology whenever possible, and many of the techniques the organisation utilised, relied

on their excellent communication and relations with other guerrilla groups across the region.

It is well documented that the Tupamaro movement in Uruguay and the Montoneros in Argentina, being urban, Latin American guerrillas, inspired the M-19 at its inception. The relationships that the M-19 created with these groups and others across the region continued to influence and inform the M-19 throughout its struggle. The abundance of guerrilla organisations that were present in Latin America in the 1970s and 80s, which sympathised with the M-19's cause, represented an enormous opportunity structure that the M-19 exploited very effectively.

Having fought in Nicaragua with the Sandanistas, as well as with the M-19, Fabio Mariño has significant personal experience of the cross-region solidarity that existed between certain guerrillas at the time and speaks of the technological advantages of such networks:

"Our Chilean comrades gave us technology [...] the Uruguayans, 'los Tupas' gave us the technology of how to organise an urban underground movement. That helped us a lot in our organisation of operations [...] They came here. We had Tupamaros here in Colombia [...] fighting for the M-19. We've got a lot of stories about Tupamaros who are still alive that we can't tell [...]"<sup>29</sup>

In fact, the solidarity and movement of soldiers around the region led the M-19, in 1985, to hold a conference with a view to setting up a pan-American army. (Villamizar, 1995:455) The initial meeting, involving themselves, their fellow Colombians the 'Comando Quintín Lame' (MAQL), the Peruvian 'Movimiento Revolucionario Túpac Amará' (MRTA), and the Ecuadoran 'Alfaro Vive, ¡Carajo!' (AVC), amongst others, led to the creation of the 'Batallón América' (The America Battalion) (Villamizar, 1995:455) which saw guerrillas from all over the continent fight in Colombia. Such a creation was again loaded with symbolism, harking back to the days of Bolívar and his pan-continental crusade for freedom. Though it was never a huge, war-winning force, it fostered and cultivated cooperation and perhaps facilitated some of the M-19's technological advancements. Mariño adds:

"The Salvadorans gave us technology [...] that we called 'panelas', which here in Colombia is a form [...] of sugar [...] it was a piece of radio apparatus [...] which also had a very small audience. It was small but it was of instrumental use to the communications policy of the Eme."<sup>30</sup>

Clearly the M-19 was taking full advantage of its international networks for its struggle. Useful information flowed in from all over the region and was embraced with enthusiasm. Perhaps the most immediately powerful of all these foreign technologies however, came from the Argentinians:

"In Cuba, the Montoneros taught Jaime Bateman how to interrupt television signals. It was a very simple thing involving a few antennas and an apparatus that ran off a car battery and with that we put on 'Radio Vinceremos Television.' ('We Will Win Radio, TV')<sup>31</sup>

Modern gadgets and gizmos gave the M-19 an edge in their symbolic struggle that might have been the envy of the Colombian guerrilla, had the other groups better appreciated the usefulness of winning over the public. Whilst modern electronics were a huge bonus however, sometimes a simple, well thought out picture was the most powerful form of communication at the M-19's disposal:

"In [...] '86/'87, the pope came to Colombia [...] and we made a sticker with a photo of him [...]and] the flag of the M-19 and it said 'Welcome to his Holiness. Greetings from the M-19,' [...] I can't remember how many we made but we made a lot and we stuck them on walls, on buses [...] all over the place [...] all of that was a form of propaganda. That was all looking to gain [...] sympathisers in the population. We always worried about that - that the people would have a favourable image [of us...] "<sup>32</sup>

## **1.2 Character of the M-19 (Framing of self)**

The favourable image that the M-19 wanted to portray had a number of elements aimed at different audiences. Ideologically and morally the group hoped to frame itself as superior to, and more attractive than, other guerrillas and the state. The message that the M-19 was a group of and for the people was particularly important, and lay at the heart of its professed identity, as the organisation went about distinguishing itself as a player in the Colombian conflict.

### ***1.2.1 Ideological appeal***

"The FARC read 'Das Kapital', the ELN read the Bible and we read 'One Hundred Years of Solitude.'"<sup>33</sup>

The ideological identity of the M-19 set it well apart from other guerrilla organisations that were operating at the time, and appealed to a wide cross section of Colombian society. The group played up to its identity to garner support with the population and encourage people view it in a particular way, making its ideological standpoint a major factor in the group's framing of itself.

Collective action frames are, according to Benford and Snow, "action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organisation." (Benford and Snow, 2000:614) The M-19's ideological positioning can surely be said to fit such a description, inspiring and informing their actions, at the same time as providing a framework for the justification of such actions and the framing of other actors, events and situations.

Whilst Benford and Snow clearly set ideology apart from framing, they view ideology as "a cultural resource for framing activity," (Snow and Benford, 2000:9) saying that, "the framing process involves, among other things, the articulation and accenting or amplification of elements of events, experiences, and existing beliefs and values, most of which are associated with existing ideologies." (Snow and Benford, 2000:9) They state that



they, "believe that it is arguable and empirically demonstrable that collective action frames are typically comprised, at least in part, of strands of one or more ideologies" and that, "from a framing perspective, ideologies constitute cultural resources that can be tapped and exploited for the purpose of constructing collective action frames, and thus function simultaneously to facilitate and constrain framing processes. (Snow and Benford, 2000:9) They add:

"Following Swidler (1986), we are arguing that if culture is best conceived as a 'bag of tools,' then clearly ideologies function in this fashion in relation to collective action frames." (Snow and Benford, 2000:9-10)

The M-19's ideological position, though not a collective action frame in itself, was an important ingredient in the group's creation of an image and provided a structure that helped create and coordinate further collective action frames.

The M-19 was as different from existing rebel groups ideologically, as it was strategically. Though clearly left leaning, it was far more nationalistic and inclusive in its positioning than previous groups had been. Bolívar was a national hero, not a socialist one, but the M-19 claimed him as their own, sending out a message of pan-Colombian inclusiveness and a strong link to Colombia's past. Mauricio García Duran says:

"It was a less orthodox guerrilla [...] that was more open to certain cultural and social dimensions and that helped them to connect with what was called [...] 'magical realism' [...] I think that allowed it to enter much more into the dynamics of the county and it allowed it to have a certain connection with the urban middle classes [...]"<sup>34</sup>

Magical realism, strongly associated with the late author of '100 Years of Solitude', Gabriel García Márquez, sees reality and the surreal cross over. It is a mindset that many associate with Latin American culture. In a discussion about magical realism, Márquez once referenced his adopted homeland, saying:

"In Mexico, surrealism runs through the streets. Surrealism comes from the reality of Latin America."(García Márquez quoted from 1973 William Kennedy interview in Fetters, 2014)

His books however, would forever cement the association of magical realism with the country of his birth. Together with Colombian nationalism, it became a potent mixture, which influenced and combined effectively with the tactical symbolism employed by the M-19 and resonated with many.

Colombian Ambassador to the Netherlands and brother of the late M-19 leader Carlos Pizarro Léongómez, Eduardo Pizarro Léongómez remarks:

"It is interesting because the M-19 started with the symbol of the sword of Bolívar [...] Bolívar and the independence figures were of the bourgeoisie, of the Latin American elites [...] independence was viewed negatively in Marxist texts."<sup>35</sup>

In stealing Bolívar's sword, the M-19 stole his ideological symbolism from the oligarchy, and gave it to the Colombian people. In some respects, with magical realism in mind, the theft of the sword saw the great hero himself re-enter the fray. The M-19 also made a direct challenge to traditional left wing dogma. Eduardo Pizarro says:

"...the creators of the M-19 [...] - Jaime Bateman and Carlos my brother, Fayad<sup>36</sup> - they were all ex militants of the FARC but they wanted to create a movement that was more distant from the international communist poles of Beijing, [and] Moscow."<sup>37</sup>

René Ramos highlights further problems with the existing left:

"The M-19 was born in reaction to the mutual cannibalism that existed between the organisations of the left [...] the armed groups killed amongst each other [...] and one of the messages of the Eme when it was born was, 'No. There are distinct postures of the left [...]and we respect them'."<sup>38</sup>

In some respects then, the M-19 could almost be seen as having an anti-ideology, being defined as much by what it did not believe in - dogma, uniformity, conformity and foreign communist models - as what it did. The M-19 framed itself as an organisation for the people, whoever they may be and whatever their faults. If you were open and wanted socio-democratic change, you were welcome in the M-19. Fabio Mariño points out that Bateman once said in a speech that, "[...] to be in the M-19 you have to defeat the myth that to be a guerrilla, you have to be a perfect man [...]"<sup>39</sup>

The frustration that many felt about the rigidness of the traditional left, and its ideas of worthiness, are expressed by former M-19 commander Otty Patiño who mocks what he describes as, "[...] this theme of always being 'devoted to the king' from the 60s and the time of Che [...] 'Be like Che.' [...] Everyone viewed Che [...] like Jesus Christ..."<sup>40</sup>

M-19 members openly shunned such attitudes and flaunted a fun, non-dogmatic image. Mariño recounts the story of an M-19 member who was doing an interview in Cuba. When the interviewer began by asking, "So, I assume you've read Das Kapital?" He answered "No, but I've seen the movie."<sup>41</sup>

The result of such behaviour was an image of a guerrilla that was lighthearted and approachable. It was not daunting. It was human. This gained the organisation respect both within its own ranks, and with wider society as a whole. Vera Grabe adds:

"The other thing was overcoming this idea of sacrifice [...] the revolution for us was not about suffering but rather a party. 'We're here because we want to be' [...] We weren't there through hate or suffering or badness but rather because we believed in it and we had a good time. And obviously people died and all that happened but it wasn't this Christian idea that the ELN had that the revolution was martyrdom."<sup>42</sup>

Mariño gives his own interpretation of the organisation's outlook:

"The M-19 was a heavy rock movement."<sup>43</sup>

### **1.2.2 Robin Hood tactics**

"... they were always into popular causes. For example they'd rob milk floats and hand out the milk for free on the corner or in the square or whatever, but that's not revolution [...] It was just a publicity strategy."<sup>44</sup>

Jaime Castro's irreverent remarks regarding the M-19 are perhaps unsurprising given his relationship with the organisation. Having carried out a car bomb assassination attempt on the former government minister in 1986, the rebels could hardly be expected to have gained his admiration. In their flippancy however, his comments on the M-19's popular causes fail to make an important connection. Though they were undoubtedly part of a publicity strategy, that publicity strategy was an integral part of the revolution. It was not a separate entity, but rather an aspect of the M-19's popularity building, self-framing, and communication technique, which again aligned with the group's penchant for symbolism. Rene Ramos explains:

"We thought there were ways of giving examples of what we wanted. Not just making a speech so [...] these actions that we carried out initially, like robbing a milk float and handing out the milk in the poorest neighbourhoods in December, or robbing a lorry of toys from the warehouses [...] and distributing them [...] it was to say to the people, 'we want you to have better conditions [...] more than we're delivering right now.' If you give someone a bag of milk, they drink it and two hours later it's gone but the message remains [...] so in the end this achieved the development of a very important communications capacity. Of all the military actions of the M-19, the things that were very important [...] were very few, but they all generated a very important phenomenon of opinion which [...] was [...] to allow us to do politics. To be able to [...] send a message [...] to be able to confront the state of things through politics [...] So it was a bit like that. Lots of symbolism."<sup>45</sup>

Benford and Snow's diagnostic, prognostic and motivational classifications of frames (Benford and Snow, 2000:615) all have some relevance here. The act of stealing from the

wealthy to give to the poor displays aspects of identifying, or at least highlighting, the problem of poverty, and points the finger at the rich. The M-19, through their actions, presented themselves as a solution. At the same time they motivated people to join their cause and generated both active and passive support within the neighbourhoods. Carlos Alberto Garzón highlights clear advantages for the M-19 in incorporating hearts and minds operations into their struggle, saying:

" [...] the big things that assisted the M-19 as a guerrilla with regards to the government and the state were opinion drives [...] above all some actions that were very much, lets say, in the style of Robin Hood [...] they were courageous actions [...] to search for a way to generate linkages and effective relations with the population."<sup>46</sup>

He is not alone in his reference to Robin Hood. Comparisons with the medieval, English legend regularly crop up in discussions with Colombians about the M-19, and illustrate the feeling in many sectors of the population towards the rebels. The lovable rogue, who fought against a much stronger, corrupt system, stealing money from the rich to give to the poor, is an extremely positive personification of the M-19's role in society. Though the character of Robin Hood was never explicitly part of the M-19's branding, the ideals he represented were very much a part of the group's self-framing and blended seamlessly with their ideological profile.

To what extent such framing tangibly strengthened the M-19 in its struggle is impossible to calculate, however by all accounts the organisation was very successful in making itself extremely popular in certain sectors of society. Mauricio García Durán says:

"[...] I still remember [...] the siege of the Dominican Republic Embassy and in that moment when there was the exit [...] of the rebels] in a 'Cubana' plane to Cuba. I lived in the most eastern part [of Bogotá] in one of the most working class neighbourhoods. It was impressive the people on the terraces. There was a very favourable feeling."<sup>47</sup>

He also recalls the impact that such a favourable feeling sometimes had on the elites, giving a sense of the tangible rewards that the M-19 reaped from its framing strategies:

"One thing that really scared the government [...] during the dialogue with the Betancur administration, [was that] they started to create camps in the cities and there was a really strong response from young people, from people who participated in those camps and got involved [...]"<sup>48</sup>

As with all politically orientated organisations, the popularity of the M-19 did not remain at a constant and consistent level, but rather it fluctuated, with the group fighting a perpetual framing battle with their enemies, who wished to discredit them. Aspersions of terrorism and attacks on the ethics and decency of the group as an unofficial armed movement were commonplace, and at times had an impact. Though the Robin Hood credentials of the organisation were perhaps difficult to refute, morals were a softer target. The M-19's framing of itself as respectable and proper was therefore a third, and arguably the most important, aspect of its image.

### ***1.2.3 The moral guerrilla***

"It was very hard for our generation [...] the experience of the ELN, shooting people for minimal human infractions in the guerrilla. That story of the ELN shooting its youth is terrible and the Eme had to escape that."<sup>49</sup>

The efforts of the M-19 to frame themselves in a way that emphasised their morality were made with three main audiences in mind: their own members and potential recruits, the public, and the enemy. Clearly the above comments relate to the welfare of the M-19 members themselves and the importance of breaking with the norms of capital punishment within the ranks of guerrilla groups. The ideological openness of the organisation surely made this easier for the M-19 and former members have universally expressed the freedom they felt in the organisation. Members enjoyed the opportunities to comment on

the direction of the group or criticise decisions without fear of punishment. They could leave and return to the organisation with relative ease. Grabe states:

"[...] during the first stages of the Eme [...] I never got, 'Vera... comrade, that's no good for the revolution!' but rather, [...] 'You are who you are and you'll have a place if you want it so go and clear your head. Don't worry about it.'"<sup>50</sup>

Patiño emphasises the value that was placed on individual views:

"There was that possibility of personal initiative, or individual initiative, but of course there was also the condition that that had to be endorsed, developed, worked on [...] through the collective but in the Eme the value of individuals was never denied."<sup>51</sup>

One could argue that this attitude of respect for the individual derived from the purported democratic ideals of the organisation. It seems logical that a group who believed in democracy for the state would have democratic features internally. It should also be seen however as an aspect of the group's moral framing. Again there are aspects of diagnosis and prognosis in the frame with the group portraying itself as a moral tonic for the ills of the organised left. It was also heavily motivational however, drawing members and promoting internal cohesion and pride. The M-19 made itself attractive to potential recruits by respecting them and, to some extent, practicing what it preached. A strong sense of freedom and fairness certainly added to the M-19's positive self-image, and within the ranks of the organisation, there is still a definite sense of pride in the liberalism of the group.

The M-19 attempted to lead by example and also publicly condemned practices by other groups, in efforts to take the moral high ground. Patiño, Grabe and García Durán state that the M-19, "strongly criticised the arbitrary execution by which guerrilla commanders traditionally reinforced their leadership."(García Durán, Grabe, and Patiño, 2008:12)<sup>52</sup>

The M-19's disdain for other groups' bloodletting was not contained to respect for the lives of guerrilla combatants, but stretched to respect for human life in general. Grabe explains the M-19's attitude towards informants, both combatant and civilian:

"[...] for example in the gaol, [...] people who spoke under torture, and those who didn't, those people generate problems but [...] there wasn't the attitude of 'you talked so you are worth less' [...] the people who were in the guerrilla, they didn't shoot them. The attitude with the civilian population [...] wasn't that of killing snitches [...] On the contrary, if the people needed to give information, they had to give it. We were the ones who had to look after it. So there was a very different relationship with the population..."<sup>53</sup>

In an environment in which peasants could often find themselves threatened from guerrillas, paramilitaries and the security forces alike, this effort not to burden the civilian population with the task of keeping secrets was a clear statement once again, that the M-19 were on a higher moral plain. Grabe goes on to criticise certain views of the civilian population:

"I remember in the EPL [...] in Antioquia, for them, the people were 'the dough' [...] those who had to help them from whom they could take chickens, eggs, pigs [...] everything, because they were just the 'dough' who had to recognise the pain of the vanguards. The Eme wasn't like that. We were vanguards but in a different way."<sup>54</sup>

Former M-19 members emphasise that they made a conscious effort to avoid bringing harm to innocent members of the public whenever possible. Mariño states:

"Many military operations, the M-19 didn't carry out because the risk to the population was very serious. The ones that happened and exceeded the risks were nearly always caused by the army, like the Palace of Justice."<sup>55</sup>

Ingo Schröder and Bettina Schmidt claim that violent acts by groups "follow cultural models of appropriate action" (Schmidt and Schroeder, 2001:9) and that "war is framed in a



code of legitimation that declares the assertion of interests to be related to moral imperatives." (Schmidt and Schroeder, 2001:9) Such an observation is very much applicable to the Colombian conflict in general, as historical experience and political factors gave legitimacy to the recourse to violence of both the state and the guerrilla organisations. As discussed in part 1.1, use of violence was seen as justified to the point that its use as a general strategy was rarely questioned. However, specific, individual acts of violence should also be considered through that lens of legitimacy. This is a point on which many guerrilla groups and the state fell short. Massacres of one's own troops, for example, are difficult to frame as a respectable use of violence. Violence was a valid tool in the political box but not all of its potential uses were. Not only did the M-19 strive to maintain a perceived legitimacy of their use of violence generally, but they hoped to attach that legitimacy to each of their actions. By condemning massacres and respecting non-combatants, the M-19 attempted to frame itself as a force for good. Each action was carefully planned to limit any damage to that image.

