

## ANTHROPOLOGY

# The Colombia-Israel Nexus: Toward Historical and Analytic Contexts

Les W. Field

University of New Mexico, US  
lesfield@unm.edu

Israel's historical relationships with Argentina, Nicaragua, and Guatemala during the Cold War in the 1980s provides one context for understanding the parameters of Israeli foreign policy in the region. These relationships allied Israel with right-wing military regimes suppressing a variety of subversive others in Argentina and Guatemala, and also a right-wing counterinsurgency in Nicaragua. In the post-Cold War era, the Colombian case is distinctive because conflict is shaped by a number of different armed actors, including the state, right-wing paramilitaries, left-wing insurgents, and the narcotics industries. Israel's role in the complex Colombian milieu involves relationships with both the state and the parastate, both the military and the paramilitaries. The Israeli and Colombian states are substantively and conceptually intertwined around a common obsession with national security and armed conflict with subversive others of many types. I ask whether a special relationship sutures Israel to Colombia linked to the expanding interventions of paramilitaries and parastate apparatuses. This article provides historical and analytic contexts to elaborate the Colombia-Israel relationship, toward a future in which "peace" may play an important role.

Las relaciones históricas entre Israel y Argentina, Nicaragua y Colombia durante la Guerra Fría de los años 80 ofrece un contexto para entender los parámetros de la política exterior israelí en la región latinoamericana. Estas relaciones eran basadas en la alianza entre Israel y los regímenes militares-derechistas que practicaban una supresión total contra una variedad de "otros" subversivos en Argentina y Guatemala, y también en Nicaragua donde existía una contra-insurgencia derechista. En la época post-Guerra Fría, el caso colombiano es diferente porque el conflicto allí es formado por muchos actores armados que incluyen el estado, los paramilitares derechistas, los insurgentes de la izquierda, y la industria narcotraficante. El papel israelí en la situación complicada colombiana involucra relaciones entre estado y para-estado, el Ejército Nacional y los paramilitares. El estado colombiano y el estado israelí están entretejidos alrededor de una obsesión sobre seguridad nacional y conflicto armado contra el otro subversivo de varios tipos. Yo pregunto si una relación especial une a Israel con Colombia vinculada con las intervenciones aumentadas de paramilitares y los aparatos para-estatales. Este ensayo proporciona contextos históricos e analíticos para elaborar la relación entre Colombia e Israel, hacia un futuro en el cual "la paz" puede jugar un papel importante.

## Introductory Frameworks

In 1997, Carlos Castaño and Salvatore Mancuso, among others, cofounded the Auto-Defensas Unidas de Colombia, or AUC, the umbrella organization of the Colombian armed right wing, or *paramilitares*.<sup>1</sup> In Castaño's 2001 biography, *Mi confesión* (Aranguren Molina 2001), readers learn that he received over a

<sup>1</sup> Carlos Castaño was murdered, probably by members of his own organization, in 2004. Negotiations between the AUC and the administration of Uribe were initiated around that time through a series of agreements with the Colombian state, and the AUC was supposedly completely demobilized by 2006. But as numerous observers, whom are cited later in this article, have noted, a series of less centralized but no less brutal successor organizations have continued to operate in Colombian territory, sometimes in the pay of corporations attempting to control territory for agribusiness development (African palm) and mining. Israel's continued relationship with the successor organizations appears not to have flagged.

year of training in Israel in 1983–1984, both in military schools and at Hebrew University. Israel played a formative role in his own ideological formation and that of his movement:

I admire the Jews for their bravery in confronting anti-Semitism, their strategy for survival in the diaspora, the surety of their Zionism, their mysticism, their religion and above all for their nationalism.

I learned an infinity of themes in Israel and from that country I owe a part of my culture, my achievements both human and military, and while I repeat myself, I did not learn only about military training in Israel. It was there that I became convinced that it was possible to defeat the guerrillas in Colombia. I began to see how a people could defend itself from the whole world. I understood how to get someone involved who had something to lose in a war, by making such a person the enemy of my enemies.

In fact, the idea of “autodefensa” [self-defense] [in terms of owning and distributing] weapons I copied from the Israelis; every citizen of that country is a potential soldier. (Aranguren Molina 2001, 108)

Castaño’s memoir poses questions about the relationships among and between the paramilitaries in Colombia, the Colombian state, and Israel. Carlos Castaño was and remains a central figure for the Colombian ultraright; with respect to Israel his declarations offer sharp contrasts with the legacy of Spanish colonial anti-Semitism, as well as the prevalence of anti-Semitism among twentieth- and twenty-first-century ultraright-wing movements in Latin America and elsewhere. Israel’s self-representation as a liberal, lawful democracy also contrasts to the AUC’s profile: according to the Colombian government’s self-study, the AUC has been responsible for “the bulk” of the human rights atrocities and massacres in the country between 1980 and the present. The United Nations specifies that “80% of all killings in Colombia’s civil conflict have been committed by paramilitaries, 12% by leftist guerrillas, and the remaining 8% by government forces” (“It’s a Matter of Perception” 2016). The Colombian government reported that in the year 2000 the paramilitaries and state forces committed approximately 85 percent of political murders (Tate 2001). In the 2000s, the Colombian government estimated that the AUC was responsible for at least 40 percent of narcotics trafficking in the country (Scott 2003, xviii), and Castaño himself stated that 70 percent of AUC’s operating budget was derived from the narcotics trade (Berry et al. 2002, 52).

Many Latin Americanist scholars are unaware of Israel’s substantial and long-term relationships with Latin American countries such as Colombia and others that are discussed in this article.<sup>2</sup> I argue that complex and intertwined relationships between Israel and several Latin American countries—specifically Argentina, Nicaragua and Guatemala—that developed during the particular Cold War permutation of the early to mid-1980s provide a context for inquiry into the relationships between the state and parastate parties in Colombia and Israel. I discuss how the multiple forms of violent conflicts in Colombian are markedly different from the conflicts that took place in Argentina, Guatemala, and Nicaragua during the 1980s, and how consequently the particularities of the Colombia-Israel relationship in the post-Cold War context significantly depart from Israel’s previous relationships with Latin American countries during the 1980s. I argue that Israel’s role in the latter played an important role in setting up conditions for Israeli involvement in the former. I therefore first present a resume of Israel’s relationships with those three countries, elaborating the character of those relationships, what might be concluded about Israeli foreign policy parameters and goals in the context of the Cold War, and where those parameters and goals might originate in Israeli national ideology. I then briefly characterize the conflict in Colombia, discussing state, parastate, insurgency and counterinsurgency, and Israel’s historical and current role in this complex situation, as Castaño’s memoir invites us to do. Calling on selected examples of large literatures, this article is necessarily brief and points to further questions and research. I end with questions about the connections between Israel and Colombia in light of ongoing peace processes in those countries.