Not all members of society held the rose-tinted view of the M-19's operations that the group strived for however. The Palace of Justice siege, was a particularly controversial event that divides opinion in Colombia to this day,<sup>56</sup> but it was not the only hole in the M-19's 'good guerrilla' image. García Durán explains:

" [...] there was a certain support or back up in certain sectors of the population [...] There was still a very romantic view of the guerrilla. It seems to me that the processes of demobilisation [...] allowed for glimpses into the interior of the guerrilla which made people take a more realistic view [...] It's not simply the 'freedom fighter' [...] Once demobilised, I remember one member of the Eme told me that he had trained paramilitary groups, for example [...] People started to discover these sorts of things and also to discover some of the abuses that they committed."<sup>57</sup>

Whatever their faults however, the M-19 is considered by many to have been, if not a model, an ethical guerrilla, at least more morally driven than most. This is reflected in their

unusual relationship with the state security forces. Fabio Mariño talks of the group's adherence to international law and a strict military code of conduct:

"There are [...] processes of, let's say 'decency' in war [...] The M-19 internally assumed a code of military ethics [...] We took the mandate of the Treaty of Rome and the mandate of the UN and within ourselves we demanded that type of behavior [...] in the area of the injured, on the matter of attention to prisoners of war. It was very different from the situation we lived with from the state [...] that's the ethics of the revolutionary."<sup>58</sup>

The notion of the revolutionary taking the moral high ground is a powerful one that many members of the M-19 emphasise. Despite the obvious anger felt at the underhand tactics of the dirty war,<sup>59</sup> that issue did provide an opportunity for the M-19 to frame itself as the 'bigger man'. The organisation was keen to rise above the mire:

" [...] the dirty war [...] taught the revolutionaries that you shouldn't [...] respond through hate or vengeance. Personally I learned a very important life lesson. I was disappeared and tortured for twenty-seven days. When I came out with my life after the torture and I was still alive, I learned to forgive those people from the establishment who had caused me the pain of torture, because a revolutionary does not do the same as his enemy does."<sup>60</sup>

Such attitudes contrasted not only with that of the state but also other guerrilla groups however:

"There was a group called el 'PLA' - Pedro León Arboleda - which was a group that splintered from the Ejército Popular de Liberación (EPL) and they dedicated themselves to executing police officers and soldiers in the streets. They'd see a soldier and 'toom!' they'd kill him without trial, so compared with that, we had very different behaviour, ethics et cetera, and that kept open a certain possibility of communication with them [the army]."<sup>61</sup>

This view is shared by Fabio Mariño, who emphasises, "... a level of respect between members of the M-19 and members of the armed forces,"<sup>62</sup> which he adamantly asserts facilitated peace negotiations, stressing:

"Of course it did. Of course it did."<sup>63</sup>

### **1.3 Symbolic Insurgency (Framing of the enemy)**

Despite the modest level of respect, between the M-19 and the state security forces, the guerrillas were at war with the state and their self-framing strategies were coupled with powerful attempts to undermine their enemy, framing it as inept, immoral and destructible. Such framing attempts were not without their dangers however, and counter-framing by the state focused the M-19's attention on the battle to win over public opinion. The effort to discredit the state was an integral part of the M-19's struggle. Its three main messages are discussed below.

#### ***1.3.1 The state is weak***

"Today we were unlucky, but remember we only have to be lucky once – you will have to be lucky always." (Bingham, 8/4/13)

One of the principle messages of the M-19's campaign was that the state was not invincible. As a perceived underdog in an asymmetric struggle, the M-19 needed to find ways of leveling the playing field somewhat. Attempts to frame its enemy as weak and beatable were thus invaluable for purposes of morale, building support and simply being taken seriously as a player in the conflict. It is a motivational framing strategy that is shared by many rebel groups around the world and which, if employed cleverly enough, can transform the way a conflict is viewed.

The opening quote of this section is the Irish Republican Army's (IRA) claim of responsibility for the assassination attempt on Margaret Thatcher in Brighton in 1984.

Short, snappy and immensely powerful, it remains one of the most memorable and hard-hitting messages of the Irish Troubles. Proving that the British state was not untouchable, it left the government noticeably shaken. (Campbell, 2004:432) The Iron Lady was suddenly vulnerable, and she'd never seem quite so invincible again.

Though notably distinct from the M-19, the IRA did however, share the M-19's desire to make its feelings known and frame its enemy as weak and 'touchable'. On occasion, their missions were similar.

In 1991, the IRA launched three mortars at London's 10 Downing Street in an attempt to kill then Prime Minister John Major and his War Cabinet. Two of the shells missed, while another was on target but failed to kill anyone. A decade earlier the M-19 had carried out nearly exactly the same attack on the Colombian parliament building - the Casa de Nariño - with nearly identical results. In an interview with the author, in a tower block in downtown Bogotá, René Ramos described the attack. Pointing out of the window to a church on a hillside, he explained:

"Look here, that church is called la Iglesia de Egipto, and the Palacio de Nariño is just here behind us. From [...] Egipto, [...the M-19] launched three mortar bombs at the Palacio de Nariño when Turbay was president [...] One went in [...] but it was something symbolic. It was to say: 'You can't do this with impunity.'"<sup>64</sup>

The symbolism behind the act, like so many of the M-19's actions, was carefully thought out and multi-layered. One might argue for example that the church's position on the hill with its flat entrance area simply provided a good launch point for missiles, however the fact that it was a church is also symbolic. Images of justice raining down from the heavens spring to mind planting the notion that the government would pay for its perceived sins. The fact that the church was in a residential, fairly poor neighbourhood, gives a sense of a message being sent from the people - normal Colombians striking at the heart of government. Even the date of the attack was significant, as Fabio Mariño claims:

"The M-19 was the first guerrilla group in Latin America to militarily send a message to the head of state, which was a mortar to the parliament [...] The 20th July, it's a key date. Bam!"<sup>65</sup>

The 20th July is Colombian Independence Day - a symbol of freedom and hope.

Nobody was killed in the M-19 mortar attack, but the message was sent to the government and the population: the state was not as strong as it liked to think it was, and the rebels were capable of striking at its heart. This, in the opinion of Ramos, represented one of the M-19's biggest strengths:

"I think it [the M-19] was the organisation with the greatest capacity for destabilisation that we've had [...] in this country. More than any other. More than the FARC, let's say [...] the FARC didn't threaten [...] the heart of the state, of power [...]"<sup>66</sup>

The position of the M-19 in the Colombian conflict could be seen as an illustration of Thomas Hobbes' notion of the equality of strength. The seventeenth century philosopher observed that:

"Nature hath made men so equal in the faculties of body and mind as that, though there be found one man manifestly stronger in body, or of quicker mind than another [...] the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest either by secret machination or by confederacy with others [...]" (Hobbes, 2012:188)

This notion can be extended to collective political actors and suggests that despite the asymmetric nature of the Colombian conflict, the M-19 were capable of dealing major blows to the government through clever tactics.<sup>67</sup> Of course, many such tactics left the M-19 uncomfortably vulnerable to accusations of terrorism, and the government enthusiastically portrayed them as such. Rafael Pardo says:

"The M-19 characterised itself with a belligerence and a terrorist capacity that was without precedent in the history of the violent conflict that the country had lived through up to that point." (Pardo Rueda, 1996:125)

The label of 'terrorist' immediately aligns the framing of a group with the negative politics of other organisations around the world, blocking out any nuances in the reasoning or actions of a group with a pejorative, one-size-fits all term.(Schroeder, 2005:69) Michael Bhatia notes that "in internal conflicts images and names are used to depersonalise opponents and create fertile ground for intercommunal violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide."(Bhatia, 2005:11) Though he appears to have more high-intensity race-related conflicts in mind, the idea of depersonalisation is very pertinent to the M-19's situation. Whilst the M-19 were striving to frame themselves as a familiar group of the people, the 'terrorist' label provided the state with a strong counter frame. Bhatia adds that, "Offensive action is taken in the name of defence,"(Bhatia, 2005:11)- an occurrence seen in the Colombian government's justification of repression - and that internal discourse is polarised, "quieting dissenting views and defining parameters, thus ensuring that any local debate or contest occurs on their terms (Bhatia, 2005:11-12)<sup>68</sup>

The notion of terrorism can be both a very effective framing tool, and at the same time, a major framing danger. The old cliché of one man's terrorist being another man's freedom fighter perfectly summarises an important aspect of the M-19's framing war. The M-19 had to show up the government's weaknesses, without looking like psychopathic extremists. Fabio Mariño describes the delicate balancing act:

"The M-19 was the first organisation that used a car bomb in the most militarily guarded area. It was a political message, in the Casa de Nariño, and the great risk of that operation was collateral damage to the neighbours [...] the bomb was not to bring down the building but to send a message. The operation to divert the traffic around the Casa de Nariño from where our car was going to be, was bigger than the bomb. And that bomb, which was the first car bomb in Latin America at the seat of government didn't cause more than two or three injuries."<sup>69</sup>

Terrorism is a tactic of the underdog. It is for the weak, however, as Hobbes observed three centuries ago, physical weakness does not equate to an inability to strike an opponent. That is a message that the M-19 had to convey.

The M-19's framing of the government as weak and 'touchable' provided hope that change was possible. The communication was clear. The M-19 could not match the national army in firepower, but they didn't need to. Just as David defeated Goliath, the M-19 could defeat the government. That was the difference between the actions of the M-19 and those of other organisations that can be more solidly defined as acts of terrorism. Whilst terrorism usually aims to strike fear into a populace, the M-19 intended to give hope to the populace. The fear was reserved for the state.

### ***1.3.2 The state is stupid***

" [...] the theft of the arms at the Cantón, [...] was a declaration of war on the armed forces. To disarm them was an attack on their honour [...] and obviously that generated a strong process of confrontation."<sup>70</sup>

In December 1979, a group of M-19 members dug a tunnel into an arsenal at the Cantón Norte in Bogotá, stealing a large quantity of arms from right under the noses of the national armed forces. The operation temporarily strengthened the M-19's military capacity by around 5000 weapons but, once again, the message behind the attack was far more significant than the material gains. María José Pizarro Rodríguez explains:

"At the beginning when they said 'with the people, with arms, to power' it was about the situation with violations of human rights [...] that Turbay had advanced. They declared the army as an enemy [...] It sort of began by [...] discrediting the army, making them look like fools, [showing that] 'obviously the military intelligence isn't so intelligent' [...] and that generated a direct confrontation between the army and the M-19."<sup>71</sup>

Such framing was very motivational, attracting huge attention and showing people what could be achieved in the struggle against the state. The rebels had robbed one of the most secure sites in the country by simply digging under the walls. It was a memorable event, which has some similarities to the Zapatista Rebellion of 1994 in Chiapas, in which a poorly armed peasant army overran and briefly occupied four cities using pieces of wood that had been carved to look like guns. (Gossen, 1996:528) Though the phoney weapons were a practical necessity for an army that was too poor to properly equip its soldiers, the seemingly ridiculous nature of the event inflicted a profound and famous humiliation of the Mexican armed forces that was comparable to that suffered by the Colombian army in the Cantón Norte raid.

The action was also somewhat prognostic. In the words of Benford and Snow, prognostic framing, "involves the articulation of a proposed solution to a problem, or at least a plan of attack." (Benford and Snow, 2000:616) Although the action didn't overtly propose any plan, it did promote general disrespect for the army, making them look utterly incompetent. If the army couldn't even look after their own guns, stored within a military base in the capital city, how could the people trust them with anything else? Additionally however, it twisted and built upon a plan of action proposed by the state, compounding the army's humiliation by turning one of its own proposals on its head. The act was designed to make the army leaders eat their words:

"It wasn't just the act of entering into a military base and taking the arms cache in the middle of [...] the heart of the army, and stealing 5000 weapons, but also [...] the Minister of Defense came out a few days before to say that the people should arm themselves [...] the phenomenon of self defence [...] The General, the Minister of Defence told the people to arm themselves and the people did just that - '5000 guns for the people'. So they [the M-19] targeted what they had said [...]"<sup>72</sup>

The guns never got to the people. The fact that the army managed to recover all of the arms within weeks (Carrigan, 1993:80) perhaps goes to show that the main aim of the attack was not to take the weapons themselves but to frame the army as foolish. The physical gains of



the attack were more than the M-19 could handle at the time but the humiliation of the army was powerful.<sup>73</sup>

The technological skillfulness of the M-19 allowed the organisation to further embarrass the government, particularly with their television interruptions. For some time, the government did not know how the guerrillas were doing this or how to stop it, massively overestimating the level of sophistication of the technology used:

"The army thought it was similar to the apparatus that they use in London that checks for television signals for enforcing tax, that's a van. They thought it was the same."<sup>74</sup>

Darío Villamizar says:

"I think the whole world imagined that we had some studios where we did analysis and knew when to interrupt..."<sup>75</sup>

The inability to make the transmissions stop made the government look particularly inept, whilst the symbolism of actions like cutting off the president in mid-address and replacing his voice with that of a rebel showed great disrespect for the state:

"[...] it didn't interrupt images. It interrupted voices and it only worked in a limited area, but it was news. It was news that when the president of the Republic was speaking, he was cut off and the M-19 would speak, reproducing a proclamation [...]"<sup>76</sup>

Such news spread like wildfire, generating rumours, and hearsay about the M-19 and the government and creating a ripple effect that was far greater than the attack itself. The mystery surrounding how the guerrilla were carrying out the action fed into the idea of magical realism and saw the guerrillas harness the power of imagination in their struggle. Mariño explains:

"It was magic [...] The magic was that the message wasn't of the guerrilla, but of the people and it became magic because the people [...] in those days [...] would go to watch the football, waiting to see when the Eme would interrupt [...] and 'boom' suddenly there'd be interference [...] It didn't cover the whole city [...] it only covered a very small area but the next day the magic [was people saying] 'No! [It happened] in Cali too! In Chía too'. It wasn't like that, but that's how the news was because it was something new and beautiful. It was a distinct war."<sup>77</sup>

### ***1.3.3 The state is criminal (a tale of two sieges)***

Distinct as the M-19's war may have been in some ways, it still often followed certain trends and repertoires of rebel actions. In a conversation drawing parallels between an embassy siege in Guatemala and the Dominican Republic Embassy siege in Colombia, Darío Villamizar states:

"Taking embassies at that time, in 1980 [...] was the order of the day."<sup>78</sup>

It was certainly a common occurrence around the turn of the decade.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, such events occurred throughout the 1970s and 80s and were not limited to embassies, as events like the hostage tragedy of the 1972 Munich Olympics (Johnson, 2001:896), and the M-19's own Palace of Justice seige demonstrate. On the M-19's part, that siege and that of the Dominican Republic Embassy have come to be defining moments in its struggle, with each producing very different results.

#### ***i. The Dominican Republic Embassy siege:***

" [...] And so they sent us messages from La Picota, which was another gaol, saying, 'No, no, the way out was political'. What did they mean a political way out?! '[...]' Bateman had said that it was a political way out and we were like, 'Yeh, right.' We wanted a real way out! How were they going to just leave us there?!"<sup>80</sup>

Thirty-four years on, Vera Grabe jokes with fellow M-19 members about her own personal disappointment in the outcome of the Dominican Republic Embassy siege of 1980. Amongst the laughter, one still picks up traces of fading resentment. With a misplaced belief that her incarceration was coming to an end, she watched the events of the siege unfold on television from the Buen Pastor prison. The gaols of Colombia were full of guerrillas, but in the M-19's opinion, it was the elites who were the criminals.

The siege saw an M-19 unit enter the Dominican Republic Embassy during a Dominican Independence Day party involving diplomatic staff from all over the world. (Villamizar, 1995:170-171) Holding the building for 61 days, the M-19 originally hoped, in addition to their monetary demands of 50 million dollars, (Jenkins, 1981:37) to see the release of guerrilla prisoners and raise awareness of the Colombian government's human rights abuses, pressurising them to change. (Vásquez Perdomo, 2005:107) The elites were to be framed as criminals who were incarcerating freedom fighters.

Though the framing aspect of the Dominican Republic Embassy siege was principally diagnostic then, there are many other framing elements involved in the attack. The M-19 were characteristically careful to treat their hostages well to show the world their compassion. Many of the embassy staff were released early, partly for practical reasons of keeping hostage numbers manageable, (Vásquez Perdomo, 2005:112) but that would also display the rebels' humanity. The event was also an opportunity to make the government look both foolish by undermining its ability to competently host foreign dignitaries, and weak - the building was held by only sixteen, lightly armed rebels. (Carrigan, 1993:80) The M-19 made the government believe that they had mined the second floor of the building, when in fact they had done no such thing.<sup>81</sup> The ability of the Eme to exaggerate its strength is an achievement that Vásquez Perdomo, who was one of the sixteen hostage-takers, emphasises:

"Not everything in the Eme was deception but the Eme gained a lot from making out that it was stronger than it actually was."<sup>82</sup>

The principle aim of the attack, from a framing point of view however, was to highlight the human rights abuses of the state and in that, it was a notable success. The level of publicity gained by the attack was huge. It was exciting news and with so many diplomats from so many countries being involved, the events hit television screens worldwide. Vera Grabe emphasises the gripping nature of the reports:

"It was the first event that was televised. There was a permanent camp in front of the TV [...] It was an event that people followed day by day. It was the best film the Colombians had ever seen."<sup>83</sup>

The success of the event was also partly down to pressure from human rights organisations at the time, which were calling for some of the same changes as the M-19.<sup>84</sup> Such attention from internationally respected human rights organisations lent the M-19's actions legitimacy in the eyes of huge numbers of people, adding to the pressure on the government, whilst simultaneously giving the politicians a way of justifying an acceptance of certain guerrilla demands. Vásquez Perdomo believes:

"The [success of the] embassy was [...] 1. We echoed a clamour that was also coming from human rights organisations [...and 2...] as it was a modern guerrilla in terms of communication it knew well how to communicate a political message [...]"<sup>85</sup>

The framing success of the operation in boosting the M-19's good-guerrilla image, whilst shedding light on the government's human rights abuses, therefore came, in no small part, as a result of a major opportunity structure: the interest of the human rights organisations, who were focusing on the same issues as the M-19 at the time. René Ramos very succinctly highlights the dual framing achievements of the operation:

"The embassy [...] had many virtues [...] it was something that was largely bloodless - obviously one of our comrades died when he was going in but it was quite bloodless - which successfully lifted the veil on the political regime at that moment in this country, at the international level."<sup>86</sup>

All of the hostages survived the ordeal, unharmed, the M-19 gained a modest monetary sum, and from a public relations point of view, the event was a phenomenal success. (Carrigan, 1993:81) The government entered into talks with the M-19, international attention was drawn to the state's human rights abuses, and the government agreed to sign accords with international organisations to oversee adherence to human rights norms in Colombia. (Vásquez Perdomo, 2005:119)

The successes of the Dominican Republic Embassy however, come in stark contrast with the tragedy of the Palace of Justice siege, five years later. One could argue that the achievements of the embassy lead to a sense of hubris regarding the seizing of buildings but whatever the reasons for the events of November 1985, the outcome was disastrous.

## ***ii. The Palace of Justice siege:***

"I remember that column of black smoke the next day. I saw that smoke and I said 'There are the souls of my friends.' It was hard. So hard."<sup>87</sup>

Following an unsuccessful peace process in 1984 and 1985, the M-19 decided to go back to war. Blaming the government for the breakdown of the talks, and buoyed by the memory of past successes, the M-19 carried out their most audacious attempt ever at framing their adversaries as criminals. In the words of Carlos Alberto Garzón:

"That [peace] process was really long. At first they made some agreements that were not abided by [...] Precisely the taking of the Palace of Justice was to bring the government to justice for not abiding by the initial agreements that the M-19 had proposed."<sup>88</sup>

After enduring an uneasy cease-fire for ten months,<sup>89</sup> the M-19 broke off the negotiations, (Chernick, 1999:176) seeing an opportunity to forward their cause. In an ambitious effort to overtly frame the government as criminal, on November 6th 1985, the M-19 sent a

commando unit to take the Palace of Justice and put President Belisario Betancur on trial. (Chernick, 1999:176) The reaction from the army was swift and crushing:

"There's a really serious breaking point that was the Palace of Justice [...] the military structure assumed the management [and said] 'Belisario, step aside, you don't want to deal with the consequences while this finishes' [...]"<sup>90</sup>

In a ferocious retaliation the army surrounded and laid siege to the building, right in the centre of Bogotá, engaging in twenty-eight hours of fighting with the rebels that left over one hundred people dead and the Palace of Justice completely destroyed. (Chernick, 1999:176) It was a national tragedy that shocked the public (Chernick, 1999:176) and crippled the M-19, causing, in the words of Professor Carlos Nasi of the Universidad de los Andes, "a severe loss of popularity, legitimacy, and prestige," by the guerrilla. (Nasi, 2002:284)

From a framing perspective the operation had catastrophically backfired. The M-19 had not only failed to frame the government as criminals, they had handed their enemies a golden opportunity to frame them as terrorists and as being in league with the drugs cartels. The idea was put forward that the M-19 had been paid by Pablo Escobar to destroy criminal records and that they had done so in an act of terrorism with complete disregard for human life<sup>91</sup>. Having tried so hard on so many occasions to shake off such pejorative labeling, it was now nearly unavoidable.<sup>92</sup>

The government's counter framing of the M-19 was successful and whilst nobody came out of the events of November 1985 looking good, the M-19 were dealt a much greater blow than their adversaries. The bloody outcome of the event forced the M-19 into a period of self-reflection which changed the course of the conflict. Considering the gravity of the situation, Mauricio García Durán's comments on the matter come across as something of an understatement:

"It seems to me that [...] after the failure of [...] the Palace of Justice siege they asked themselves some serious questions."<sup>93</sup>

## **2. A hostage to fortune? Álvaro Gómez and the peace process**

### **2.1 The 'war against the oligarchy' and the kidnapping of Gómez (Framing of the conflict and opportunity structures)**

Reports on the physical strength of the M-19 in the years following the Palace of Justice siege are almost universally very negative, and there is no doubt that the years following the tragedy saw the M-19 embark on a reduced-violence strategy that ultimately ended in peace negotiations. The reasons why the M-19 decided to ratchet down its armed struggle at that moment in time however, are somewhat debatable, as is the question of whether or not the group was defeated. Such issues are all relevant in explaining how the M-19 made its gains in the peace process and will be discussed below.

#### ***2.1.1 The 'war against the oligarchy' (framing)***

"The Eme took up arms to defend the electoral victory of a retired army general, Rojas Pinilla [...] we ended up fighting with the National Army and later [...] Carlos Pizarro said, 'no more war with the army,' and that the war was with the oligarchy..."<sup>94</sup>

At the root of the M-19's paradoxical relationship with the army was the fact that the organisation had never seen the armed forces as a natural enemy but rather, had fallen into the position of having to fight it in order to get at the country's political elites. Fabio Mariño claims that many armed forces personnel had family connections to the M-19, saying that "in the area of personal and family relations, there was lots of intertwining."<sup>95</sup> Carlos Pizarro Léongómez himself was the son of a navy admiral and the M-19 were keen to display a level of honour befitting a legitimate army. René Ramos recalls his time on trial:

"A certain level of competition was generated over who could be more gentlemanly in the court martial - us or the officers who were judging us? [...] On the first day of the court martial [...] in Medellin [...] there were about 15 or 18 of us from the Eme who were accused, and before it started, we stopped and sang the national anthem. So, the next day, the colonel who was presiding over the court martial ordered that all the troops should sing the national anthem [...] In the breaks from the trial, the colonel would come over to chat with us and would bring us things and we'd argue over who would pay the bill and the troops started to see this and in the barracks at night they'd tell us that they were surprised at how the officers treated the M-19 prisoners because they treated the guerrillas from other groups horrendously badly. So there were certain things that allowed us to have a distinct form of communication with the army."<sup>96</sup>

Despite the bad blood between them then, in many ways the M-19 and the army were reluctant enemies who could relate to each other on a level that was unmatched by any other guerrilla.

Though one might assume that the army's assault on the Palace of Justice would ferment hatred within the M-19 and drive the organisation to more combative behaviour, loss of popularity with the public and the major damage done to the guerrilla's fighting capacity instead encouraged the group to extend an olive branch, proclaiming a new mantra:

"Peace to the army, life to the nation and war to the oligarchy." (Interview, Bogotá, July 2000 in Nasi, 2002:297)

This was a clear signal to the army that the guerrillas had no interest in fighting it any longer, and an indication to the people of Colombia that large-scale combat of the sort seen at the Palace of Justice would not be provoked by the M-19 again. It was also however, a redefinition of the conflict. Having spent years framing the players in the struggle in particular ways, M-19 was now reframing them, and with that, reframing the war itself.

The new slogan illustrates the diagnostic and prognostic character of the framing effort. The M-19's "identification of the source of causality, blame and [... culpability]" (Benford



and Snow, 2000:616) had been significantly refined. The army was no longer a foe. The problems of the country were the fault of the oligarchy and the M-19's plan of action was to target them specifically. The proclamation was also a powerful sound bite, intended to resonate with the people, once again tapping into cultural references to mobilise support and sympathy. In this case, it worked on the memory of the charismatic, former Liberal presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán - a perceived man of the people -who was assassinated in 1948. Mario Aguilera explains:

"[...] there is an interesting use of methods [by the M-19], and a very clever use, to lead a country that was anxious for change. On the one hand this, 'peace to the nation and war on the oligarchy', of course. That [...] point was powerful for the working classes and the middle class. It was striking because [...] in those years there was still established in the Colombian culture, a rejection of the management of the country by an oligarchical, traditional group, that came from many years before. So there was an image of a very strong elitist monopoly. The associations were very sensitive to that anti-oligarchical discourse because it was used a lot, years back. It's from one of the Colombian politicians of the 1940s - Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. He had used that terminology of oligarchy [...] so the M-19 appeared also in cultural terms [...] like heirs to that discourse, of that great leader who was thwarted with his death in 1948. And they used it deliberately. So they tried to intellectually draw a line of continuity between Gaitán, who lead the people and rejected the oligarchy and themselves."<sup>97</sup>

From the point of view of some in the M-19, the oligarchy was trying to take advantage of the violence in the country to consolidate its position.(Dudoet, 2009:25) As previously mentioned, violence can be used to justify repression and the resistance of political change. War was therefore becoming an obstacle to the M-19's goals, (Dudoet, 2009:25) and though the shift to 'war on the oligarchy' was not an official call for peace, it was a significant move in the direction of reduced violence on the part of the M-19. The idea of peace making as a transformative strategy rather than a definitive ending was beginning to develop.(Dudoet, 2009:25) Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz once famously described war as a "continuation of politics by other means". (Clausewitz, 1989:87)

Perhaps in the case of the M-19's transition to peace, we view the opposite: politics as a continuation of war by other means.

The difficulty facing the M-19 from a practical point of view, was that if the oligarchy was the enemy, who could be included in that category?<sup>98</sup> Even now, three decades on, the term causes confusion. Patiño's suggestion in a group interview with the author, that the left also has an oligarchy sparked heated debate that concluded with a general agreement that the oligarchy is

"[...] found in the heart of the people."<sup>99</sup>

Clearly then, the oligarchy was not a fixed enemy that could be attacked militarily on any grand scale, however this arguably suited the M-19's style of symbolic warfare very well. The fuzzy, pliable nature of the concept of 'oligarchy' lent itself well to framing and allowed the M-19 to hone in on small, symbolic targets and individuals whose targeting could have a big impact on the ruling class. Physical weakness was no great barrier to such tactics. Otty Patiño explains:

"[...] the forces that could carry out a strong action against the oligarchy were, [...] in quite a poor position [...] In any case one of the possible objectives was to face a figure from the oligarchy... and there was Alvaro Gómez [...]"<sup>100</sup>

### ***2.1.2 An act of war that led to peace (opportunities & framing)***

"The important thing about the kidnapping of Álvaro Gómez is that an act of war transformed itself into an opportunity for peace."<sup>101</sup>

In the post-Palace of Justice siege years, the much-weakened M-19 had to tread very carefully in its actions and be even more specific in its targets. One action in particular has been widely credited with opening up a path for the guerrilla to make their transition to peace. Mario Aguilera explains:

"[...] I think that all [...] the actions of the M-19 were very well thought out and they applied pressure. They were masters in carrying out that type of action and in locating a sense of the most opportune moments. Of course, to kidnap the son of Laureano Gómez, the great chief of the Conservative Party, it was a shocking thing, you know? Something that was a really big threat [...] In some ways that could influence the necessity for peace. I think that the kidnapping also resulted in a sort of agreement that peace was necessary. [...] But the M-19 made a mistake at the Palace of Justice [...] when they had that option to kidnap Álvaro Gómez they were already a diminished group that was criticised for the assault on the Palace of Justice. It was an M-19 [that was...] very desperate."<sup>102</sup>

Desperate or not, with the kidnapping of Álvaro Gómez Hurtado in May 1988, the M-19 dealt a powerful blow to the ruling elite. Gómez was from a powerful family, a prominent member of the Conservative party, who had been their presidential candidate on a number of occasions, and was also the director of *El Siglo* newspaper. (Pardo Rueda 1996:85) Kidnapping him caused a massive stir infuriating the government and the oligarchy more generally.<sup>103</sup> The action also got the rebels noticed, shining a spotlight on their relations with the government and providing an opportunity for the M-19 to put forward peace proposals. A peace plan was proposed by the M-19 on 30th June, which included, amongst other things, a sixty-day ceasefire and a conference with representatives from all sectors of society, including themselves and the government to discuss the future of the country. (Pardo Rueda 1996:88)

Gómez claims there was a very strong reaction against the M-19's proposal, which he believes was the rash result of Pizarro's search for a way to end the armed struggle. (Gomez, 1989:127) There was certainly anger from the armed forces at the thought of having a cease fire imposed on them (Pardo Rueda 1996:89) however, the mood for negotiation was far healthier than in the days of the Palace of Justice siege and the M-19's proposals were something to work with. It appears that openness to the pursuit of peace on both sides created some common ground.

This situation lends itself to Zartman's concept of ripeness - when an environment develops that is conducive to making peace. (Zartman, 2001:22) He states that ripe moments revolve around some level of perceived Mutually Hurting Stalemate (MHS), (Zartman, 2001:22) and that is possibly the case here, in part, for reasons that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. We can also however, consider the development of ripeness as a phenomenon apart from MHS at this stage. Zartman describes ripeness as a "perceptual event" (Zartman, 2001:23) and says that "as with any subjective perception, there are likely to be objective referents to be perceived." (Zartman, 2001:23) The Palace of Justice tragedy could be seen as just such an objective referent, representing something of a climax in the animosity between the M-19 and the state. Following the heat of that event, the declared peace on the armed forces and the reduction in the M-19's armed action, there is a strong sense that the tensions between the rebels and their enemies cooled somewhat.<sup>104</sup>

Whilst some view the kidnapping of Alvaro Gómez therefore, as having given the M-19 the opportunity to force peace talks on the government, opening the way for it to proceed with its cause as a legitimate political party, others disagree<sup>105</sup> but at the very least one could say that as Gomez's kidnapping required negotiations to resolve, it got the ball rolling in the peace process. Both sides were forced to sit round the table and talk to each other, opening up channels of dialogue and creating a foundation on which further, more general peace negotiations could be built. What is more, by holding Gómez hostage, the M-19 put itself, at least initially in the driving seat of the negotiations. It was the actor making the demands, and that attitude could then be carried through to the peace talks themselves. The M-19 can be credited with having played its cards very well in the situation.

René Ramos, maintaining that the kidnapping cornered the government, highlights the power of surprise in the circumstances:

"Obviously I think that the negotiations became a priority in the policies of the Barco government. There's a problem in that the state was totally unprepared [...] for a peace

process. To the point that the peace process was [only] possible because we were in a state of emergency [...] For that reason, as Barco's government had these exceptional powers, he could propose to the government a peace process."<sup>106</sup>

This does not sound like a government that had been planning peace for months however it does concede a level openness to dialogue on the government's part. To return to Zartman's notion of ripeness, he claims that it is "only a condition, necessary but not sufficient for the initiation of negotiations. It is not self-fulfilling or self-implementing. It must be seized." (Zartman, 2001:23) In this case, both sides seized the chance of developing peace negotiations and working through their differences.

Whilst this helps to explain how the peace negotiations came about then, there are still some questions regarding why the M-19 wanted to make peace at that moment in time. Jaime Castro believes the M-19 was comprehensively defeated, presenting that as the reason for why the rebels were keen to make peace:

"They had nowhere else to go. They weren't going to take power and they didn't want to all end up sacrificing themselves. It was an act of realism [...] They were defeated and so was their concept of revolution, their concept as guerrillas, their idea that the taking of power is with arms. It's not with arms, it's at the ballot box."<sup>107</sup>

He has a point in that the organisation did see no future in armed struggle and many people share his view that the group was defeated. Carlo Nasi speaks of numerous army personnel who were convinced of having decisively beaten the M-19, quoting one General as having said:

"there is an old sentence of (Colombian president) Lopez Michelsen, that in order to have true peace accords, first you have to make the guerrillas kneel. The enemy must be on his knees. Only then will the guerrillas make a real peace accord, because they feel weak. The case of the M-19 is symptomatic (of this)". (Interview, Bogotá, July 2000 in Nasi, 2002:293)

Nasi observes something however that suggests that although the rebels were in a particularly bad position in terms of military strength, their influence was not completely crushed. He states:

"For this General then, it was crucial that the M-19 was faring badly in both military and political terms prior to the negotiations. With such a desperate situation, the status of the rebel group could only improve if the M-19 engaged in negotiations. In his opinion, the negotiations offered the M-19 an opportunity to win at the bargaining table what it could not win in the battlefield."(Nasi, 2002:293)

While this emphasises military defeat then, it also concedes that the group was not defeated outright but rather saw a new route through which to continue its struggle showing a further example of its revolutionary flexibility and innovation. In a country that was tearing itself apart, perhaps the most revolutionary thing to do was to negotiate peacefully. Rather than giving up, the M-19 may have found a better way forward. This goes back to the reverse Clausewitz idea of politics as war by other means. On the surface an astute move can look like a failure. Carlo Nasi cites an unnamed M-19 commander as having told him:

"(...) the weapons were impeding (our) further political development, which led us to sign the peace and focus on politics." (Interview, Bogotá, July 2000 in Nasi, 2002:295)

To say that, "weapons were impeding"(Interview, Bogotá, July 2000 in Nasi, 2002:295) development strongly suggests strength in the move to peace, rather than weakness. Ingo Schröder and Bettina Schmidt's view of violence as "a complex social phenomenon that under certain circumstances may not be a good strategic choice at all" (Schmidt and Schroeder, 2001:6) is pertinent here. The armed struggle had become counter productive for the M-19. They saw what they had to do to move forward and that was the action they took. In the words of Otty Patiño:

"Sometimes military victories hide political ones."<sup>108</sup>

The decision to negotiate and make moves toward laying down arms then was from some perspectives a political victory concealed behind a perception of military defeat. The kidnapping of Álvaro Gómez however, had allowed the M-19 to frame it to many as a military victory that forced the government to the negotiating table. Vera Grabe claims that:

"For as long as you feel you aren't defeated, you aren't defeated. If you're still alive and still active [...] you are not defeated. Defeat, like victory is very subjective"<sup>109</sup>

And the M-19 was determined not to concede defeat. When it came to actually handing over their weapons for destruction, the M-19 did so to an international organisation rather than to the state. (Nasi, 2002:291) It was another symbolic act: The guerrillas had decided to pursue a peaceful continuation of their struggle - they had not surrendered. (Nasi, 2002:291)

Though credit is due to both sides for their willingness to make the most of the opportunity to negotiate, the M-19's portrayal of the episode can surely be seen as a framing triumph on the rebels' part. Creating a media frenzy and a spectacle in which it appeared that the rebels had forced the government's hand the M-19 came out of the event looking very much like winners. In an ironic and paradoxical turn of events, the guerrillas appeared to have almost literally put a gun to the head of their enemy and demanded peace. It was perhaps a last public display of military capability before the peace process. They seemed to have held the state to ransom with the power of a single bullet. In another flourish of Independence Day symbolism from the rebels, the announcement that Gómez would be released hit the newspapers on the 20th July 1988. (El Tiempo, 20/7/88:1) Rather than appearing a loser in the conflict, the M-19 had framed itself as a champion of peace, paving the way for a constituent assembly in which it would have strong public support.