### Israel and Right-Wing Regimes in Latin America in the 1980s

During the late 1970s, the Israeli military and governmental apparatus established a constellation of tactical and political alliances with right-wing military movements and regimes in Latin America, including (but not limited to) the final days of the Somoza regime in Nicaragua, the military-dominated regime in Honduras,

<sup>2</sup> This has been brought home to me graphically when I have presented parts of this article to the Latin Americanist faculty at University of New Mexico. The majority of my colleagues expressed to me their surprise at learning about Israel’s relationship with the Colombian paramilitaries in the context of Israel’s relationships with the Argentine military junta, the Guatemalan military regime, and the Contras during the 1980s.

the Nicaraguan Contras, successive military juntas in Guatemala, and the military regime in Argentina. These were substantively different conflicts: the Argentine and Guatemalan military regimes fought to defeat armed left-wing insurrectionary movements, and to suppress the civilian population base that the military suspected of supporting the insurrectionary movements; the Somoza regime, not a military junta but a dynastic dictatorship supported by military force, was fighting a broad-based alliance of social classes and movements that successfully defeated the dictatorship and unleashed a social revolution starting in 1979; and the counterrevolutionary organization known as the Nicaraguan Contras were an armed force based in Honduras (and to a much lesser extent in Costa Rica) fighting to unseat the revolutionary Sandinista government. In all cases, Israel allied with the ultraright and the military ambitions of that political-ideological force.

One explanation frequently given by Israel's apologists for Israel's intimate relationships with Latin America's dictatorships is "economic": Israel must sell weapons to whomsoever has the money to pay for them, in order to survive economically, and therefore cannot argue with valuable customers. The second explanation is geopolitical: because Israel's enemies have so successfully isolated the Jewish state, Israel does not have the luxury to choose its friends, which supposedly clarifies why Israel allied with military regimes in Latin America during the 1980s, for example.<sup>3</sup> In this section, I discuss three interconnected, interdependent Israeli contemporaneous alliances with Latin American countries, arguing that these alliances rather than a series of provisional or extemporaneous compromises with hard realities reflect instead deliberate and systemic political, economic, and ideological commitments. These commitments were part of Cold War anticommunism, to be sure, but they were not shaped unidimensionally by US interests. Specifically, Israel and Argentina were not simply or always proxies for the United States but rather involved themselves and developed policy from the vantage of their own particular interests in the geopolitics of anticommunism. Scholars' increasing attention to the central, pivotal importance of the Cold War in the US–Latin America relationship (see Grandin and Joseph 2010; Rabe 2016) helps contextualize the importance of Israel's role during the mid- to late twentieth century.

The year 1982 was a pivotal one. In June, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) invaded Lebanon, and the brutal Sabra and Shatila massacres followed in September. Israeli defense minister Ariel Sharon visited Honduras and the Nicaraguan Contra camps in early December. Argentina attacked the British-controlled Falklands (Malvinas) Islands in April, supplied and supported by Israel, with a wide range of sophisticated weaponry and technology, and fought the United Kingdom until decisively defeated in June. In 1982, Guatemalan general Efraín Ríos Montt staged a coup ushering in the most intensive period of internal warfare and human rights abuse in that country, supported by Israeli weaponry and advisers. These are not iterations of distinct Israeli relationships with Latin America: these are networks of contingent relationships.

Israel had had a close relationship with Nicaragua during the four-decade-long Somoza dynasty. This authoritarian dictatorship was initiated by the US invasion of the country in the 1930s, and the installation and longevity of the successive Somoza regimes was underwritten by the United States' creation of the Guardia Nacional, the private army the Somozas controlled. Nicaragua under Somoza had voted for the UN Partition Plan in 1947, which constituted a powerful international endorsement of an independent Jewish-majority state in Palestine, and recognized Israel four days after it proclaimed its independence in 1948. Nicaragua voted for Israel's admission to the United Nations in 1949. The relationship came to an end with the overthrow of the regime in 1979 by the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN); Israel was the principal provider of weapons and logistical support for Anastasio Somoza Debayle, the last of his family's dynasty, until the final weeks of dictatorship (Booth, Wade, and Walker 2014; Colhoun 1987), and the FSLN had warm relations with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) (Hoffman 1988; Jamail and Gutierrez 1986, 1988).

By 1982, Nicaragua was a scene of increasingly intensive rural warfare between FSLN forces and the Contras in which the latter targeted the institutions of the revolution—schools, health clinics, and local governance—at the expense of civilian noncombatants. The organization of the Contras, and the initial supply of weapons and logistical advice that initiated the Contra War, came not from the United States but from Argentina. As Ariel Armony (1997) argues, Argentine generals were motivated by concerns that President Carter's stated intention to protecting human rights had softened the US commitment to fighting global communism; by contrast, Ronald Reagan's 1980 electoral platform included support for the Contras, part of his expansive interpretation of anticommunism. Having won the presidency, Reagan was faced with

<sup>3</sup> These rationalizations for Israel's foreign policy come less from published sources, and much more from a childhood spent in a Jewish family of Holocaust survivors and children of refugees, and in Conservative synagogues in New York City and New England.

domestic opposition to overt support for the Contras. Covert support was ongoing, under the direction of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), but the Argentine military regime (1976–1983), followed its own ideological platform (in English, the National Security Doctrine), which comprised “the military’s own interpretation of a set of concepts about national security, cold war politics and counterinsurgency warfare” (Armony 1997, 9). Argentina acted as an independent interlocutor in the Nicaraguan conflict even before Reagan’s election: “Argentina acted alone in becoming involved in the organization and training of the Contra army. . . . The Argentine training and supervision of a US-backed Contra army aimed to promote counter-revolutionary insurgency by deploying a relatively small number of advisors in the region” (Armony 1997, 172–173).