## **2.2 Bateman, Pizarro and the 'sancocho nacional' (Leadership)**

"Bateman [had the idea] that the revolution was a party [...] Pizarro was an expression of an internally flexible, non-dogmatic, fresh organisation [...] He's an idol within the organisation and was outstanding. So was Bateman."<sup>110</sup>

From the birth of the M-19 to the peace negotiations, many important and influential figures emerged from the organisation, both in top ranking positions and in supporting roles. A discussion of each and every prominent M-19 member is beyond the scope of this thesis, however two individuals in particular stand out as having been particularly important in shaping the way in which the M-19's strategy related to the final peace negotiations. These are Jaime Bateman and Carlos Pizarro Léongómez. They will be discussed, each in turn below.

### **2.2.1 Bateman**

" [...] a boss appeared, a guerrilla leader, unarmed [...] combing his hair [...] without a hood, so he showed his face, and he started to talk [...] and he gave his name. He said 'I am the commander of the M-19'. I think that signified a powerful change. From that point on the guerrilla started to talk in a different way to the people in this country."<sup>111</sup>

Just as the M-19 changed the way guerrilla organisations were viewed in Colombia, its first leader, Jaime Bateman, changed the image of the guerrilla commander. His relaxed style became iconic and was like a personification of the image the M-19 had created for themselves as a group. Darío Villamizar recalls that until Jaime Bateman, guerrillas in Colombia tended to know their leaders from photographs of them, hooded and armed to the teeth, hiding in the deepest, darkest parts of the mountains.<sup>112</sup> For the public too, guerrilla commanders were mysterious and dangerous figures but Bateman changed that. Through the simple act of revealing his face and talking like a normal man, he humanised the M-19 leadership for members and civilians alike, building respect, familiarity and trust with those he addressed. René Ramos reveres his talent in this area commenting:



" [...] there was an exercise in constructing dialogue [...] with the people. In that respect Bateman is legendary."<sup>113</sup>

Charles King stresses the importance of key leaders in conflict, viewing them as critical in defining the nature of the conflict itself. (King, 2007:125) He states that how a leader chooses to frame a conflict matters a great deal to how it is settled. (King, 2007:125) Ramos recollects Bateman once saying:

"Here, politics only has two expressions: elections and bullets."<sup>114</sup>

Bateman was skilled in both politics and the gun and though he came to strongly prefer the idea of the former, always keeping in mind the political impact of the guerrilla's actions, he was not averse to utilising the latter. In truth, though the above is a catchy soundbite, it portrays a somewhat binary choice between the bullet and the ballot, failing to illustrate the leader's appreciation of the nuances of potential strategies that were available to the M-19. Elections and bullets were very much connected on a broad spectrum of political expressions, and although governmental elections were not an option that was available to the M-19 during Bateman's life, the leader seized opportunities to steer the group on a democratic path. At times such opportunities emerged from the mire of armed conflict. Ramos explains:

" [...] From the Dominican Republic Embassy siege [...] Bateman said, 'Here we have the opportunity to start to construct something [...] a construction that's more consensual, more discussed and less confrontational.' [...] it's democracy. And he said we had to open that up even with arms [...] The M-19 was democracy in arms."<sup>115</sup>

The significance of the Dominican Republic Embassy Siege stretches beyond the aforementioned aspects of the M-19's framing strategy, to the point that it changed the M-19s perception of its own goals and set the group on a definite track to eventual negotiations.

Like her friend Vera Grabe, who was left to languish in the Buen Pastor Gaol, María Eugenia Vasquez Perdomo was initially very unhappy with the outcome of the siege. In her autobiography she states:

"None of us thought that we would leave the embassy alive without our compañeros. The slogan 'Victory or Death' was the condition of our existence. We really internalised it [...] I was so angry I cried. I hadn't come this far to leave with our compañeros still in prison." (Vásquez Perdomo, 2005:118-119)

Bateman however, had spotted the value of dialogue, compromise and living to fight another day, deciding to negotiate a peaceful end to the action. In reference to concluding civil wars, Charles King claims that in addition to the importance of a leader's framing of a conflict, there is a leader's framing of the possibility of peace. (King, 2007:125) He adds:

"Disputes that are characterised in all-or-nothing terms, where fundamental differences divide the sides and where no form of single state is possible, can be settled only by first shifting the frames through which conflict is viewed." (King, 2007:125)

He obviously makes this statement in reference to civil wars that have an element of secessionism, in which the territorial integrity of the state is under threat. Though that particular issue was never a feature of the M-19's conflict, the emphasis on all-or-nothing outcomes is applicable. In the process of the Dominican Republic Embassy Siege, the M-19 saw a shift in the frame through which it viewed the skirmish. That then triggered a shift in their view of their wider conflict strategy.

In many ways the events of the Dominican Republic Embassy are a metaphor for the life of the M-19 itself. The guerrillas entered hard-headed and determined to get everything or die trying, but in the process of their actions, guided by flexible, intelligent leaders with vision, they learnt the value of compromise, negotiation and dialogue.

King writes that leaders do not only affect how conflicts are framed but that they also "contribute their particular worldviews to how a conflict is characterised and marketed, not only to their own sides but also to potential allies and adversaries outside the conflict zone." (King, 2007:125) In the case of Bateman, one of the most powerful influences that emerged from his worldview did not come directly in relation to conflict itself however, but rather referred to the country's future. He had a vision for change and development that was highly appealing and which reached out to many beyond the conflict zone. As a goal, that vision for the peace affected the character of the M-19's war. Ramos describes it:

"From the proposition of national dialogue or what Bateman called the 'sancocho nacional' [...sancocho...] for us is a type of food [...] it's a soup that you find in every region of the country, and it has different variations [...] One seems different from the other but it's sancocho, no? And Bateman said that [...] we had to develop the national sancocho [...] everyone brings whatever they've got [...]. Someone adds plantain, someone else adds yuca, someone else puts in meat blah, blah, blah and the music's playing [...] and everyone's helping [...], 'that is national dialogue[...] the development of a sancocho, made by everyone' and each person puts in their own thing, whatever they've got, whatever it is [...] their diversity, their difference, their limitations [...]and I think the Constituent Assembly is a good example of a sancocho."<sup>116</sup>

It was a powerful and purely positive metaphor for the country and for the revolution. It tapped in to something that was familiar to all Colombians: food and the traditions that surround it. Aligning perfectly with the idea of the revolution being a party, the vision was to bring everyone together. Everyone had something to offer for the good of society. It was a positive vision, and though Bateman was a rebel at war with the state, it was an image not of vengeance or his own group crushing the enemy, but of a collective triumph of the people of Colombia over their own, shared problems. It has echoes of the sentiments of Martin Luther King's world-renowned 'I have a Dream' speech and, those of Bobby Sands M.P, that are immortalised in a west Belfast mural:

"Everyone, Republican or otherwise, has their own particular role to play [...] Our revenge will be the laughter of our children."(Mural, Falls Road, West Belfast, Ireland)

Bateman's significance then was that he not only sent the M-19 on a path towards peace, but he offered a vision for the future that was inclusive and attractive to everyone. That vision and attitude was a huge aspect of the M-19's strength, bringing them a level of legitimacy and support from people across the social spectrum.

### **2.2.2 Pizarro**

"Here we call him 'Comandante Papito'<sup>117</sup>, because all the young ladies thought he was very handsome. They all fell in love with him as if he was a film star [...] that was his image."<sup>118</sup>

Bogotá has no shortage of people willing to confirm Jaime Castro's account of Carlos Pizarro's popularity with the female population. Myriam Rodriguez, the woman with the enviable position of being his wife is one of them, though she emphasises his magnetism with the public in general, saying:

"He was charismatic. In the public squares he drew a lot of people. [...] The common people wanted to touch him, even if it was just like that [she lightly taps the author's arm]. It was impressive! [...] That charisma, that way of talking [...] his voice came from his stomach [...] His voice, his way of talking slowly, his hand gestures, all of that, well, yes, he was very charismatic."<sup>119</sup>

Such charisma and oratory skill was an invaluable quality of Pizarro's leadership, which added to what Bourdieu would describe as his 'symbolic capital' - the recognition that he received from others in society. (Bourdieu, 1991:72) Without symbolic capital, trying to impress one's opinion on others can be like yelling in a vacuum - it doesn't matter how good your ideas are if nobody respects your opinion. Pizarro however, had the ideas and the symbolic capital needed to project them.

If there is any individual who can be credited with the M-19's disarmament, it is Pizarro. Former M-19 members recall that during a process of communications between the M-19 and the government, aimed at formulating a move toward peace, Pizarro unilaterally brought up disarmament. Darío Villamizar adds:

"He didn't consult us internally [...] Afterwards he assembled the [M-19] leadership [...] In other organisations a decision of a commander of that magnitude would have produced God-knows how many insurrections."<sup>120</sup>

In fact, the action did cause major ruptures initially. For many of the guerrilla, laying down arms before they had 'won' the fight, was madness. María José Pizarro Rodríguez says:

"It isn't easy for a guerrilla to put down his guns. I think it's the most heretical decision that a guerrilla can make."<sup>121</sup>

That's not to mention the fact that it would leave the rebels unable to protect themselves, exposed to the dangerous possibility that their foes could simply exterminate them one by one. There was precedent for that, with the FARC's political wing, La Union Patriótica, seeing over 500 of its members murdered within the first two years of its existence (Villamizar, 1995:515). Vera Grabe remembers the shock at the suggestion of disarmament:

"We here in Bogotá were thinking 'what's happening to him? This talk of laying down arms? What's is this? He's crazy!'"<sup>122</sup>

Pizarro was able to bring the guerrillas round to his way of thinking however, convincing them of the futility of continued bloodshed and the need to take a leap of faith. It was an impressive feat, which demonstrated his political skill and the clout he had with members of the organisation. René Ramos says:

"The capacity of Pizarro to convince the others was very strong. The people [...] trusted him. This man, who'd been the warrior of warriors, took the decision so it's not a problem of betrayal. It's not a problem of cowardice. He doesn't have other agendas. So that helped a lot [...]"<sup>123</sup>

This reference to 'warriors' is again an aspect of what Bourdieu would consider Pizarro's symbolic capital. He says that when an agent wants to influence the opinions of others, they can "put into action the symbolic capital that they have acquired in previous struggles." (Bourdieu 1986 in 2009:21) As a result of the reputation he had built up over the years as an excellent military man, people respected his right to challenge the continuation of the armed struggle - a challenge that in most cases would have been rejected. In the words of Grabe:

"Because Pizarro had so much military experience, so much authority, he could speak of peace. Others couldn't have."<sup>124</sup>

Aside from his vision and persuasiveness, Pizarro is also widely credited as being a man of his word, who had a strong sense of fairness. With the M-19's disarmament, Pizarro stated that the M-19 had paid cash and that it waited for the government to pay its dues in the form of a long-term credit. (Nasi, 2002:320) He showed trust in the government and he expected the same in return. This helped immensely in the M-19's dealings during the peace process.<sup>125</sup> The ability of Pizarro to build trust with others was based on his attitude, however, the connection he made with those from the government's side, was also facilitated by his background and social standing. Such factors, Bourdieu also considers symbolic capital. Some aspects of this, such as Pizarro's education at the prestigious Javeriana University would fall into the sub category of 'cultural capital' (Thomson in Bourdieu, 1991:14) whilst factors like his family connections, as the son of an admiral would be considered 'social capital' (Bourdieu, 1986:21) It is all symbolic capital however and whilst many M-19 members also had some comparable attributes, Pizarro put them to particularly good use in his relations with his adversaries. The relationship that developed between Pizarro and the government peace councilor Rafael Pardo became particularly

significant. Pardo was a member of the cabinet and one of the initial negotiators with the M-19.<sup>126</sup> Mauricio García Durán says:

"I think the role of the leaders of the M-19 was very important. I think in the case of Pardo too, as a negotiator [...] there was a synthesis [...] that facilitated the dynamics of the process, for sure, the advancement of the negotiations. They had some drinks together [...] this played a big role."<sup>127</sup>

Though Pizarro's daughter María José is adamant that her father would never have considered Pardo anything close to a friend, she concedes that they developed a level of mutual respect and understanding.

"There was an opening [...] My father had the opposite fame of what he had after the peace process. He was considered a man of war, one of the most warlike of the M-19, one of the most radical [...] of course he had a lot of military experience. The image [...] was of a man who was the complete opposite of what Pardo found [...] he was a man with whom you could talk man to man [...he'd give] you the respect that you deserve [...] He wasn't of peasant origins [...he had] the same qualifications [...he was of...] the same class [...] I think that facilitated it. It permitted a dialogue [...] The trust that the other will keep their word [...] I think that was important in the case of my father. He was a man of values that had been lost. If he gave his word he kept it. That, and he had very noble behaviour [...] he gave the trust [needed] to continue."<sup>128</sup>

This supports the notion that symbolic capital played a big role not only Pizarro's gaining of respect from the enemy but also in turning Pizarro and Pardo's views of each other into something which, if not approaching the status of friend, was at least more akin to 'acquaintance' than 'foe'. María José paints a picture of noble adversaries of old who would dutifully deal with each other in a somewhat clinical fashion. Others however give a strong impression that a genuine liking developed. René Ramos states:

"There was a certain chemistry between them [Pizarro and Pardo...] interaction, trust [...] I think there was a lot of transparency between the two. There wasn't much of a hidden agenda."<sup>129</sup>

Pardo himself writes positively of Pizarro and the relationships he built up with both him and other M-19 leaders. In his autobiography, for example, Pardo states that after a meeting with the M-19:

"We left [the guerrillas] two boxes of Chivas whisky and a few bottles of Veuve Cliquot champagne [...] We'd developed a close relationship with the leaders of the M-19, which undoubtedly facilitated our workings in moments of crisis like those we faced." (Pardo Rueda, 1996:163)

Whatever the relationship, there was a definite shift in relations between the M-19 and members of the government in that period and the openness of both Pizarro and Pardo must be credited to some extent.

The violence in Colombia generally, remained intense and no level of good will from Pardo could prevent political killings from taking place. Pizarro's murder a year and a half later was one of a number of high profile political assassinations that occurred during the elections of 1990 but was arguably one that had the most impact. Opening fire on a flight that had just departed Bogotá for Barranquilla, Pizarro's assassin was shot dead almost immediately, but not before he had shot the AD/M-19 presidential candidate thirteen times in the head, neck and hands. (Semana, 1/5/90:28-29) It was the morning of Thursday, 26th April, 1990. Pizarro had handed over his arms only the month before. (El Espectador, 19/10/12) El Espectador laments:

"He lived just 49 days a civilian." (El Espectador, 19/10/12)

The public outpouring of grief was immense, as Myriam Rodriguez explains:



"You can't imagine what Carlos' burial was like [...] That was impressive [...] They shut the Plaza de Bolivar and [...] it was a queue like a snake around the Plaza [...] because so many people wanted to see him[...] and the people came in, saw him, paid their respects and moved on [...] the whole of Bogotá was turned on its head [...] When we came out of the cathedral into the Plaza de Bolivar [...] people went with us - and not our people - the students, the workers from the offices [...] on the bridges over the '26' you couldn't [...] fit another soul, and torrents were coming down. It was raining like you wouldn't believe [...] and nobody moved for Commander Pizarro[...] The man driving the car said to me, 'I don't know madam, but I'll tell you something. I've done burials [...] I drove the [funeral] car of Luis Carlos Galán<sup>130</sup> but I've never seen anything like this. Never. It's awe-inspiring."<sup>131</sup>

### **3. The winds of change**

#### **3.1 A cocaine fuelled surge of violence (Opportunity structures)**

"You're asking how such a small group managed to achieve so much. It was because the other was even smaller..."<sup>132</sup>

The second half of the 1980s saw violence in Colombia spiral to unprecedented levels. The situation would provide a major opportunity structure to the M-19 simply in the form of a weaker and more distracted enemy. By the end of the previous decade, the North American hunger for cocaine (Pardo Rueda, 1996:183) had seen production of the drug, spread north from Bolivia and Peru to Colombia (Pearce, 1990:173). The drug became a game changer in the country's conflict, altering the perspectives of the guerrilla groups, corrupting people in positions of power and heightening the level of bloodshed as drug cartels vied for power, turning themselves into major players on the Colombian political scene.

### **3.1.1 *The rise of the cartels***

Although Colombian cultivation and production of cocaine truly soared in the 1990s (Linton, 2013:144) drug gangs, most famously Pablo Escobar's Medellín Cartel, wreaked havoc on the country throughout the 80s causing a huge increase in violence. The signing of an extradition agreement between Colombia and the U.S at the start of the 80s, that would see drug traffickers imprisoned in the United States instead of Colombia, incurred the wrath of the cartels and became one of the principal causes of terror for the population. (Pardo Rueda, 1996:183)<sup>133</sup> Adding to the existing problems in the country, violence levels continued to increase throughout the decade and into the next. Marc Chernick claims:

"Between 1987 and 1997, over 270, 000 homicides were recorded. Most of these were considered social violence and crime, although in Colombia, the line between social and political violence is unclear." (Chernick 1999, in Arnson 1999:163)

What was clear however was a link between the growing cartels and violence in the country, which, by the end of the 1980s, was soaring.<sup>134</sup> Rafael Pardo writes:

"[In] November [1989], drug violence raged to unimaginable levels. On the 27th November a bomb destroyed a full Avianca flight that was travelling between Bogotá and Cali with 107 passengers. They all died. On the 6th December at 07:30, a bus loaded with 1000 kilos of dynamite was driven into the eight-story headquarters of Das, the security agency that took on the Medellín Cartel. 64 people died, 250 were injured and at least 1500 families were affected. The headquarters was virtually destroyed.

Once again the country's morale was on the floor. There was no prospect of ending the war. The people lost hope and there was little the government could offer them." (Pardo Rueda, 1996:159)

Once again, a backdrop of violence provided a perfect opportunity structure for the M-19. Whilst in the late 80s, they had been described as weak and desperate, the government was looking increasingly worthy of the same description. Mario Aguilera sees the drug problem as the biggest facing the government at the time, saying:

"The aspect that is important about those years [is] that the threat of the drugs trade surged. The threat of the drug trade positioned itself as a much more serious threat than that of the guerrilla so the state had to confront two threats [...] I think the state's intention was to neutralise one of these two threats and the one [...] that seemed more possible to take down was the guerrilla with the peace process."<sup>135</sup>

It is interesting here to explore Zartman's concept of Mutually Hurting Stalemate (MHS) (Zartman, 2001:22) and how it might help to explain why the peace process took place. He states:

"Parties resolve their conflict only when they are ready to do so - when alternative, usually unilateral means of achieving a satisfactory result are blocked and the parties feel that they are in an uncomfortable and costly predicament." (Zartman, 2001:22)

MHS is often taken to mean that each side in a potential negotiation is causing enough damage to the other to make continued war very costly, but neither side is doing enough to actually win. In this case, although the M-19 wasn't inflicting much physical damage on the government, only really doing enough to be annoying, the other sources of violence in the country were inflicting so much damage that it was crippling the state. Essentially, the government wanted rid of one of its headaches. Zartman does specify that the pain being inflicted by each side does "not necessarily [come] in equal degree" (Zartman, 2001:22) so we may still consider this MHS.

Such a concept is also relevant to the previously discussed debate regarding whether or not the M-19 was comprehensively defeated or whether it merely took a change of strategy. MHS would suggest that although it could not win militarily, it was not defeated either. In pursuing negotiations, both sides made some progress in their aims that they could not otherwise have made.

Pardo appears to contradict the idea that the rise in violence encouraged the peace process when he says that that the drug war eclipsed the issue of making peace with the guerrilla. (Pardo Rueda, 1996:150) Though the sharp surge in the already rising violence might have distracted the government's attention from the peace process with the M-19 however, that does not mean that the peace process completely ignored. The government's attention was simply drawn more to something else. Though one might assume then that this would be a disadvantage for the M-19, seeing thoughts of peace negotiations put on the back burner, it was perhaps also an environment that was conducive to making demands. The government was both distracted and under increasingly extreme pressure. René Ramos puts it more succinctly:

"I think that ... in a climate [of] such multiple sources of violence as we had in this country at the time, the government could say, 'ok we can at least neutralise this factor [...] we can't tell them no' [...] Bateman used to say that we had to proposition them in a way that they couldn't say no."<sup>136</sup>

The remarks recall the aforementioned belief of President Michelsen that to make peace with the guerrilla, one first had to bring it to its knees. (Interview, Bogotá, July 2000 in Nasi, 2002:293) An opportunity structure had emerged in which the government was struggling and was ready to make peace with the rebels. The M-19 had not brought the government to its knees but it was kneeling. Circumstance had seen to that. They could now be propositioned, as Bateman had intended, 'in a way that they couldn't say no'.<sup>137</sup>

### **3.1.2 *The boom of the guerrillas***

A reduction in the government's perception of the seriousness of the guerrilla problem relative to that of the drug cartels should not be confused with an actual weakening of the guerrilla. In fact, the 1980s saw a major expansion of rebel groups (Nasi, 2002:272), compounding the pressure on the government, and reinforcing the opportunity structure that came with it. Some new groups were formed or splintered from larger, existing groups.(Nasi, 2002:272) <sup>138</sup> In addition, all the guerrilla organisations grew significantly in

terms of manpower and their geographic reach within the country. (Pecaut 1997:896 in Nasi, 2002:272)<sup>139</sup>

The expansion of the guerrilla groups was fuelled in no small part by the development of the cocaine trade, and the attitudes of each group toward the trade were as diverse as the groups themselves. Each had its own reaction to the industry, with some growing significantly more than others. Mauricio García Durán says:

"It's difficult to gauge. When you look at the violence figures [...] The group that had the opportunity [...] was the FARC, which went straight in [to the cocaine trade]. Also the ELN which was more timid and which initially had some objections, partly because of its more Christian roots, regarding the theme of violence [...] Also [for] the ELN, I think one of the things that affected it and made it lose clout was that it didn't go in as hard in the area of drug trafficking. When it finally did, it was a bit late. The possibility for expansion that the FARC had was partly down to that. So that's the scenario. [...] If the M-19 had got more [...] involved, I don't know. [...] The fact is they didn't."<sup>140</sup>

Duran's mention of the ELN losing out in this context should be understood in terms of speed of expansion only relative to that of the FARC. In reality, the ELN expanded greatly, going from an estimated 800 fighters in 1986 to 3000 in 1995, covering 32 fronts. (Rangel Suárez in Aguilera, 2013:132)

The guerrillas then, took a pragmatic view on the cocaine industry (Pearce, 1990:173) with the FARC embracing it most enthusiastically and reinforcing its dominance as the biggest guerrilla group as a result. Perhaps the M-19 could have turned itself into an enormous military power had it been more proactive in taking the reigns in the narcotics trade, however it was particularly reluctant to do that. Funding pressure was a problem for all rebel groups and through the drugs trade, many were resorting to methods of financing themselves that were, to say the least, ethically dubious. (Zuluaga, 1999:26) The M-19 was determined not to bring violence to non-combatants in order to further its goals. (Zuluaga, 1999:26)<sup>141</sup>

Relative to the FARC, the M-19 was a mere thorn in the side of the government, (Linton, 2013:148) however, that may have been more of an advantage than a problem. The unique character of the M-19 as a politically driven guerrilla, ever conscious of public opinion, masters of symbolic warfare who used violence sparingly could have been fundamentally undermined by a massive, cocaine funded expansion of their physical capabilities. Perhaps that is a further reason why the organisation was so reluctant to throw itself into the drug trade. Cocaine shaped the Colombian conflict in the 1980s. How each guerrilla dealt with it went a long way to defining their personalities, strategies and priorities.

The M-19's political interests took precedence over military expansion: brains over brawn. For reasons already discussed, the unique nature of the M-19 against a background of traditional guerrilla organisations, whose methods were old hat, was one of its advantages. The environment of traditional warfare was an opportunity structure that had allowed the M-19 to create success from reacting against type. The effects of the cocaine industry in the 1980s created another opportunity to take unorthodox paths.

The expansion of other guerrillas and drug cartels throughout the decade saw the level of violence become so great, that it provided both the need for and the opportunity of a further change of strategy. The M-19 couldn't keep up militarily, and questioned the use of trying to do so. Instead, it played to its strengths. Years earlier, the shifting war environment had led to the change of tack that saw 'peace to the armed forces and war on the oligarchy.' (Interview, Bogotá, July 2000 in Nasi, 2002:297) At that point, the M-19 had noticed problems spiraling and that in the middle of such widespread violence, any violent tactics would lose meaning, doing nothing but adding to the fear in the country. (Nasi, 2002:296) Not only would violence no longer work, it would become counterproductive. The increasingly violent strategies of many of the guerrilla groups were losing them much of whatever public support they had. This was an opportunity for the M-19 to once again frame itself as the good guerrilla and win back some of the support it had lost in the Palace of Justice.

At its beginning, the M-19 had revolutionised the revolution through symbolic, urban warfare. With its change of targets in the war against the oligarchy, it did so again. In the late 80s, the M-19's flexibility and ingenuity was again put to the test. Disarmament and entering negotiations was an opportunity to make demands when the government was at its weakest, seize the moral high ground, win back mass support from the population, and with that support, carve out a position as a legitimate political party with which it could implement further change. Making peace had become the most revolutionary thing that the M-19 could do.

### **3.2 Civil unrest (Opportunity Structures)**

*"'Ejercito de Liberación Nacional' (Army of National Liberation), 'Fuerzas Militares [sic] Revolucionarias de Colombia' (Revolutionary Military [sic] Forces of Colombia), 'Ejercito Popular de Liberación' (People's Liberation Army). 'Forces', 'armed', 'liberation'. These were the names of the moment. [...We were] a new thing with a distinct oxygen [...] 'Eme 19'."*<sup>142</sup>

Fabio Mariño's emphasis on the naming of the 'April 19th *Movement*' is interesting in the context of growing civil unrest in Colombia. As society's problems took their toll on the population, a number of protests and social movements developed that would act as another opportunity structure for the M-19. Though the rebels did not drive the people to revolt, they often actively aligned their cause with those of protests, when they occurred. Vera Grabe describes some of the group's actions as "more movement than structure."<sup>143</sup> That is a characteristic that is well illustrated by events of the late 1980s.

#### **3.2.1 Protests in the neighbourhoods**

The rapid urbanisation seen in Colombia in the 70s and 80s was largely unplanned and caused major problems in the towns and cities. (Pearce, 1990:223) Though housing was being built on a grand scale, with an average of 100,000 houses being constructed per year under the Betancur administration, it was not enough to keep up with the insatiable

demand. (Pearce, 1990:224) This led to the development of informal housing, shanty towns and slums which, by 1990, made up 64% of housing in Bogotá. (El Espectador, 16/3/89 in Pearce 1990:224) Consequently, the 1980s saw a boom in civic protest as people decried the deficiency or lack of public services in their neighbourhoods. (Aguilera, 2013:128)

Tilly and Tarrow present social movements as a significant manifestation of collective action, defining them as, "sustained campaigns of claim making using repeated performances that advertise the claim, based on organisations, networks, traditions and solidarities that sustain these activities." (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007:111) Though many of the civil protests of the time perhaps lacked the organisation necessary to fit into the theorists' definition, they demonstrated many of the characteristics included in it. Civil unrest is an expression of collective action and its prevalence in late 80s Colombia surely constituted an opportunity structure for the M-19.

The years between 1982 and 1989 saw an average of 30 civic strikes a year, with people demanding such basic necessities as water, electricity, sewerage and rubbish collection. (Restrepo, Luis Alberto in Aguilera 2013:128) Trade unionists added to the public outcry, though trade union activity at the time is downplayed. René Ramos says:

"The workers movement had very important moments [...] but I think it had a very important period of activity in the social and political process that was more in [...] the 70s [...] In the 80s there wasn't much incidence."<sup>144</sup>

Evidence suggests that rather than the trade union members calming down however, they merely shifted their attention from work-related issues, to problems at home. The 1984-1990 period saw trade union strikes double from the previous decade to 1036, with 172 in 1989 alone.(CINEP in Aguilera 2013:128) One might view this as an act of solidarity with the civic movements - 'solidarity' being a factor that Tilly and Tarrow highlight in their definition of social movements (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007:111) - however in reality, the workers, often living in the slums, were as much a part of the civic movements as anyone else. Carlos Alberto Gárzon explains:



" [...] the problems were basically civil problems. The problem was... it wasn't even [just] the working class anymore. The demands weren't about salaries [...] the issues were the problems that existed in the neighbourhoods: water [...] public services, the streets, hospitals, health [...] The worker has his conflicts in the factory but [...] the ground on which they express themselves and protest was in the neighbourhoods. And the worker doesn't live in the most comfortable neighbourhoods, he lives in the marginal ones. [...] So [...] a number of [...] socio-political factors were fermenting in a way that 'BOOM' causes an explosion [...] and [...] when they had the last civic strike [...] militant organisations [...] like the M-19 [were able] to consolidate political projects [...] With the capital accumulated from this, they [the M-19] were able to [...] enter into negotiations with the government."<sup>145</sup>

Whilst Garzón sees a general opportunity structure for the M-19 in this environment then, he also highlights the last civic strike as a specific opportunity, linking it directly to the success of their peace negotiations. Others disagree with that assessment of the situation however. Though he emphasises the power of the people's movements, Marío Aguilera questions the guerrilla's ability to capitalise on it, saying:

"There was an explosion in Colombia, a wave of movements [...] that started to demand solutions to very local problems with public services - water, electricity[...] in that period of the [late] 80s - A golden age for the civic movement. There were protests, marches, roadblocks, but they were connected to finding solutions to very concrete problems with public services [...] so it wasn't anything political, it was something else. But the guerrilla tried to attach a political element to it and organise some marches but that didn't resonate sufficiently."<sup>146</sup>

For Aguilera to claim that the issues in contention were not political is a somewhat strange statement to make. In many ways such protests are an example of politics at its most raw: people taking to the streets for the bread and butter issues that were affecting them at the time. Benford and Snow claim that "since social movements seek to remedy or alter some problematic situation or issue, it follows that directed action is contingent on identification

of the source of causality, blame and/or culpable agents," (Benford and Snow 2000:616) and although they clarify that an agreement on the nature of a problem does not necessarily lead to consensus on its origin, (Benford and Snow 2000:616) in this case, the government was widely seen as culpable. It is often said that your enemy's enemy is your friend and even if there was no direct link between the M-19 and the civic movements, mutual sympathies still presented an opportunity structure, with the M-19's foes coming under yet more pressure. With regard to the success or failure of the M-19's capitalising on the situation, the truth is probably somewhere between Garzón's and Aguilera's versions of events. One might say the civic movements gave more resonance to the M-19's frame of itself as a guerrilla of the people, with the people demanding many of the same things as they demanded. Even if the M19 failed to attach its own cause to the social movements, it was certainly able to appropriate the cause of the social movements for itself. The unrest in society gave legitimacy to the M-19's demands and the admirable electoral results of the AD/M-19 in the first elections after the peace agreement<sup>147</sup>, suggest that the civic movement did the M-19 no harm.

### ***3.2.2 The Séptima Papeleta***

"At the start of 1989, the country didn't expect much of its students: a generation that was apathetic and indolent. They didn't have team spirit. They weren't organised. They weren't interested in politics." (Semana, 6/3/2010)

This description, in 'Semana' magazine, of public attitudes towards the student population, if accurate, shows that the country could not have been more wrong. The assassination of Luis Carlos Galán in 1989 triggered a massive response from the universities. On the 25th August of that year, a crowd of 25,000 people, mostly made up of students from the many universities of Bogotá, amassed in the capital, holding white handkerchiefs, and started to walk, in silence through the city. (Carillo Florez, 2010:27) It was a powerful condemnation of the violence that had rocked the country in recent years and marked the beginning of a movement calling for political, socio-economic and justice reforms. (Jorje Carrillo, quoted in El Colombiano, 3/7/11) More specifically it pushed for a 'séptima papeleta', or 'seventh

ballot', to be included in the upcoming election of 1990, through which people could express their desire for a national constituent assembly that would update the country's century old constitution. (Jorje Carrillo, quoted in *El Colombiano*, 3/7/11)

This event, fitting Benford and Snow's aforementioned definition of a social movement, presented a huge opportunity to the M-19. It was a major manifestation of non-guerrilla driven collective action, calling for what was arguably the M-19's principle goal - the overhaul of the Colombian constitution at the hands of what was essentially Bateman's national sancocho. René Ramos emphasises that it was a long-standing demand of the guerrilla, saying:

"I have a particular reading of all that business. I think the political and social climate for the constituent assembly in some ways was created [...] from the guerrilla. It was born [...] a long time before. The proposal was born of the EPL [...] the EPL was the first to talk of a constituent assembly as far as I remember, and that was, I don't know, in the year [...] 1984 or something like that [...] when the idea started of negotiating with the government of Betancur [...] and we had our first conversations with the national government [...] We also introduced the idea of a constituent assembly in our negotiations with Barco [...] What I think is that it has been attributed too much to the Séptima Papeleta [...] I think the Séptima Papeleta [...] were a catalyst but I don't think it can be attributed only to the students [...]"<sup>148</sup>

Some interesting questions arise from the occurrence of the Séptima Papeleta then, regarding who was more responsible for achieving the setting up of the Constituent Assembly. Was it the M-19, the Séptima Papeleta movement, or both? It certainly was not a brand new or unusual idea, arising even before Ramos claims, as early as the Second National Forum for Human rights in 1981, (Fox, Gallón-Giraldo and Stetson, 2010:470) however the pressure for it was mounting, with the student movement and the M-19 leading the demands. Mauricio García Durán sees both groups as factors in a general shift toward change:

"In those years, there was a demand for political openness and better political participation [...] and I think the Séptima Papeleta was a movement that resonated a lot with people. It was a movement that had a lot of backing [...] so it formed part of the context of the global demand for political openness that the country was asking for [...] I think it had an impact in so much as it [...] promoted constitutional reform and [...] a constituent assembly [...] It had an impact in the context because it was a manifestation, but up to a point the M-19 was also a manifestation of this. So by two different routes they created expressions of that desire for political openness..."<sup>149</sup>

Jaime Castro affords far more credit for the Constituent Assembly to the student movement and believes that it indirectly smoothed the M-19's transition to peaceful politics. Of the movement, he says:

" [...] it facilitated the reinsertion of the M-19 because it provoked the Constituent Assembly, and the M-19 had a popular image [...] They had 19 of 70 seats [at the assembly].<sup>150</sup>

If nothing else, the Séptima Papeleta movement gave the M-19's calls for a constituent assembly wider legitimacy. The importance of that should not be underestimated and can perhaps be illustrated with a return to Bourdieu's notion of symbolic capital. In this case social capital is relevant in that it is "an aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to [...] relationships or mutual acquaintance and recognition - or in other words to membership of a group." (Bourdieu, 1986:21) Though he is referring to individuals' relationships and memberships of groups, the notion can to some extent be logically extended to collective political actors. Just as Pizarro gained individual respect from his family connections, the M-19 gained respect from its association with the demands of the Séptima Papeleta. It provided a level of legitimisation for the M-19's cause. This is significant not only in that it may have strengthened the public acceptance mentioned by Castro, but also in that it opened the way for the government to accept some of their proposals. It was far easier for the government to bow to requests that were obviously widely supported in society than ones that came from their enemies, who some viewed as a

terrorist organisation. Whoever was more responsible for achieving the Constituent Assembly therefore, it was a shared goal and the student movement was of great help to the M-19 in making it happen. Ramos concedes:

"[...] obviously it was a very important thing because in some ways the Séptima Papeleta legitimised an idea of a certain need. Let's say, large sectors of public opinion thought that it [a constituent assembly] was important, necessary [...]"<sup>151</sup>

When the referendum was put to the people, 88 per cent of voters came out in favour of a constituent assembly to strengthen democracy. (Fox, Gallón-Giraldo and Stetson, 2010:471) The Constituent Assembly was a major opportunity that would allow the M-19 to legitimately put forward ideas and have them debated in an open and democratic manner but it would also greatly facilitate the government's acceptance of such ideas.