Armony (1997, 153) discusses how Israel collaboratively partnered with Argentina in the Contra War, having already become the regime’s alternative source of military equipment once President Carter “suspended all military assistance to Argentina in 1978 because of the regime’s gross violations of human rights.” Focusing for the moment specifically on that partnership as it shaped the Contra War, Armony writes that Israel supplied false passports for the Argentine advisers to the Contras, and both countries cooperated in the bizarre arrangements involving drug mafias, the Contras, and Iran, known as “Iran-Contra.” Israel’s partnership with Argentina, and leading role in training and supporting the Contras was greatly advanced by Israeli general and then minister of defense Ariel Sharon’s visit to Honduras.

Sharon’s visit to Honduras came about as a result of the invitation of Honduras’s commander of armed forces Gustavo Alvarez Martinez, rather than the president of Honduras, and resulted in the sale of jet fighters, transport planes, machine guns, and more, as well as military training and advisers. During Sharon’s visit, he secretly (at that time) also toured the Contra training camps on Honduras’s border with Nicaragua. In a clear indication of the connections being drawn by the Israelis between their foreign policy in the Middle East and their foreign policy in Central America, Israel’s first shipment of weapons to the Contras were assault rifles captured from the PLO in Lebanon as a result of the invasion in June (Colhoun 1987); IDF advisers and logistics training followed as did antiaircraft missiles (Beit-Hallahmi 1987). Israel acted as a proxy for US policy interests in Nicaragua during the Reagan era version of the Cold War, but was Israel’s support for the Contras for the duration of the 1980s until the FSLN lost the election of 1990 a commitment to the Cold War ideology of containing communism? Israel’s principal foe in the 1980s, the PLO, while left oriented, was not a communist movement; Israeli involvement with the Contras was woven together not only with the 1982 Lebanon War but also with the FSLN’s affiliations with the PLO. Thus, Israel’s commitments in Central America and the alliance with the Argentine military junta in the Contra War were not necessarily limited to anticommunism alone.

That Israel acted both as US proxy in the Cold War and in pursuit of its own independent foreign policy objectives was perhaps clearer in the case of Israel’s relationship with Guatemala, also a scene of cooperation with the Argentine military. As in Nicaragua, the Israeli connection dates back to Guatemala’s vote of support in the United Nations for the 1947 partition plan, immediate recognition of Israel in 1948, and Guatemala’s vote to admit Israel to the United Nations in 1949. But viewing the Israeli relationship with Guatemala as a continuum is problematic, since the Guatemalan government that acted in these cases in the late 1940s was an elected social democratic government which by 1954 had been removed by a military junta under the direction of the CIA; thereafter ensued a series of military regimes whose brutality grew at the same time as did support from Israel. The overthrow of Guatemala’s democratically elected government in 1954 took place also under the aegis of US anticommunism; Guatemala in the Reagan era also comprised a theater of Cold War combat, and another theater in which Israel distinguished itself (see Weld 2014). In Guatemala, unlike in Nicaragua where a counterrevolutionary army supported by Argentina and Israel attempted to erode and ultimately dislodge a revolutionary leftist regime, Israel and Argentina supported an ultraright military regime’s war with several leftist guerrilla groups in a rural landscape inhabited by a linguistically and culturally diverse indigenous population whom the military viewed as inherently subversive precisely because they were indigenous (see Smith 1990; Sanford 2004).

In Guatemala, the alliance with Israel hinged not only on the sale of sophisticated weaponry for ground and air combat but also on the deployment by early 1982 of sophisticated communication and computer technology in the service of a sustained counterinsurgency campaign that led to upward of two hundred thousand individuals dead or missing—*desaparecidos*. The vast majority were victims of the Guatemalan military. The computer programming developed and deployed by Israeli (IDF) advisers enabled the tracking of suspected combatants and of a huge number of members of communities who were noncombatants but who suffered the effects of massacres, forcible evacuations, and obligatory resettlements in enclosed twenty-four-hour-a-day guarded settlement camps (Beit-Hallahmi 1987; Schirmer 1999). Argentina

cooperated with Israel in this effort—not only in the supply of hardware but also in the planning and execution of major offensives in the Guatemalan countryside (see McClintock 1985). The expulsion of masses of people from their historical communities, their forcible resettlement, and the massive land grab that benefited a state building project were formulated around technologies of continuous intrusive surveillance and suppression of conquered populations, such as the 40 percent of Guatemala's population who is indigenous (see Smith 1990; Fried et al. 1983; Simon 1987). Israel's deep involvement in one of the most directed campaigns against an indigenous population in the Americas in the twentieth century underscores Israel's global priorities in a region well outside the area of the Middle East. Moreover, this involvement suggests that Israeli policy makers were in accord with the Guatemalan military's construction of the indigenous populations as an enemy subversive other.

Israel's alliance in and cooperation with Argentina in Guatemala during the 1980s was characterized by ideological anticommunism and Israeli collaboration in identifying indigenous peoples as subversive. The alliance between Israel and the Argentine military in Argentina itself provides a window onto another element of Israeli ideological and political culture that is perhaps surprising: the claim asserted and vigorously defended within classical Israeli ideological discourse that there is no distinction between being anti-Israel or even critical of Israel, on the one hand, and anti-Semitism, on the other hand. In the alliance between Israel and the Argentine generals between 1976 and 1983, this assertion becomes untenable. Israel sold sophisticated weapons to the Argentine generals, and indeed was Argentina's dependably useful ally during the Falklands War, fought between Great Britain and Argentina from April to June 1982. The weapons included some of the most important elements of the combat: air-to-air and air-to-sea missiles, missile-alert radar systems, large fuel tanks for use on bomber planes, antitank mines, large bombs, and mortars. Discussion of Israel's support of the Argentine war effort has sometimes hypothesized that Menachem Begin, the Israeli prime minister at the time, nurtured a long-standing antipathy to Britain stemming from his days as a terrorist in the 1930s and 1940s and that this accounts for Israel's position (see Dobry 2011). The fact remains that the Argentine military's *guerra sucia* against the left and all its perceived enemies in that country during the 1970s and 1980s disproportionately targeted Argentine Jews (Rabe 2016; see Mualem 2004 for an interpretation of this phenomenon from a different point of view). Moreover, as numerous scholars have pointed out, the Argentine military was explicitly anti-Semitic in its targeting of Jewish Argentines and routinely utilized Nazi symbols and images in its own propaganda as well as in its infamous torture chambers (Schoijet 1983; Armony 1997).

A key witness to these elements of the military's ideology and activities and its intricate relationship with Israel was the Argentine journalist Jacobo Timerman, also a Jewish man. He was imprisoned and tortured by the military in 1977 and released in 1979, after which time he was compelled to emigrate to Israel, where he wrote *Prisoner without a Name, Cell without a Number* (Timerman 1981). His story underscored the ideological link between the anti-Semitic generals and Israeli state interests. I suggest that Israel concluded agreements with the generals to send Jewish Argentines to Israel rather than killing them, because for Israel, the logic was that like all diasporic Jews, Argentine Jews were legitimate only insofar as they became immigrants to Israel and therefore affirmed the ideological platform of the Israeli state's existential gestalt. In other words, rather than defend the Jews of Argentina because Israel defends Jewish people everywhere, Israel was an overt ally of the anti-Semitic regime and considered its characteristically anti-Semitic policies something of an opportunity to recruit more Jews to the Israeli state project (Sznajder and Roniger 2005; Rein and Davidi 2010). Timerman understood this, and Israeli policy in support of the Argentine military regime impelled insights into an overall critique of Israeli foreign policy in both Latin America and the Middle East; after emigrating to Israel, he wrote a scathing critique of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, titled *The Longest War* (Timerman 1982). After the generals were at last deposed in disgrace, he returned to democratic Argentina, his home country. In sum, if in Argentina under military rule the subversive other often wore a Jewish face, this did not present an obstacle to one more iteration of Israeli support for a war of elimination against that subversive other.

Israeli military and political support for the Argentine junta argues for an analysis of Israeli political and ideological alliances that understands those alliances first and foremost about the Israeli state-building project rather than a commitment to defending Jewish people in the world (for an opposing analysis, see Mualem 2004). This analysis would buttress the general argument that in Latin America Israel did not act simply as a proxy for US imperial interests notwithstanding the resonance between the two—as well as with Argentina—in the 1980s around ideological anticommunism. Israel's alliances in Latin America of the 1980s signaled instead a consistent involvement in the war against the left when it came to power in Nicaragua, and against subversive enemy others in the dirty wars of Argentina and Guatemala. The subversive enemy

other in Guatemala was, in addition, a racially, linguistically and culturally marked subaltern. The similarities and differences among Israel's allies, and Israel's entanglements with them, should be viewed in all their complexity in order to contextualize Israel's alliance with both the Colombian state and the Colombian parastate in the current century.

### Colombian State, Insurgencies, and Paramilitaries—and Israel

As in the rest of the Americas, the indigenous peoples inhabiting the lands that became Colombia experienced a population collapse in the wake of the arrival of and military campaigns waged by Europeans in the early sixteenth century. While the territory that is now Colombia featured a number of relatively small centralized states (in comparison to the much more extensive empires located to the north and to the south) with not-insignificant populations, their populations were no doubt much more modest than what existed contemporaneously in Mesoamerica or the central Andes. Under such conditions, the Spaniards' need for forced labor in the gold mines in the Chocó, to build the colonial cities of Cartagena, Bogota, and Popayán, and to labor in the early tobacco and sugar plantations was therefore fulfilled by the large-scale importation of African slaves (see Safford and Palacios 2001). The outcome was that in what is today Colombia, many indigenous peoples were exterminated, or their remnant populations subsumed by a combination of imposed Christianization, the complete domination of the Spanish language, and a socioeconomic conjugation of castelike subaltern status with the phenotypic traits associated with indigenous peoples and Africans. The legacy some four hundred years later: in 2005, the Colombian government census showed that 49 percent of Colombia's population is mestizo, that is, of mixed European and Amerindian ancestry (see Hudson 2010, 87). Approximately 37 percent is of European ancestry according to the official census, while the government reports that about 10.6 percent is of African ancestry. Indigenous Amerindians comprise 3.4 percent of the population (Hudson 2010, 86–90), and the association between phenotype and socioeconomic status is as strong as ever (see Wade 1995; for historical background, see Rappaport 2014). A tiny elite, which Colombians routinely refer to as *la oligarquía*, intensely proud of its European ancestry that is rehearsed as a cross-generational transmission of privilege, comprises the political class and controls economic power. Notwithstanding the domination of such an oligarchy, Hylton writes:

Colombian nationalism has been and remains predicated on *mestizaje*, understood as the harmonious mixture of “races”—Spanish, African, Indian—and stresses the centrality of the highland Andean region in relation to lowland frontiers and peripheries, where descendants of Africans and indigenous minority groups live. Thus racial hierarchies rooted in colonialism were integral to the definition of regional identities and class relations, but were shot through with partisan political identities. . . . No subaltern group imagined politics in ethno-racial terms, at least not primarily. (Hylton 2014, 75; see also Hylton 2006; Wade 1995)

Hylton argues that the domination of Colombia's political scene by the elites of the Conservative and Liberal parties foreclosed the development of an independent left party or social movement, relegating the left to a wing of the Liberal Party. In the mid-twentieth century, radical Liberal reformer Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was on the verge of creating “the country's first national-popular bloc by bridging gaps of race, gender, region and class” (Hylton 2014, 79), but his assassination in 1948 destroyed that possibility and ushered in La Violencia (1948–1958). More than two hundred thousand Colombians died during that decade, which set the stage both for the advent of total political domination by the two parties and for the beginning of the armed guerrilla insurgencies, the ultraright paramilitaries, and the narcotics production and export industries.

The Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Colombianas, or FARC, founded as the armed force of the Colombian Communist Party (PCC) in 1964, has been the country's iconic and largest left guerrilla insurgency (Hristov 2009; Elhawary 2010). The FARC is a guerrilla organization whose political platform has for at least five decades identified with the interests of specific sectors of politically and economically disenfranchised, marginalized, mostly landless communities of rural mestizo farmers, more recently in the departments of Caquetá, Meta, Guaviare, and Putumayo, where their presence has been long term and more decisive in the day-to-day lives of such communities, as Clemencia Ramirez (2011) described in the Putumayo.<sup>4</sup> Hylton

<sup>4</sup> Colombia's history since the mid-twentieth century has featured a number of other armed left-wing groups, including the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN), the Ejército Popular de Liberación (EPL), the M-19, the Frente Ricardo Franco, and the Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame. None of the groups has come anywhere near the FARC in terms of military might, financial weight, control over territory, or numbers of militants in arms, nor has any of them had the enduring influence of the FARC over the longest period of time.