In truth, the idea of reform was not unattractive to the government but the Constituent Assembly gave them a way to allow it without losing face and in an open, legitimate manner. From the perspective of both the government and the M-19, the agreement to have a constituent assembly would facilitate the peace agreement and provide an opportunity for everyone to negotiate the reforms they wanted. It was a democratic opening. Though one could argue that, like the rise in violence levels and the civic protests, the student movement piled yet more pressure on the government - one could equally say that it offered the government a release. Many politicians also wanted reform and they now had an opportunity to implement it.

### **3.3 Fresh thinking and conflicted interests (Opportunity Structures)**

Whilst the aforementioned factors heightened reformist feeling amongst certain sectors of the elite in the shorter term, modernisation had long been on the cards, not only in Colombia but across the region and in the wider world. Mario Aguilera explains:

"Our constitution was 100 years old and people had long talked about modernising it. The country needed to open its doors to modernising institutions and to world economic and political processes. [...] There are thus various factors that influenced constitutional change, and the guerrilla was one of those factors but they didn't single handedly determine the change."<sup>152</sup>

International factors and global trends were giving the Colombian elites food for thought. That did not mean however, that they would all reach the same conclusions.

### ***3.3.1 Fresh thinking***

The M-19's peace process came towards the beginning of a period of major political change around the world,<sup>153</sup> though it is debatable to what extent this affected the Colombian situation. García Durán downplays the role of international upheaval in Colombia, saying:

"I think it had a bit of an impact but not all of these things reflected developments here. The Berlin Wall wasn't a big deal here."<sup>154</sup>

What was certainly a big deal however, was the Colombian government's desire to liberalise the economy further and open up opportunities for international trade. That attraction of liberalism and greater access to the global markets was weakening resistance to the idea of a constituent assembly and therefore represented a major opportunity structure for the M-19 at that moment in time. The Barco government pushed forward plans to move the economy toward export led growth, privatising many commercial, financial and industrial activities and providing inducements to attract foreign capital. (Pearce, 1990:212) It was an economic vision that was shared by the following government, and which may have helped to facilitate the M-19's own demands for reform. Ramos states:

"I think that some of the interests of the government coincided with ours regarding the Constituent Assembly. Things like the international market and international political

issues meant that the government (by this time of Gaviria) wanted to adapt. Gaviria started a policy of more economic openness. He took away trade barriers so the constituent assembly gave them the opportunity to institutionalise these things. You'll find that in the constitution there are a series of guaranteed norms, an extensive bill of rights etc, but at the same time, everything is geared towards allowing for the conditions for neoliberalism - for privatisation of things etc. That was the internal struggle in the Assembly and to a certain extent that was the transaction that was made (between left and right). So the economic powers in the country saw their opportunities too."<sup>155</sup>

The fact that the specific interests of the M-19 and those of the elites did not match, is beside the point. Both sides wanted change of some kind, and with the Constituent Assembly, they would have the opportunity to discuss it. Whilst the government focused on economic reform, the AD/M-19 prioritised political reform, in the hope that with more political access, they could influence economic policy at a later date. From the point of view of the M-19, the needs of the government provided the opportunity for a pragmatic weighing up of priorities, and a quid pro quo engagement regarding how to move the country forward. For the reformists among the elites however, the Constituent Assembly was not only a way of debating change with the M-19, but also a way to circumvent some of the resistance that was coming from within their own ranks, and implement desired reforms.

That mutual desire for the Constituent Assembly is perhaps also a reason for the marked change in attitude towards negotiating with the M-19. Though negotiations had taken place in the past, neither side took the first M-19 peace process particularly seriously, with the armed forces breaking agreed ceasefires and the guerrilla seeing the relative lull in hostilities as an opportunity to rearm and prepare for the next, inevitable onslaught. In the second half of the 1980s, the difference in attitude is visible in the newspaper reports. Though the administrations had changed, the events being reported were distinct, and different newspapers represented different strands of opinion, there is a clear difference in sentiment in the way the stories are told. Whilst reports of the Palace of Justice Siege have headlines such as:

"We will not negotiate: The government" (El Tiempo, 7/11/85: 1)

"Betancur says: I don't understand the reasons of the M-19" (El Tiempo, 8/10/85:6A)

By the time of Álvaro Gómez kidnapping, the mood was different:

"Prospective dialogue of the M-19 with the government" (El Siglo, 26/6/88:1)

"Free Gómez and start the dialogue" (El Siglo, 26/6/88:1)

"Government will persist in its endeavor for peace, says Barco" (El Tiempo, 21/7/88:1)

In the late 1980s then, there was a definite strand of opinion amongst the elites that displayed a new outlook on politics. Pro-peace, pro-Constituent Assembly, and pro-reform, its positioning created a major opportunity structure for the M-19 in its pursuit of its goals. As Tilly and Tarrow point out, however, opportunities come alongside threats (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007:58) and whilst many amongst the elites were keen to make peace and discuss reform, others most definitely saw change as a threat, causing serious tension in the corridors of power.

### ***3.3.2 Governmental struggles***

Though some amongst the elites wanted to modernise, bolster the strength of the state, reform institutions and pursue peace, most were concerned principally with the preservation of their own privileges. (Pearce, 1990:286-287) Corruption was rife, with drug money lining politicians' pockets, (Pearce, 1990:193) and a weak state suited many of the ruling class very well.(Pearce, 1990:287)

Though President Barco presented 20 reform projects to Congress in 1987, only one was actually passed. (Pearce, 1990:218) The fact that his Liberal party had a majority in



Congress provided him with no guarantees of making changes, with regional politicians working to their own logic. (Pearce, 1990:218) Though acknowledgement of the need for modernising reform in order to deal with the social and political conflicts that the country was facing, led the government to approach the guerrilla with its Peace Initiative in 1988, (Grabe 2008:15) the diverse priorities of the elites were something of a spanner in the works. René Ramos explains his frustration with the situation:

"[...] Congress wasn't capable of creating the conditions for a political agreement with us. The negotiations we had with Barco on our part were nothing. Nothing, because the government couldn't comply. The [...] political reforms that they were putting through Congress [...] they had to throw out because they introduced the issue of the extradition of the drugs traffickers, so the government preferred to sink the reforms [...] It was a sort of battle won by the drug cartels. So they scuppered the reforms [...] From there it ended the agreement with the M-19 because the politically favourable things that had been agreed had been in that reform."<sup>156</sup>

For the modernisers in government, fellow politicians were to a certain extent becoming bigger enemies than the guerrillas. This dynamic can be connected to Tilly and Tarrow's work on opportunity structures. 'Openness to new actors', 'instability of current political alignments' and 'availability of allies' are three factors of a regime's political opportunity structure that are highlighted by the theorists as being relevant to the threats and opportunities that develop in the political arena. (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007:57) Any decisive changes in those factors is given as another important issue. (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007:57) What we see amongst the Colombian ruling elite in the late 1980s is a major crisis and a split in opinions over how best to move forward. It is possible that as a result, political alignments were strained, and as other actors in the political arena, such as the M-19, tried to break into politics, some saw them, perhaps not as allies but as sympathetic players and were open to dialogue with them as a result. That openness to dialogue may have been viewed in itself as a threat by other players however.

Tilly and Tarrow say that, "most people engaging in contentious politics combine response to threat with seizing opportunities." (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007:58) This may account for some of the violence of the time, with threatened elites seeing opportunities to defend their positions by underhand tactics. The dirty war was still very much in progress, seeing powerful individuals able to remove their foes, often with impunity. The murder of Carlos Pizarro had the potential to derail the peace process, and some believe that that was the intention. Ramos claims:

"We were a military threat but, with the sudden growing popularity of Pizarro, we were much more of a civil threat. And that's why they killed Pizarro. They killed him in the hope that we would return to violence."<sup>157</sup>

Stephen John Stedman warns of the dangers of such scenarios, saying that it is rare for all actors in a conflict to see peace as beneficial. (Stedman, 1997:7) He refers to those parties who attempt to derail peace processes as 'spoilers', emphasising the risk leaders take by making peace and leaving themselves vulnerable to attack from those who benefitted from the war. (Stedman, 1997:5) Though nobody has ever been convicted of Pizarro's murder, and spoiler motives have never been proven, it is a common opinion that the crime was intended to damage democracy and drive the M-19 back to war. At a demonstration for justice at Bogotá's El Dorado Airport on the anniversary of Pizarro's death, the author witnessed first hand the hurt that lingers on, nearly a quarter of a century after the killing. The fear and anger caused would have been immense at the time and could have seen the rebels return to arms. All those interviewed however, universally expressed their gladness that they had stayed true to the peace process.

The cost of returning to violence would have been significant, though it was considered by the M-19 leadership. It may be that the very same thing that caused Pizarro's death and endangered the peace process however, also prevented the de-railing of that peace process. Carlo Nasi claims that were it not for the massive showing at Pizarro's funeral, the rebels would likely have returned to arms. (Nasi, 2002:318-319) He cites a former guerrilla commander as having told him:

"I even considered going back to the mountains, because we would not have let them kill us one by one (...). If they killed Pizarro, what would prevent them from killing the others? But we decided to keep the peace, defend ourselves and do whatever was necessary. I locked myself in a house for sixty-five days, with a lot of armed people around, and we never left (the house) to find out if they were going to kill us. But we made a decision (in favor of peace) that would have been totally different had there been less support from the citizenry." (Interview, Bogotá, July 2000 in Nasi, 2002:318-319)

Thinking of that decision with Myriam Rodriguez' previous description of her husband's funeral in mind one gains a sense of the magical realism so many of the M-19 held dear. The immense people power triggered by the killing, the queues in the Plaza de Bolivar, the crowds crammed like sardines on the bridges over the 26, standing in the rain<sup>158</sup> were all factors that helped prevent the resumption of violence. Just as the spirit of Bolívar was evoked to help M-19 in the war, the spirit of Pizarro aided them in the keeping peace.

The M-19s belief in peace was not held by all however, as the country continued to descend into some of the worst fighting in its history. Pizarro's successor to the presidential candidacy, Antonio Navarro Wolff, was well aware of the dangers he faced announcing his main aims after he accepted the post:

"My principal goal is to stay alive." (Zuluaga, 1999:38)

Despite the dangerous political games playing out in the country and the lack of cohesion in the government's reform priorities however, the very fact that there was significant level of reformist thinking amongst politicians was an opportunity structure that the M-19 could take advantage of. Both the M-19 and the government had their own priorities and things they wanted to achieve through a peace process, but the important thing was that they were open to ending hostilities and negotiating.

In such an environment, the agreement to have a constituent assembly could be seen as something of a pressure release valve for the reformist sectors of the government and in the peace process. Not all the demands of the M-19 had to be extracted from the government during negotiations. Instead, the agreement to have the Constituent Assembly would give the M-19 the opening it needed to democratically put forward its ideas for change in the country and in the constitution. That democratic opening was the M-19's biggest aim from the beginning, and arguably the biggest opportunity structure the M-19 could have was to have the government recognise the need for change. Mario Aguilera states:

"The M-19 can't take all the credit for the constitutional change and neither can the peace process. The elites in Colombia already understood that their institutions were in crisis and that there was a deep de-legitimisation of the political class and the main parties, so they also needed to renew themselves. I think there was some coincidence between them and a guerrilla that had an urban outlook and that that facilitated matters but you have to look at diverse factors that affected constitutional change."<sup>159</sup>

The Constituent Assembly and the new constitution were not solely achievements of the M-19. With the Séptima Papeleta, and the modernising elements within government, there developed some significant common ground and a mutually advantageous opportunity. Though, the M-19 must be credited with recognising the emergent opportunity for change, they were not uniquely responsible for it. In many ways the stars just aligned. Whatever the impact of the M-19 specifically on the creation of the Constituent Assembly however, their involvement in pushing for it put them at the heart of change in society and facilitated their peace process.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The M-19 is not an organisation that rocked the world. It was no silver bullet for the woes of Colombian society and some would argue it made very little impact at all. Thousands of others would strongly disagree.

On a practical level, the M-19 achieved a number of their aims and made an impact on Colombian politics. They secured a number of favourable technicalities regarding their own transition to peace, including amnesty from prosecution, temporary protection for the rebels, and a reintegration programme to help former rebels back into society (Acuerdo entre el gobierno, los partidos políticos y el M-19. 9/3/1990). Though the effectiveness of the latter two is somewhat dubious, attempts were nevertheless made to implement them. A peace fund was agreed to, to take forward community action and run beneficial programmes in areas where demobilised guerrillas had had influence (Acuerdo entre el gobierno, los partidos políticos y el M-19. 9/3/1990) and commissions were to be set up to look into the reform of the justice system in administrative, substantive and financial areas relating to both individuals and procedures. (Acuerdo entre el gobierno, los partidos políticos y el M-19. 9/3/1990) An independent, non-governmental commission was also agreed to, to investigate the drug problems in the country. (Acuerdo entre el gobierno, los partidos políticos y el M-19. 9/3/1990)

The M-19 had ended its armed struggle with a level of dignity that was reflected in their extensive public support, and they created a political party that was initially successful, coming in a healthy third place in the presidential elections of 1990. (Semana 7/4/11) Most importantly, whether prised from the government's grasp, or willingly agreed to, Bateman's vision of a national 'sancocho' was realised, in the form of the constituent assembly, with representatives from the M-19's newly created political face, the AD/M-19, winning nearly a third of the seats, by public votes.<sup>160</sup> It was the democratic opening they'd been looking for and through it the rebels gained themselves great influence on the content of the country's new constitution. Ironically, in addition to the Liberal Party's Horacio Serpa, the assembly was presided over by the AD/M-19's Antonio Navarro Wolff, alongside his former hostage, Álvaro Gómez Hurtado, of the Conservative Party. (El Universal. 17/6/11)

The organisation had managed to avoid losing focus on why it was fighting. Armed action was always one strategy among many for the M-19 but the group never fell into the trap of

fighting for fighting's sake. Many would say that the FARC and the ELN have not been so successful in that regard, but then they always were examples of a very different sort of guerrilla.

The M-19's unique character helped it, from the outset, to make an impact on society in a way that no other Colombian guerrilla had done before. It valued people power and having the masses on side. After all, they were the reason for fighting. If the M-19 couldn't gain the support of the people, what would have been the point in continuing with the revolutionary project? Nationalistic, open, broad-minded and ideologically non-dogmatic, the M-19 portrayed itself as a group of the people, for the people. In addition, its activities were exciting and engaging. As Ana Carrigan has noted:

"It [the M-19] combined two images beloved by Latin societies: the macho rebel and the playboy, the weaver of exotic fantasies."(Carrigan, 1993:34)

The astute M-19 leadership noticed opportunities in the lack of urban guerrilla activity, in a rapidly urbanising country, and in pursuing the symbolic warfare that leant itself so well to such an environment. By engaging the masses as their audience and wreaking a campaign of low casualty, highly symbolic theatrical warfare, the M-19 caught their enemy on the back foot, forcing it to deal with a new type of threat that the establishment, in many cases, did not understand or recognise.

The M-19 carried out its war in captivating ways that drew mass attention and spurred on gossip and stories about the guerrillas that gave them an almost legendary status that aligned perfectly with the national penchant for magical realism. Mistakes were certainly made, most notably at the Palace of Justice, but through framing and symbolic warfare, the M-19 painted a picture. It was a vision of Colombia, of themselves, their enemies, the people and the future, and its intention was not to relay hard, cold facts, but to inspire.

At times the line between fantasy and reality can be very thin, and the M-19 did its best to straddle it, displaying a zeal for imagination and innovation that was unrivalled by any Colombian guerrilla before or since.

The opportunity structure provided by the widespread guerrilla violence across the region, allowed the M-19 to network, bringing new strategies and technology to the Colombian arena and pushing the boundaries of the propaganda war.

Framing themselves as honourable and virtuous in their behaviour, the M-19 built up public sympathy, but also bound together its members with a sense of pride and individual self worth. Both the government and the armed forces found the M-19 to be a group that was worthy of respect. Even when feelings of anger ran high, such as in the aftermath of the Cantón Norte raid, a relationship was maintained that was far closer and more conducive to potentially reasonable negotiation than those experienced by other guerrilla groups. The symbolic capital of Carlos Pizarro and the resulting closeness that he developed with Rafael Pardo certainly bolstered that wider, positive relationship during the peace process.