(2014, 83) characterizes the FARC's social base as "smallholding frontier communities," arguing, "After the Cold War, no matter how large, wealthy or militarily powerful they became, the FARC and the ELN did not represent the Colombian nation or even radical democratic movements. Instead, they represented isolated frontier-settler communities in specific regions, mainly the vast lowlands of the Amazonian basin. They never transcended the regional-local horizon in which they were born out of *La Violencia* at mid-century" (Hylton 2014, 92).

The insurrectionary left not only failed to provide a viable alternative that could achieve the revolutionary transformation of the country they claimed they struggled for; it also adopted tactics such as mass kidnapping, forcible recruitment of children as soldiers, extortion, and deep involvement in the burgeoning narcotics industries that took off in the last quarter of the twentieth century and significantly detracted from their base of popular support.

The Colombian state engaged the armed left in sustained counterinsurgency warfare starting in the 1960s and 1970s, aided and supported by direct aid from the United States, even before FARC was officially organized (see Stokes 2004; Brittain 2010). Yet from the beginning, the Colombian state's tactics included the organization of unofficial paramilitary forces in the battle with the rural left insurgencies. Hristov (2010, 44) argues:

[The] dialectical relationship between the state and the paramilitary is circular in nature. It began as the state laid the legal and military foundation for the existence of paramilitarism in the 1960s when it recruited and armed civilians to operate as paramilitary forces. This outward expansion from the centre (the state) towards sectors of civil society, reached a new stage in the 1980s as the economically and politically dominant sectors of civil society initiated the creation of paramilitary bodies themselves. The latter were outside the official state structure but developed in a continuous relation to it. The state tolerated them and provided military assistance in the form of weapons, training, bases, uniforms, transportation and so on. In the late 1990s, by the time of the unification of these groups under the name AUC, the paramilitary had reached such a high degree of financial and military power and territorial control, that it was able to establish mutually beneficial relationships with institutions beyond the state's coercive apparatus, such as the criminal justice system and the political system at all levels. This last development can be depicted as an inward movement where forces from outside the official boundaries of the state (AUC and other paramilitary groups) penetrated state institutions. . . . [T]his is not a case of warlordism where the state's coercive apparatus disintegrates and the means of violence are taken over by various armed actors, each in a war against everyone else.

Hristov argues strongly against the idea that the Colombian state is or has been weak or that the paramilitary forces' infiltration of the legitimate bureaucratic and military state organs signals a debilitated state. Gill's (2016) ethnography of the paramilitary in the Middle Magdalena region and particularly in the city of Barrancabermeja explores how right-wing paramilitaries "have operated alongside the official state since the 1980s and used terror to combat the insurgencies" (Gill 2009, 314). In Barrancabermeja and elsewhere paramilitaries administration of people and territory has "taken on state-like characteristics, but unlike the guerrillas who aspire to create an alternative state, the paramilitaries defend the status quo and in some cases have become a kind of surrogate state in regions where the power of the official state is absent or ineffective" (Gill 2009, 314). Richani's (2007, 407–408) analysis allows that the relationship between state and paramilitaries has changed substantively over time, specifically in relation to the creation of a newly enriched class segment, the "narcobourgeoisie":

The creation and consolidation of the paramilitaries in the 1980s resulted from the interplay of a number of factors. One was the concern of the regional landed elites (cattle ranchers and large landowners) about the prospects of a negotiated settlement of the conflict that could undermine their class interests. . . . The military and the intelligence services of the Colombian state were also instrumental in fomenting the emergence and growth of paramilitaries before they were banned in 1988. Despite being officially banned, a significant number of military personnel maintained their relationship with these groups into the 21st century. The underlying cause of these cosy relations lies in the organisational interests of the military and cold-war counterinsurgency doctrine, a situation which continued well beyond the end of the Cold War (highlighting the specificity of the Colombian civil war, even though it had been understood by both international and local actors as

a cold war struggle). . . . During the initial [1980s] phase the paramilitaries were acting at the behest of the state's security apparatus not only against the insurgency but against all opposition figures, including union leaders, journalists, students, university professors and human rights advocates. . . . Despite the relative success of the state and its paramilitaries in containing the insurgency and limiting its radius of influence to the rural and scarcely populated areas, it has had to contend increasingly in the 1990s with the rising narco-bourgeoisie. The narco-bourgeoisie, which amassed significant wealth and land in the 1990s, found in paramilitarism an instrument with which not only to fight the insurgency, but to redefine its relationship with the other factions of the bourgeoisie and with the state.

Notwithstanding the various interpretative analyses of the relationship between the Colombian state and the paramilitaries (see López Hernández 2010; Romero 2003, 2007; for an excellent review of the recent literature, especially by Colombian social scientists, see Tate 2010), the Colombian philosopher Luis Alberto Restrepo (2001, 96) points out: "Human rights have never been a central preoccupation of Colombia's ruling class, be they members of the economic, political, military religious or cultural elite, and different social positions or political ideologies have not made any essential difference in the matter."

AUC and its constituent guerrilla armies were officially demobilized by the Peace and Justice Law negotiated by the government of two-term strongman president Alvaro Uribe (2002–2010), a politician closely associated with the paramilitaries. As Gill (2016), Romero (2007), Richani (2007), López Hernández (2010), and many other scholars have been concerned to show, new configurations of paramilitary armies and parastate formations quickly took the place of the AUC, notwithstanding official denials by the Colombian government and mainstream media. The leadership structure of the paramilitaries has been and continues to be composed of "cattle ranchers, agribusiness, emerald barons, local political bosses and the narco-bourgeoisie, all under the auspices of the state's military" (Richani 2007, 407), and their rank and file is drawn from men with "middle or lower class origins [who] grew up in small to intermediate cities" (Richani 2007, 414). Paramilitaries' violence has never been limited to battling the insurgent forces of the armed left, obviously; Hristov (2010, 48) cogently lists the component social sectors comprising the subversive other for the paramilitaries:

[There are] three types of people who are most likely unrelated to the guerrilla or narco-businesses, are nevertheless identified as the Enemy: 1) members of social movements and organizations; 2) members of the low-income population, especially in rural areas, who reside in areas of strategic economic importance and/or territories under the control of or in proximity to rebel groups; and 3) sectors of the urban poor such as the homeless, beggars, petty thieves, informal street vendors, street prostitutes, drug-addicts, and mentally ill. Therefore, the Internal Enemy is not really an enemy to security *per se*, but an enemy to capital (or at least sectors of capital).

In particular regions of the country—Urabá, Chocó, the Medio Magdalena—the result of the paramilitaries' activities has been "a large-scale cross-country, counter- agrarian reform in which the expropriated land has been used for cash crop cultivation (legal and otherwise), cattle ranching, and extractive industries undertaken by foreign companies" (Hristov 2010, 25–26), or in Richani's (2007, 411) words:

A rentier-based political economy in the rural areas that is based on land speculation, extensive cattle-ranching, services and cash crops (African palms, coca, cocoa and flowers) geared to international markets. According to the Colombian Institute for Land Reform (INCORA), about 48% of the country's most fertile lands are in the hands of the narco-bourgeoisie, which makes this faction the most powerful in the rural economy, consequently shaping its mode of production and development. In sharp contrast, 68% of small land owners own only 5.2% of these fertile lands. Ironically the mode of development presided over by the narco-bourgeoisie is in line with the neoliberal economic paradigm and various free trade agreements.

In the Pacific coastal region of el Chocó, paramilitaries have deployed to permanently evacuate Afro-Colombian populations from their historical villages located in territories where national and multinational corporations subsequently develop monocrop palm-oil plantations (Hecht 2014; Oslender 2007, 2008). Intensified mining of coal and gold has also been made possible through the deployment of paramilitaries serving the interests of the state and corporate development. While the FARC has also engaged in violent,



indeed murderous, reprisals against indigenous populations in particular (see Belazelkoska 2013; Murillo n.d.), the paramilitaries are part of a larger neoliberal transformation of the Colombian economy in which the legitimate state and the narcotic industries are full partners (see Taussig 2005). Ballvé (2012, 618–619) writes:

Amid the palm plantations already discussed, the military have stationed temporary bases alongside the companies' outposts, while the grid-patterned roads crisscrossing the equally geometric crop-lines make for efficient surveillance and patrols. The expulsion of peasants and the extensive geographic breadth of the plantations, meanwhile, help to sever the social networks required by insurgents for sustaining their operations (informants, food and supplies, transportation, etc.). Besides complying with the clear-hold-build logics of counterinsurgency strategists, the plantations are also firmly ensconced in the government's economic strategies. . . . Mass displacement and the production of territory in Urabá—and perhaps in other “ungoverned spaces”—demonstrate how primitive accumulation can be the ongoing processual prism that produces and refracts the violent spatial pangs of capitalist development and the social relations of state formation. . . . Urabá's narco-driven economies of violence are not anathema to projects of modern liberal statehood—usually associated with tropes of ‘institution building’ and “good governance”—but deeply tied to initiatives aimed at making governable spaces, expanding global trade, and attracting capital.

How is Israel involved in the complex Colombian milieu, where state and parastate are conjoined and yet not always the same thing, in which neoliberal economics and the narcotics industries are intricately intertwined? Colombia abstained from voting for the 1947 UN Partition Plan that provided the international seal of approval for establishing a Jewish state in Palestine, and official relations with Israel were established only in the 1950s. The Colombian armed forces began purchasing weapons technologies from Israel in the 1980s, at the same time Colombian paramilitaries began training in Israel. While the United States has been the Colombian Army's main supplier, Israel has been its second most important source of weaponry and logistical technology, approximately 38 percent of all weapons purchases made by the Colombian state. Wikileaks (see NACLA 2011) reveals that since the turn of the century, the Colombian government has intensified its relationships with private Israeli military contractors owned and managed by retired IDF officers (Melman 2008; Keinon 2013). These relationships are necessarily far more complex than state-to-state ones, and they oblige us to return to pondering the contextual significance of Carlos Castaño's affection for Israel.

In the 1980s and in the context of the Cold War and the ideology of anticommunism, the Argentine military deployed the term *national security* in mobilizing its support of both state-to-state relationships (with Guatemala and Honduras, for example) and in support of a counterinsurgency (the Nicaraguan Contras) seeking to unseat an existing government. Colombia's post-Cold War ideological formulation of national security has coalesced around privatized paramilitaries, the crucible where the substantive relationship between Colombia and Israel has formed, expressed through reiterated idioms of the right. In other words, the profound relationship between Colombia and Israel was established via national security states that were as much the creation of the privatization of violence in the move toward paramilitaries and private military contractors as it was through state-to-state relationships. The relationship between Colombian paramilitaries and Israel about which Castaño wrote is therefore part of the state-to-state relationship between Colombia and Israel that is also a parastate relationship—both in the sense of conventional states complicit with, and indeed dependent on paramilitaries, such as the AUC and its successors, and in the sense of a parallel state constructed by the violent force exerted by paramilitaries in spaces that the conventional state no longer monopolistically controls, as described in the already-cited scholarship by Gill, Richani, Hristov, Ballvé, and others.

In Colombia, President Uribe elaborated the policy denominated Democratic Security (Seguridad Democrática). Uribe's ideas paralleled Castaño's in certain key areas, which not coincidentally have been the contact points establishing Israel's role in building the paramilitaries and in elaborating the concept of security. Like all “private military contractors” in the United States, Israel, and Colombia, Castaño's AUC has been a repository of retired military officers. Major figures in Colombia's oligarchic elite and political class have been closely connected with AUC. As the relationships between the governments of Colombia and Israel developed, so too did the relationships between privatized forms of the national security state in Israel and the paramilitaries in Colombia. The Israeli security firm Spearhead, led by retired IDF colonel Yair