In the final years of its armed struggle, a number of opportunity structures saw events align with the goals of the M-19, providing legitimacy to their demands and making many of them far easier to achieve.

But the M-19 paid a bloody price for a political success that it could not maintain long-term. That is perhaps the biggest tragedy of the group and it cannot be ignored. Having lost members, enemies and civilians alike in its operations, the group created a political party that crumbled away after just a few years. Colombia is still plagued by war and human rights violations, whilst society remains characterised by woeful disparities of wealth, and right-wing elites continue to dominate the political scene. The end of the M-19's insurgency however, saw the creation of a democratic opening through which the traditionally dominant political class could be challenged at the ballot box. They didn't aim for a triumphant entry to the Casa de Nariño and the chance to do as they pleased with the country. They simply aimed to break open the closed political system, and in that regard

they have had notable success. The M-19 made substantial, tangible gains for an organisation that posed such a limited military threat to their enemy. One might say however that the organisation's less practical, less tangible achievements that are just as impressive in the M-19's case. The notion of magical realism that guided the group appears to have become something of a self-fulfilling belief. It twisted the notion of the guerrilla into something almost unrecognisable. Violent, yet caring, dangerous yet amicable, familiar but strange, hated and liked, even at times by its own enemies, it was a unique and evolving entity that appeared and vanished in less than two decades against a consistent backdrop of traditional guerrilla violence in one of the longest running conflicts in the world. Through its use of symbolic acts, spectacle, and selective violence, the M-19 almost entertained as much as it terrorised, communicating constantly with the people and brilliantly framing its image to the point that it was widely forgiven even for the carnage of the Palace of Justice. During one discussion between the author and a former M-19 member at an outdoor café in Bogotá, a member of the public overheard the conversation and walked over to the table. Apologising for the interruption and barely able to conceal his excitement, he praised the former rebel for the M-19's action and spent some time recounting memories he had of events from the M-19's past before wishing us well and leaving.

"There was a time," remarked the former guerrilla, "when that could have gone very differently."<sup>161</sup>

Though its members made many enemies in their day, they were, and remain remarkably popular and the organisation, like many of its leaders, has gained an almost legendary status. The mention of the M-19 in Bogotá today, like any political entity anywhere, is met with varied reactions depending on who you speak to, but in a surprising number of cases it provokes smiles and excitement. Perhaps that is just the romanticism of the guerrilla noted by Mauricio Garcia Durán<sup>162</sup> - people blinded to the misery by the spirit of adventure. Whatever the reasons however, and whatever its wrongdoings and moral failings, the M-19 had an undeniable ability to project a sense of optimism and hope for many. That positive feeling and the connection that was nurtured with the people was the foundation for most



of the M-19's campaign. It was its greatest strength and put the group in a position not to transform the country but to nudge it in a more inclusive direction opening up future possibilities of change and influence. Vera Grabe once said that the problem with some guerrillas is that they don't realise that putting down their guns doesn't stop them being revolutionaries.<sup>163</sup> Perhaps then, rather than being a forceful event or action, revolution for the M-19 became more of a mindset: a propensity for improvement to be cultivated in the people, who must be given the chance act on it. Their unusual revolutionary outlook was the foundation for the strategies that led them to successful gains in the peace process and with the terms of that peace, wider change was set in motion. Some may be cynical about the political openings of the early 1990s, but we still do not know their full impact. Ten years before the M-19's disarmament, in the heat of the Salvadoran Civil War, the reformist - some might say revolutionary - Archbishop Oscar Romero was assassinated. The words famously dedicated to him by Bishop Kenneth Untener could also be true of the M-19:

"We plant [...] seeds that one day will grow [...]"

We lay foundations that will need further development [...]"

It may be incomplete but it's a beginning, a step along the way [...]"

We are prophets of a future not our own [...]" (Untener. 1979, in Udovic, 2008:76-77)

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<sup>1</sup> The M-19 had between 750 and 900 members at the time of demobilisation in 1990, whilst groups such as the ELN and the FARC numbered in the many thousands. (Aguilera, 2013:132)

<sup>2</sup> The 'Alianza Nacional Popular': A political party, headed by General Rojas Pinilla, which lost the 1970 election by apparently foul means. (Vázquez Perdomo, 2005:60)

<sup>3</sup> Author's interview with René Ramos, former M-19 member, on 29th April 2014

<sup>4</sup> Alianza Democrática M-19: The left-wing political party that resulted from the conversion of the M-19 from guerrilla group to legal political actor. (FIP Boletín de Paz No31. 2013:13)

<sup>5</sup> Author's interview with Carlos Alberto Garzón, former ELN and CRS member on 23rd April 2014

<sup>6</sup> Author's interview with Mauricio García Durán, Jesuit priest and academic at the Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (CINEP), on 30th April 2014

<sup>7</sup> Author's interview with Fabio Mariño, former Sandinista and M-19 member, on 9th May 2014

<sup>8</sup> Author's interview with Eduardo Pizarro Léongómez, Colombian Ambassador to The Netherlands and brother of late M-19 leader Carlos Pizarro Léongómez, on 18th February 2014

<sup>9</sup> Author's interview with Carlos Alberto Garzón, former ELN and CRS member on 23rd April 2014

<sup>10</sup> Author's interview with Mauricio García Durán, Jesuit priest and academic at the Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (CINEP), on 30th April 2014

<sup>11</sup> Author's interview with René Ramos, former M-19 member, on 25th March 2014

<sup>12</sup> Author's interview with Jaime Castro Castro, former Minister of Government (Betancur administration) and Mayor of Bogotá, on 23rd April 2014

<sup>13</sup> Author's interview with Mario Aguilera, academic at IEPRI, the Universidad Nacional on 25th April 2014

<sup>14</sup> Author's interview with Carlos Alberto Garzón, former ELN and CRS member on 23rd April 2014

<sup>15</sup> Author's interview with Luz Amparo, Otty Patiño Hormaza and María Eugenia Vázquez Perdomo, all former M-19 members (Patiño is a former commander), on 7th May 2014

<sup>16</sup> Author's interview with Mario Aguilera, academic at IEPRI, the Universidad Nacional on 25th April 2014

<sup>17</sup> Author's interview with Luz Amparo, Otty Patiño Hormaza and María Eugenia Vázquez Perdomo, all former M-19 members (Patiño is a former commander), on 7th May 2014

<sup>18</sup> Author's interview with Darío Villamizar, former M-19 member and historian of the M-19, on 28th May 2014

<sup>19</sup> Author's interview with Myriam Rodríguez, former M-19 member and widow of late M-19 leader Carlos Pizarro Léongómez, on 7th May, 2014

<sup>20</sup> Author's interview with Vera Grabe, former M-19 commander, on 27th May 2014

<sup>21</sup> Author's interview with Mario Aguilera, academic at IEPRI, the Universidad Nacional on 25th April 2014

<sup>22</sup> Author's interview with Darío Villamizar, former M-19 member and historian of the M-19, on 28th May 2014

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Otty Patiño stresses this difference in attitude, saying:

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"Generally guerrilla organisations and by that I'm principally referring to the FARC [...] think that public opinion is a fabrication of the media and [...] when you don't have power, public opinion [...] doesn't matter [...] but we always had public opinion and our work always seemed like an electoral campaign." (Author's interview with Vera Grabe, Fabio Mariño, Otty Patiño Hormoza, Darío Villamizar, former M-19 members including two former commanders, on 27th March, 2014.)

<sup>26</sup> Author's interview with Vera Grabe, former M-19 commander, on 27th May 2014

<sup>27</sup> Ejército Popular de Liberación (People's Liberation Army): Another leftist guerrilla group.

<sup>28</sup> Author's interview with Darío Villamizar, former M-19 member and historian of the M-19, on 28th May 2014

<sup>29</sup> Author's interview with Fabio Mariño, former Sandinista and M-19 member, on 9th May 2014

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Author's interview with Darío Villamizar, former M-19 member and historian of the M-19, on 28th May 2014

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Former M-19 member, Conversation with the author, Bogotá, 2014

<sup>34</sup> Author's interview with Mauricio García Durán, Jesuit priest and academic at the Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (CINEP), on 30th April 2014

<sup>35</sup> Author's interview with Eduardo Pizarro Léongómez, Colombian Ambassador to The Netherlands and brother of late M-19 leader Carlos Pizarro Léongómez, on 18th February 2014

<sup>36</sup> Álvaro Fayad: A former leader of the M-19

<sup>37</sup> Author's interview with Eduardo Pizarro Léongómez, Colombian Ambassador to The Netherlands and brother of late M-19 leader Carlos Pizarro Léongómez, on 18th February 2014

<sup>38</sup> Author's interview with René Ramos, former M-19 member, on 25th March 2014

<sup>39</sup> Author's interview with Fabio Mariño, former Sandinista and M-19 member, on 9th May 2014

<sup>40</sup> Author's interview with Vera Grabe, Fabio Mariño, Otty Patiño Hormoza, Darío Villamizar, former M-19 members including two former commanders, on 27th March, 2014.

<sup>41</sup> Author's interview with Fabio Mariño, former Sandinista and M-19 member, on 9th May 2014

<sup>42</sup> Author's interview with Vera Grabe, Fabio Mariño, Otty Patiño Hormoza, Darío Villamizar, former M-19 members including two former commanders, on 27th March, 2014

<sup>43</sup> Author's interview with Fabio Mariño, former Sandinista and M-19 member, on 9th May 2014

<sup>44</sup> Author's interview with Jaime Castro Castro, former Minister of Government (Betancur administration) and Mayor of Bogotá, on 23rd April 2014

<sup>45</sup> Author's interview with René Ramos, former M-19 member, on 29th April 2014

<sup>46</sup> Author's interview with Carlos Alberto Garzón, former ELN and CRS member on 23rd April 2014

<sup>47</sup> Author's interview with Mauricio García Durán, Jesuit priest and academic at the Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (CINEP), on 30th April 2014

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Author's interview with Fabio Mariño, former Sandinista and M-19 member, on 9th May 2014

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<sup>50</sup> Author's interview with Vera Grabe, former M-19 commander, on 27th May 2014

<sup>51</sup> Author's interview with Luz Amparo, Otty Patiño Hormaza and María Eugenia Vázquez Perdomo, all former M-19 members (Patiño is a former commander), on 7th May 2014

<sup>52</sup> They identify the organisation's denunciation of the Comando Ricardo Franco (CRF), following its massacre of more than 150 of its own members in 1985, as the pinnacle of the M-19's stand against such behaviour. (García Durán, Grabe, and Patiño, 2008:12) The fact that the M-19 had allied themselves with the FARC splinter group up to this point (García Durán, Grabe, and Patiño, 2008:16) and was so closely associated with it was perhaps morally dubious in itself. Both groups had strong connections to the Cauca region, and one of the leaders of the CRF was the brother of founding member and final leader of the M-19 Carlos Pizarro León Gómez. In publicly distancing themselves from the massacre and, from that point on the group itself, the M-19 demonstrated a strong awareness of its need to maintain its public image. Any physical, military advantages of continuing joint actions with the CRF were sacrificed to that end, though genuine moral objections were doubtless also a factor.

<sup>53</sup> Author's interview with Vera Grabe, Fabio Mariño, Otty Patiño Hormoza, Darío Villamizar, former M-19 members including two former commanders, on 27th March, 2014.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Author's interview with Fabio Mariño, former Sandinista and M-19 member, on 9th May 2014

<sup>56</sup> In 1985, the M-19 botched an attempt to seize the Palace of Justice in Bogotá, resulting in great loss of life. Though many blame the army for the tragedy, others place responsibility with the M-19 and rumours abound of links between the M-19 and the infamous drug baron, Pablo Escobar. The siege and the conflicting opinions surrounding it will be discussed at greater length in part 1.3. What is beyond debate however is that it was one of the biggest mistakes the M-19 ever made, resulting in a significant loss of public sympathy.

<sup>57</sup> Author's interview with Mauricio García Durán, Jesuit priest and academic at the Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (CINEP), on 30th April 2014

<sup>58</sup> Author's interview with Fabio Mariño, former Sandinista and M-19 member, on 9th May 2014

<sup>59</sup> A nefarious aspect of the wider conflict in which civilians and rebels alike were intimidated, disappeared, tortured or murdered in non-combat situations, often at the hands of government sponsored right wing paramilitaries. (Author's interview with René Ramos, former M-19 member, on 29th April 2014)

<sup>60</sup> Author's interview with Fabio Mariño, former Sandinista and M-19 member, on 9th May 2014

<sup>61</sup> Author's interview with René Ramos, former M-19 member, on 29th April 2014

<sup>62</sup> Author's interview with Fabio Mariño, former Sandinista and M-19 member, on 9th May 2014

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Author's interview with René Ramos, former M-19 member, on 29th April 2014

<sup>65</sup> Author's interview with Fabio Mariño, former Sandinista and M-19 member, on 9th May 2014

<sup>66</sup> Author's interview with René Ramos, former M-19 member, on 29th April 2014

<sup>67</sup> Professor Larry May very concisely articulates Hobbes' point:

"People are of equal strength in the sense that each is endowed with enough physical strength to put the other in fear. Even the strongest must sleep, and then even the weakest can sneak up and put a dagger to such a person's heart. Hobbes regards this vulnerability as a basis for the motivation of fear in human psychology." (May, 1989:130)

<sup>68</sup> Different variations of the negative labeling tactic have been used around the world. Northern Ireland again provides a good example, as does Sri Lanka, where the label of terrorism was used to undermine the Liberation Tigers of Tamil

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Elam's (LTTE), claim for Tamil self-determination and deny it international legitimacy. (Nadarajah and Sriskandarajah, 2005:87) Former U.S. President George W. Bush's proclamation of the 'War on Terror' saw his administration engage in a global war of discourse in addition to the physical conflict associated with it, (Bhatia, 2005:7) whilst closer to home for the M-19, in Nicaragua, the Sandinista's were decried as Soviet and Cuban puppets by the U.S. government of the time. (Schroeder, 2005:69) Their label was different, but just as powerful as 'terrorist' at the time - 'communist'.

<sup>69</sup> Author's interview with Fabio Mariño, former Sandinista and M-19 member, on 9th May 2014

<sup>70</sup> Author's interview with René Ramos, former M-19 member, on 29th April 2014

<sup>71</sup> Author's interview with María José Pizarro, human rights campaigner and historian at the Centro Nacional de Memoria Historica, Bogotá, and daughter of late M-19 leader Carlos Pizarro León Gómez, on 23rd May 2014

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> In that respect, the guerrillas could actually be said to have been too successful for their own good. The army never forgave them. (Pearce, 1990:172) In the days and weeks following the event, many M-19 members were rounded up and jailed and many civilians were arrested and tortured. (Carrigan, 1993:80) What is more, the legacy of bitterness that the action left almost certainly goes some way to explaining the fierce reaction of the armed forces to the taking of the Palace of Justice in 1985 (Carrigan, 1993:80) and the tragic results that came with it. The framing attempt had been immensely successful but it had come at a very high cost.

Though it has been noted that the M-19 had a paradoxical relationship with the army, which fostered a level of respect and in many ways facilitated reconciliation between them during the peace process, it is possible that in the minds of the generals, a public humiliation warranted public retribution. Like a child poking a dog with a stick, the M-19 loved to torment the state. Sooner or later, it was going to be bitten, and with the taking of the Palace of Justice in 1985, the army snapped.

<sup>74</sup> Author's interview with Fabio Mariño, former Sandinista and M-19 member, on 9th May 2014

<sup>75</sup> Author's interview with Darío Villamizar, former M-19 member and historian of the M-19, on 28th May 2014

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Author's interview with Fabio Mariño, former Sandinista and M-19 member, on 9th May 2014

<sup>78</sup> Author's interview with Vera Grabe, Fabio Mariño, Otty Patiño Hormoza, Darío Villamizar, former M-19 members including two former commanders, on 27th March, 2014.

<sup>79</sup> Guatemala saw embassy sieges in 1979 and 1980, Panama experienced one in 1980 and El Salvador experiencing a staggering six successful embassy sieges and at least three unsuccessful attempts over those two years. (Jenkins, 1981:33-38) The trend was not limited to Latin America either, with seizures of the Egyptian, British and American embassies in Iran in 1979, the Egyptian embassies in Bangladesh, Kuwait and Turkey in 1979, and the Iranian embassy siege in England in the Spring of 1980 (Jenkins, 1981:33-38) all hitting the headlines.

<sup>80</sup> Author's interview with Vera Grabe, Fabio Mariño, Otty Patiño Hormoza, Darío Villamizar, former M-19 members including two former commanders, on 27th March, 2014.

<sup>81</sup> Author's interview with Luz Amparo, Otty Patiño Hormoza and María Eugenia Vázquez Perdomo, all former M-19 members (Patiño is a former commander), on 7th May 2014

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Author's interview with Vera Grabe, Fabio Mariño, Otty Patiño Hormoza, Darío Villamizar, former M-19 members including two former commanders, on 27th March, 2014.

<sup>84</sup> According to Vera Grabe, Amnesty International was investigating reports of torture and human rights abuses in prisons at the time. (Author's interview with Vera Grabe, Fabio Mariño, Otty Patiño Hormoza, Darío Villamizar, former M-19 members including two former commanders, on 27th March, 2014.)