Klein, started training paramilitaries from the AUC in the mid-1980s, the era when Castaño was educated in Israel. By the early 2000s, under the first Uribe administration, the Colombian government was dealing directly with the privatized parallel arm of the Israeli security state, epitomized by retired general and former director of operations for the IDF Yisrael Ziv, whose firm Global Comprehensive Security Transformation was co-owned with Brigadier Yossi Kuperwasser (see Steinsleger 2008). Ziv also was part of a think tank called Counter-Terrorism International, and the Task Force on Future Terrorism created in 2005 by the US Office of Homeland Security. During this same period, a private Israeli firm in Guatemala, GIRSA, formally associated with IDF, arranged for massive arms shipments to the AUC. After 2010, the official government-to-government relations between the two countries have also become ever more intimate. Via the personal contacts between Ehud Barak and Colombian minister of defense Juan Carlos Pinzon, the Colombian government arranged to buy Israeli made drones—comprehensively and strategically tested in 2008 and 2009 in Gaza during Operation Cast Lead—for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance missions against the FARC, as reported in mainstream US media (Koebler 2013). Additional high-level contacts between Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos, the Colombian vice president, the Israeli foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman and Shimon Peres facilitated Colombia's refusal to join the rest of Latin America in recognizing the State of Palestine in the UN General Assembly. When the Colombian army rescued presidential candidate and media personality Ingrid Betancourt, who had been captured by the FARC in 2002 and held prisoner for six years, the press in both Israel and Colombia reported that Israel had been intrinsically and intricately involved in both the planning and the execution of the rescue (see, e.g., Melman 2008; YNet News 2008; Guerra 2008). Israeli contractors have continued to train Colombian paramilitaries.

Before Uribe's administration, the military and the state represented indigenous peoples, peasants, and the urban poor as victims of violence. In doing so, the military and the state mobilized a discourse of human rights that proposed to protect the security of the victims through the renewed reinforced primacy of the state (see Tate 2007; see also Gill 2016, for the Barrancabermeja instantiation). Uribe, by contrast, accepted the paramilitaries' understanding of the marginalized, especially the indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, as already subversive, as already in the FARC camp, precisely by virtue of their poverty and disenfranchisement (Oslender 2008). Uribe, like Castaño, aimed to implement a narrower nationalist vision of Colombian national identity, one that would eliminate subversives through the armed might of both the military and the paramilitaries. This twenty-first-century Colombian reiteration of radical right, counterrevolutionary, and anti-indigenous politics enacted by a state that also manifests as a privatized parastate comprises the points of connection with Israel's own security ideology, its own mix of state and parastate, and its almost seven-decade-old war to subjugate the indigenous people of Palestine. Before going on, however, I note that the full story of how points of ideological contact cemented the relationship between two fairly different settler colonial states—Israel and Colombia—would require a much more elaborated discussion of a third, highly significant national security state, that of the United States. In that discussion, it would be necessary to include the US elaboration of the drug war and the concept of the narcoguerrilla as the central point of contact with Colombia, and the post-9/11 ideology of counterterrorism as the (latest) point of contact with Israel. Such an analysis would find fruitful synergies between and among these differently faceted concepts of national security, and how they play out in the proliferation of privatized paramilitaries, and in the development of sophisticated military technologies by the military equipment industries of all three countries. Was it Israel that pioneered the creation of private military contractors? In hindsight, what may have occurred, starting in the 1980s, was a resonant development of privatized security states in the three countries—Israel, the United States, and Colombia—that became intertwined with one another in various ways as the years passed, colluding in strategies for fighting variously configured subversive enemies.

### **What Motivates Israeli Involvement in Contemporary Colombia?**

In the first section of this article, I argued that Israel, like Argentina and in alliance with Argentina, pursued interests convergent with but distinct from the US Cold War in the conflicts that unfolded in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Argentina itself in the 1980s. In other words, the 1980s witnessed a resonance of interests in fighting both the revolutionary left and an assortment of identified subversive populations all in the context of the Cold War. In the twenty-first century, Israel supplies weapons to many countries in Latin America—Mexico, Brazil, and Chile, among others—so what is unique about Israel's relationship with Colombia? Does a contemporary convergence of interests help explain Israel's role in Colombia's complex tableau of state-parastate-narco-economics (see Löfving 2004)?

For the Israeli state, the subversive other is “the Arab,” a category composed of several distinct types of Palestinians who have not been removed from the land of Palestine or who are interned in refugee camps in neighboring countries, and whose threat to the Israeli national project is embodied in the image of the terrorist. The Zionist movement was in many ways a nationalist movement much like other late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century national movements sweeping throughout the lands of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, staged not in the heart of Central Europe but in a provincial periphery of the Ottoman Empire populated by predominantly Muslim, but also Christian Palestinian, Arabs, with a minority of historically Palestinian Jews as well. Zionist settlers’ struggles with the indigenous Arabs of Palestine did not have the benefit, so to speak, of epidemiological allies as the Spanish had in the Americas. Following the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, in the territory that became the British Mandate (1919–1948), the populations of colonizing settlers and their descendants never exceeded half the total population during that period (see Pappé 2006). Those demographics were the condition for the 1948 Nakba, when more than seven hundred thousand Palestinians fled the territory that became Israel under threat from various armed Jewish forces (see, e.g., W. Khalidi 1992), and for the development in postindependence Israel of a hierarchical and stratified social structure and categorization system (see Robinson 2013). In the contemporary social, political, and economic system, the basic unequal categories—Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs—are further delineated, marked and defined by ethno-religious terms and traits that are both officially and unofficially designated and reified. Social, political, and economic inequalities between Israeli Jewish citizens (e.g., Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, Ethiopian) and different non-Jewish citizens (e.g., Israeli Muslim Arabs, Israeli Christian Arabs, Druze, Circassians), East Jerusalem Palestinians, West Bank Palestinians of Areas A and B, West Bank Palestinians of Area C,<sup>5</sup> and Gaza Palestinians are all realized through a technologically sophisticated personal identification system as well as practices enacted on the landscape itself (see Weizman 2007; R. Khalidi 1997; Shehadeh 2007). These practices include the erection of the Separation Barrier; the division of the West Bank into Areas A, B, and C, in which the area of total Israeli military and political control (Area C) exceeds 60 percent of the total territory; the relentless expansion of settlements in Area C; the establishment of a preferential system of roads; vastly unequal water allocation; unequal funding for social services, education, and health; discriminatory laws in housing; and the overall constriction of Palestinians’ mobility and movement. In this way, the different social categories and groups experience daily life in vastly stratified and hierarchical ways and, moreover, are by design physically separated and kept apart from one another (Weizman 2007).