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<sup>85</sup> Author's interview with Luz Amparo, Otty Patiño Hormaza and María Eugenia Vázquez Perdomo, all former M-19 members (Patiño is a former commander), on 7th May 2014

<sup>86</sup> Author's interview with René Ramos, former M-19 member, on 25th March 2014

<sup>87</sup> Author's interview with Myriam Rodriguez, former M-19 member and widow of late M-19 leader Carlos Pizarro Léongómez, on 7th May, 2014

<sup>88</sup> Author's interview with Carlos Alberto Garzón, former ELN and CRS member on 23rd April 2014

<sup>89</sup> Whether or not the government or the M-19 actually wanted peace in the mid-1980s is somewhat debatable. The level of mistrust between the players in the conflict was high, and led to an unhealthy environment for peacemaking. The army, violated the peace agreements on a number of occasions (Vázquez Perdomo, 2005:254), whilst the M-19 used the relative lull in hostilities to rearm. (Chernick, 1999:176)

<sup>90</sup> Author's interview with René Ramos, former M-19 member, on 29th April 2014

<sup>91</sup> Myriam Rodriguez vents her frustration at the government's use of the Palace of Justice to smear the M-19, claiming that their version of events is illogical:

"In the Palace of Justice we lost a lot of people. The M-19 wasn't going to sacrifice political cadres of the sort that went into the Palace of Justice to take out some files about drugs traffickers, which is what the right claims. They were poorly armed, they sent in some of the best cadres we had, to burn some files? I mean, come on! Come on! Who would even consider that?! Wouldn't it have been easier to send in a bomb or something? [...] Of course. It wasn't our intention [...] If we sent in some cadres, some of the best cadres the Eme had at the time there, it was in order to establish a national dialogue. And as many people say, if we'd assaulted the Congress instead of the Palace of Justice, it'd have been a different story. Because justice in this country [...] who gives a damn about justice in this country?" (Author's interview with Myriam Rodriguez, former M-19 member and widow of late M-19 leader Carlos Pizarro Léongómez, on 7th May, 2014)

She makes an interesting point. Had the principle intention been to burn some documents, the action taken by the M-19 would have been an uncharacteristically reckless and foolhardy way to go about it. What is important however is that the story gained traction.

<sup>92</sup> Vera Grabe, Fabio Mariño, Darío Villamizar and Otty Patiño discuss the shift in perception of the M-19 actions caused by the Palace of Justice fiasco:

Darío: "On certain actions the Eme used methods and instructions that were categorised as terrorist, or that the image before the country was exploited as that [...] If there was ever a clear symbol of terrorist action it's a car bomb [...] but the M-19 [...]"

Otty: "[...] the car bomb. That's terrorist."

Darío: "[...] but it was an action that had sufficient explanation for why we did that and why we did it at the Presidential Palace..."

Vera: "It's that... before the Palace, that wasn't considered terrorist, right?"

Fabio: "Right, right. The headlines in the press [...] said 'terrorist' [...]but] it's the connotation. The connotation given to terrorist action [...] arrived with the Palace, but it was always terrorism, always."

Vera: " But we didn't reali... [laughs] Well we used to call it what we wanted."  
(Author's interview with Vera Grabe, Fabio Mariño, Otty Patiño Hormaza, Darío Villamizar, former M-19 members including two former commanders, on 27th March, 2014.)

The above conversation should not be taken as a definitive admission of the M-19 being a terrorist organisation or an acceptance of that label, but rather it should be seen in the context of the debate over whether or not certain, specific actions could justifiably be considered terrorist. The fact that former M-19 members themselves are divided on that matter is perhaps an indication of how powerful the term was as a framing tool for the government.

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<sup>93</sup> Author's interview with Mauricio García Durán, Jesuit priest and academic at the Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (CINEP), on 30th April 2014

<sup>94</sup> Author's interview with Vera Grabe, Fabio Mariño, Otty Patiño Hormoza, Darío Villamizar, former M-19 members including two former commanders, on 27th March, 2014.

<sup>95</sup> Author's interview with Fabio Mariño, former Sandinista and M-19 member, on 9th May 2014

<sup>96</sup> Author's interview with René Ramos, former M-19 member, on 29th April 2014

<sup>97</sup> Author's interview with Mario Aguilera, academic at IEPRI, the Universidad Nacional on 25th April 2014

<sup>98</sup> Otty Patiño's conversation about the murder of Gaitán, with Constanza Vieira, daughter of Colombian Communist Party (CCP) leader, Gilberto Vieira, illustrates the difficulty that faced the M-19 in their identification of who exactly their enemy was:

" 'Who do you think killed Gaitan?'

... 'The oligarchy.'

... 'Who is the oligarchy?'

... 'Those who killed Gaitan.'

'So who killed Gaitan?'

'The oligarchy'

'And who is the oligarchy?'

'Those who killed Gaitan!' " (Author's interview with Vera Grabe, Fabio Mariño, Otty Patiño Hormoza, Darío Villamizar, former M-19 members including two former commanders, on 27th March, 2014.)

<sup>99</sup> Author's interview with Vera Grabe, Fabio Mariño, Otty Patiño Hormoza, Darío Villamizar, former M-19 members including two former commanders, on 27th March, 2014.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Author's interview with Mario Aguilera, academic at IEPRI, the Universidad Nacional on 25th April 2014

<sup>103</sup> An outcry from the press called for Gómez's safe release, with El Siglo unsurprisingly leading the charge. For the duration of his fifty-three days in captivity, the daily ran with the subtitle:

"Colombia is kidnapped" (El Siglo, Front pages throughout June 1988)

Whilst his picture was hardly off the front page, stories were run about the man and his family to appeal to the public's sense of empathy. Essentially the whole event was being framed as a good, innocent family man having been kidnapped by heartless villains. The front page on the 16th June shows a photograph of the politician and his wife with a letter to her published below, reading:

"Margarita,

Fifteen days ago I saw you for the last time. I'm fine. My destiny is not in your hands or in the hands of our children. Don't worry! It is in the hands of God.

I love you infinitely,

Alvaro." (El Siglo, 16/6/88:1)

Meanwhile, his regular column was left as a blank space on page five, till he came back to fill it. (El Siglo, throughout June 1988:5) Stories demonised the M-19 for the very sins they purported to be fighting against with headlines like:

"Kidnapping: The worst crime against human rights." (El Siglo, 13/6/88:3)

It is difficult of course for the M-19 to deny that they were breaching their victim's human rights but they felt the ends justified the means. Other accusations were easier to refute however:

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"[...] in Colombia, to the opponents of democracy, whoever they may be, [we say]: 'you'll neither win, nor win us over.'" (Zubiría Gómez El Siglo, 12/6/88:4)

The M-19 claimed to be taking the action in the name of democracy, against one of the country's most powerful oligarchs. That oligarchic rhetoric provided much of the M-19's ammunition in the framing battle that surrounded the episode.

Though one might assume the newspaper coverage was damaging for the M-19, it is hard to say exactly how it was taken by the public. Whilst some will have agreed with it wholeheartedly, others will have dismissed it as propaganda of the oligarchy. Gómez writes in his memoirs that:

"[...] the popular protest against my kidnapping had been gigantic. It was heartwarming for me to note its unanimity." (Gomez, 1989:129)

Though here was a big public outcry, to claim that opinion was unanimously in his favour is almost certainly an exaggeration. The M-19, though diminished, was still very popular in certain sectors of society and both their oligarchy rhetoric, and their proposals for peace talks during the kidnapping resonated with many. The M-19's results in the elections to the constituent assembly the following year, in which they took 19 of the 74 seats (Semana, 7/4/11) would certainly suggest that the press coverage of the event was not too damaging for the group.

<sup>104</sup> Zartman links the occurrence of catastrophes to MHS, saying that they can "provide a deadline or a lesson indicating that pain can be sharply increased if something is not done about it now." (Zartman,2001:22) Though the Palace of Justice siege did not lead directly to a sense of MHS, it may have acted as something of a wakeup call to both parties in the conflict - an event so horrendous that it affected the players' attitudes toward making peace with each other, making negotiations possible.

<sup>105</sup> Rafael Pardo claims that a peace plan had been in place months before the kidnapping. (Pardo Rueda, 1996:91)

<sup>106</sup> Author's interview with René Ramos, former M-19 member, on 29th April 2014

<sup>107</sup> Author's interview with Jaime Castro Castro, former Minister of Government (Betancur administration) and Mayor of Bogotá, on 23rd April 2014

<sup>108</sup> Author's interview with Vera Grabe, Fabio Mariño, Otty Patiño Hormoza, Darío Villamizar, former M-19 members including two former commanders, on 27th March, 2014.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Author's interview with Mario Aguilera, academic at IEPRI, the Universidad Nacional on 25th April 2014

<sup>111</sup> Author's interview with Vera Grabe, Fabio Mariño, Otty Patiño Hormoza, Darío Villamizar, former M-19 members including two former commanders, on 27th March, 2014.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Author's interview with René Ramos, former M-19 member, on 29th April 2014

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> 'Commander Hotty'

<sup>118</sup> Author's interview with Jaime Castro Castro, former Minister of Government (Betancur administration) and Mayor of Bogotá, on 23rd April 2014

<sup>119</sup> Author's interview with Myriam Rodriguez, former M-19 member and widow of late M-19 leader Carlos Pizarro Léongómez, on 7th May, 2014



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<sup>120</sup> Author's interview with Vera Grabe, Fabio Mariño, Otty Patiño Hormoza, Darío Villamizar, former M-19 members including two former commanders, on 27th March, 2014.

<sup>121</sup> Author's interview with María José Pizarro, human rights campaigner and historian at the Centro Nacional de Memoria Historica, Bogotá, and daughter of late M-19 leader Carlos Pizarro Léongómez, on 23rd May 2014

<sup>122</sup> Author's interview with Vera Grabe, Fabio Mariño, Otty Patiño Hormoza, Darío Villamizar, former M-19 members including two former commanders, on 27th March, 2014.

<sup>123</sup> Author's interview with René Ramos, former M-19 member, on 25th March 2014

<sup>124</sup> Author's interview with Vera Grabe, Fabio Mariño, Otty Patiño Hormoza, Darío Villamizar, former M-19 members including two former commanders, on 27th March, 2014.

<sup>125</sup> Professor Carlo Nasi of the Universidad de los Andes, writes of an example of Pizarro's trust building behaviour that was given by a Peace Councillor he interviewed:

"On one occasion, a Colombian colonel was ready to send troops into a ZD [demilitarised zone] of the M-19 after a soldier deserted and entered and hid within the zone. This action put the peace process in grave danger, but the Peace Counselor convinced the colonel to postpone any decisions, and then went to talk with the chief commander of the M-19 Carlos Pizarro. Pizarro confirmed that a deserter had entered the ZD, but had left the area after the M-19 took his rifle and military equipment. The following day the rebel commander returned the deserter's weapon and equipment to the army, which solved this impasse and greatly helped to build trust. It turned out that the important issue was not the deserter (some levels of desertion were fairly common in Colombia), but the weapons and other expensive military equipment. Had this equipment not been returned, the colonels' career was doomed." (Interview, Bogotá, July 2000 in Nasi, 2002:307)

<sup>126</sup> The failing health of the president at the time has also led some to believe that Pardo had much greater influence on policy than his position would suggest. A number of sources refer to President Barco's deterioration with Alzheimer's disease, and the consequences of that being that Pardo and some other ministers took decisions on his behalf. (Author's interview with René Ramos, former M-19 member, on 29th April 2014)

<sup>127</sup> Author's interview with Mauricio García Durán, Jesuit priest and academic at the Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (CINEP), on 30th April 2014

<sup>128</sup> Author's interview with María José Pizarro, human rights campaigner and historian at the Centro Nacional de Memoria Historica, Bogotá, and daughter of late M-19 leader Carlos Pizarro Léongómez, on 23rd May 2014

<sup>129</sup> Author's interview with René Ramos, former M-19 member, on 29th April 2014

<sup>130</sup> A popular presidential candidate for the Liberal Party

<sup>131</sup> Author's interview with Myriam Rodriguez, former M-19 member and widow of late M-19 leader Carlos Pizarro Léongómez, on 7th May, 2014

<sup>132</sup> Otty Patiño in author's interview with Vera Grabe, Fabio Mariño, Otty Patiño Hormoza, Darío Villamizar, former M-19 members including two former commanders, on 27th March, 2014.

<sup>133</sup> The slogan of narco-terrorist group 'Los Extraditables' (The Extraditables) proclaimed their cause, making clear the reasoning for their murderous rampage:

"Better a tomb in Colombia than a prison in the United States." (Linton, 2013:147)

<sup>134</sup> The government was in a state of crisis. The serious wounding of Liberal presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán, in an attack in 1989, infuriated the government and saw an attempted show of strength from President Barco. At 21:00 on the 18 August, he appeared on television to address the nation, announcing his intention to take a tough stance on the cartels, saying:

"War is declared." (Pardo Rueda, 1996:176)

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Immediately after the announcement, he was informed that Galán had died from his injuries. (Pardo Rueda, 1996:176) To make matters worse, the government's stance provoked a wave of terrorism around the country. (Vásquez Perdomo, 2005:258)

<sup>135</sup> Author's interview with Mario Aguilera, academic at IEPRI, the Universidad Nacional on 25th April 2014

<sup>136</sup> Author's interview with René Ramos, former M-19 member, on 29th April 2014

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> These included the Corriente de Renovación Socialista (CRS), the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT) and the Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame (MAQL). (Nasi, 2002:272)

<sup>139</sup> There was an expansion from guerrilla organisations from having 50 fronts affecting 173 municipalities in 1985, to 80 fronts affecting 358 municipalities in 1991. (Pecaut 1997:896 in Nasi, 2002:272) In addition to the growth of the individual groups, the creation of the Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar (The Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordinator) (CGSB) in 1987, saw all Colombian guerrilla groups, including the FARC come together in an effort to coordinate their actions and face the challenges of the dirty war and the pursuit of reform under one umbrella organisation. (Villamizar, 1995:514) Such a coordinated effort could have presented an enormous threat to the government however uniting so many distinct groups of different sizes and growth rates that had different priorities and points of view was no easy task. Ultimately, moves to peace on the part of smaller groups broke up the CGSB. (Aguilera, 2013:132) With its disarmament in 1990, the M-19 acted alone but within 5 years the EPL, the MAQL, the PRT, the CRS had all made peace, along with some smaller splinter groups. (Aguilera, 2013:132) Perhaps the 'mutual cannibalism' of the left (Author's interview with René Ramos, former M-19 member, on 25th March 2014) had prevented the guerrilla from putting up a united front, perhaps the FARC did not take the minority groups seriously enough. Whatever the reasons, it was a turbulent time of guerrillas growing, splintering, trying to coordinate but disagreeing.

<sup>140</sup> Author's interview with Mauricio García Durán, Jesuit priest and academic at the Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (CINEP), on 30th April 2014

<sup>141</sup> Early attempts to gain from the cocaine profits, second hand through extortion, backfired horribly on the M-19. The 1981 kidnapping of Martha Nieves Ochoa, daughter of a major player in the Medellín Cartel, saw the cartel found the right-wing paramilitary organisation 'Muerte a Secuestradores' (MAS), meaning 'death to kidnappers', which pursued a bloody vendetta against the M-19, killing many of its members and sympathisers. (Nasi, 2002:296)

The allegations that the M-19 was paid by Pablo Escobar to carry out the Palace of Justice siege are unproven and dubious, however if that was the case, it was another disastrous attempt to indirectly gain from the cocaine trade. What is certain about the event is that while Escobar benefited greatly in having evidence against him destroyed and the Colombian justice system crippled (Linton, 2013:147), the M-19 most definitely did not gain from the event. Compared with some other guerrillas, it gained very few physical advantages from the growth of the cocaine industry generally.

<sup>142</sup> Author's interview with Fabio Mariño, former Sandinista and M-19 member, on 9th May 2014

<sup>143</sup> Author's interview with Vera Grabe, Fabio Mariño, Otty Patiño Hormoza, Darío Villamizar, former M-19 members including two former commanders, on 27th March, 2014.

<sup>144</sup> Author's interview with René Ramos, former M-19 member, on 29th April 2014

<sup>145</sup> Author's interview with Carlos Alberto Garzón, former ELN and CRS member on 23rd April 2014

<sup>146</sup> Author's interview with Mario Aguilera, academic at IEPRI, the Universidad Nacional on 25th April 2014

<sup>147</sup> 12.5% in the 1990 Presidential election, followed by 27.3% in the Constitutional Assembly election (Durán, Grabe, Patiño, 2008:30)

<sup>148</sup> Author's interview with René Ramos, former M-19 member, on 29th April 2014

<sup>149</sup> Author's interview with Mauricio García Durán, Jesuit priest and academic at the Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (CINEP), on 30th April 2014

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<sup>150</sup> Author's interview with Jaime Castro Castro, former Minister of Government (Betancur administration) and Mayor of Bogotá, on 23rd April 2014

<sup>151</sup> Author's interview with René Ramos, former M-19 member, on 29th April 2014

<sup>152</sup> Author's interview with Mario Aguilera, academic at IEPRI, the Universidad Nacional on 25th April 2014

<sup>153</sup> The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 marked major political shifts in Europe that culminated in the collapse of the Soviet Union two years later. Closer to home, the Sandinistas suffered election defeat in Nicaragua and the seeds were being sewn for a peace agreement between the government and the guerrillas in El Salvador. (Chernick, 1999:165)

<sup>154</sup> Author's interview with Mauricio García Durán, Jesuit priest and academic at the Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (CINEP), on 30th April 2014

<sup>155</sup> Author's interview with René Ramos, former M-19 member, on 29th April 2014

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Author's interview with Myriam Rodríguez, former M-19 member and widow of late M-19 leader Carlos Pizarro León Gómez, on 7th May, 2014

<sup>159</sup> Author's interview with Mario Aguilera, academic at IEPRI, the Universidad Nacional on 25th April 2014

<sup>160</sup> Author's interview with Jaime Castro Castro, former Minister of Government (Betancur administration) and Mayor of Bogotá, on 23rd April 2014

<sup>161</sup> Conversation with former M-19 member, Bogotá, 28/5/14

<sup>162</sup> Author's interview with Mauricio García Durán, Jesuit priest and academic at the Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (CINEP), on 30th April 2014

<sup>163</sup> Author's interview with Vera Grabe, Fabio Mariño, Otty Patiño Hormoza, Darío Villamizar, former M-19 members including two former commanders, on 27th March, 2014

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