While in specific periods of its history Israel has taken measures to physically remove indigenous populations, the overall thrust of the Israeli construction of social-political-cultural categories in the territories under Israeli control has been a variegated dehumanization of Palestinians, who are always already a subversive, other enemy (Pappé 2006). Recalling Hristov’s typology of the parastate’s enemy other in Colombia, the expansive character of subversive taxonomies in Israel may be a point of convergence with the Colombian case, particularly when in both cases armed conflict has been ongoing, at a variety of intensities, since the late 1940s.<sup>6</sup> Weizman’s work (2007; see also Gorenberg 2006) suggests that in the West Bank the administrative structures and forms of military and settler control resonate with many aspects of what is considered the parastate and paramilitarism in Colombia. The coordination between the legitimate Israeli state operating within the pre-1967 boundaries, on the one hand, and what might be called the Israeli parastate in the West Bank, on the other hand, exercises a stranglehold over Palestinian society and geography. As the result, the combination of official state policy, the systematic control over Palestinian populations by the IDF, and settlers’ paramilitary activities suggests affinities to the Colombian case.

Going with such a hypothesis, in both Israel and Colombia, the alliances between state and parastate, national military and the paramilitary, in both countries has also stimulated and facilitated the interests of economic development. In Area C of the West Bank, and particularly in the Jordan Valley, settlement

<sup>5</sup> The 1994 Oslo Accords that established the Palestinian Authority (PA) split the West Bank into three areas, A, B and C. Area A comprises territory that is supposedly under both the military and civil authority of the PA, while in Area B, the PA supposedly exerts civil authority and the IDF retains military authority. Together Areas A and B comprise slightly less than 40 percent of the entire surface area of the West Bank, which excludes lands within the municipal boundaries of the city of Jerusalem. Israel maintains full military and civil authority in the slightly more than 60 percent of the West Bank that is Area C. In reality, the IDF operates with impunity in all of the West Bank, and the PA is powerless to prevent it from doing so.

<sup>6</sup> The year 1948—when Israel declared independence, the Nakba ensued, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was assassinated, and La Violencia began—presents an oddly chilling point of chronological connection between the two countries.

construction and the armed strength of settlers has made possible a takeover of land and water that sharply peripheralizes the agricultural production of Palestinian farmer communities while supporting the steady growth of Israeli-owned plantations growing export crops, particularly date palms. This has occurred with some cooperation from investment activities and interests of an elite Palestinian bourgeoisie, whose interests are served by the disenfranchisement of subaltern sectors of the Palestinian population in Area C, especially in the communities of the Jordan Valley, which is under complete Israeli and military control (see Human Rights Watch 2015). It would be fruitful to explore how the state-paramilitary-corporate disenfranchisement of local Afro-descended and indigenous communities in Urabá, the Chocó, and elsewhere in Colombia, which occurs shortly before the development of African palm plantations, gold mines, and coca-growing and cocaine-processing facilities, also plays out in the development of class hierarchies that are also racial, as in the West Bank.

In both Colombia and Israel, “peace processes” have provided legitimating cover for these expanding forms of economic development that require violent dispossession of subversive enemy others, and not as epiphenomena or “side effects” of industrial growth. “Peace” is not a cynical ploy—establishing peace is in the true interest of the Colombian state, parastate, and the multinational partners of both (see Gill 2016). Similarly, the issue of control over the Jordan Valley that the Israeli government has in the past two years made clear it intends to maintain, despite whatever might occur in peace negotiations with the Palestinian Authority, may not be a means to sabotage such negotiations, as some have reported; instead, it reveals the real stakes for the Israeli state and the West Bank parastate. The Jordan Valley is the last big parcel of land available for industrial agricultural investment and development in the territory of the British Mandate of Palestine, the entirety of which Israel has fully control since 1967 and under which lies the tremendous water resources needed for such development.

In both the Colombian and Israeli cases, paramilitaries and synchronicity with a parastate are useful for the extension of the legitimate state’s reach and the creation of space for multinational profit making, when and if the intensive phase of violent warfare with subversives is successfully ended. “Peace” in Colombia and Israel in other words means the next round of capitalist growth, under the rubric of national security states buttressed by paramilitaries and their parastate apparatus. Does this proposed convergence of interests and future ambitions form the basis for the apparently intensifying connection between Israel, the Colombian state, and paramilitarism in Colombia?

## Acknowledgements

Early versions of this article were presented at an invited lecture at the Center for American Studies and Research (CASAR) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) in 2012, at a seminar at the Universidad del Cauca in Popayan, Colombia, in 2013, and at CASAR’s Fifth International Conference at AUB in 2014. My sincerest and heartfelt thanks go to Alex Lubin, Chair of American Studies here at UNM and formerly CASAR director, and to Cristobal Gnecco, Professor of Anthropology at the Universidad del Cauca. Without the insight, critical commentary, and friendship of Alex and Cristobal this article would not have come together. I also want to give special thanks to Lara Deeb and Jessica Winegar, both of whom were persistently encouraging and profoundly constructive at key junctures in the writing process. Thanks also to Mick Taussig, whose interest and support were also quite encouraging, and to Amina Tawasil for conversations that propelled this article’s progress. Many thanks to the anonymous LARR reviewers, whose comments deepened the analysis I have presented here, although there is still much more to do on that account. Finally I thank Joanne Rappaport, who has inspired my work in Colombia from the very beginning.

## Author Information

Les W. Field is professor of anthropology at the University of New Mexico. In Nicaragua, Colombia, Ecuador, Native North America, and in Palestine, his research has hinged on establishing collaborative relationships with communities concerning the goals, methods, agendas, products, and epistemologies of anthropological work. His books include *The Grimace of Macho Ratón: Artisans, Identity and Nation in Late Twentieth-Century Western Nicaragua* (Duke University Press, 1999), *Abalone Tales: Collaborative Explorations of California Indian Sovereignty and Identity* (Duke University Press, 2008), and most recently the coedited *Challenging the Dichotomy: The Licit and the Illicit in Archaeological and Heritage Discourses* (University of Arizona Press, 2016). With Alexander Lubin, he organized and led a field school of UNM undergraduates and graduate students in the occupied West Bank in 2011 and in 2015.

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**How to cite this article:** Field, L. W. The Colombia-Israel Nexus: Toward Historical and Analytic Contexts. *Latin American Research Review*. 2017; 52(4), pp. 639-653. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25222/larr.111>

**Submitted:** 13 January 2016

**Accepted:** 07 September 2016

**Published:** 23 October 2017

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