Gifts, Horses and Flowers: Cultural History of the State in Eduardo Santos Presidential Tour, Colombia, 1938

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Abstract

After being elected president in 1938, Eduardo Santos set out on a tour around Colombia. This thesis analyzes this cross-country tour to argue that politicians in municipalities still represented the predominant actors in the Colombian political scene. In doing so, I try to find a middle ground between two opposing trends in the historiography. On the one hand, historians in Colombia and Latin America have labelled the 1930s a decade of transition, pointing out the process of state formation, urbanization, the rise of populism, and mass politics. Eduardo Santos' tour exemplifies how Colombian historiography of the 1930s overestimates socio-political and demographic change. On the other hand, I believe that scholars who criticize Bogotá's dominant role in politics, should not go in the opposite direction by stressing local isolation without acknowledging the importance of their connection to the capital.

Résumé

Après avoir été élu président en 1938, Eduardo Santos organisa un tour à travers la Colombie. Ce mémoire analyse ce voyage à travers le pays pour affirmer que les politiciens dans les villages représentaient encore des acteurs prédominants au sein de la politique colombienne. Pour ce faire, je tenterai de trouver un terrain neutre entre deux tendances antagonistes de l'historiographie. D'une part, les historiens en Colombie et en Amérique Latine ont catégorisé les années 1930 comme une décennie de transition; soulignant le processus de la formation de l'État, d'urbanisation, de montée du populisme et des politiques de masse. Le voyage d'Eduardo Santos illustre comment l'historiographie colombienne des années 1930 surestime les changements démographiques et socio-politiques. D'autre part, je pense que les historiens qui critiquent le rôle dominant de Bogotá dans la politique et soulignent l'isolation locale devraient reconnaître l'importance la connexion avec la capitale.

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Introduction

After being elected president in 1938, Eduardo Santos set out on a tour around Colombia, accompanied by his spouse, Lorencita Villegas de Santos, and his closest advisors. The presidential party weaved their way across Colombia's vast national territory by crossing valleys by railroad, plowing through rivers in small canoes and steamboats, peregrinating narrow mountain roads by automobile, and arriving in cities at the trotting pace of horseback or at the rumble of an airplane landing. They travelled around Colombia, a country divided geographically

by the Andes, where most of the population lived in hundreds of small municipalities. The presidential tour visited settlements and departments located in the three Andean chains—the Western, Central and Eastern—and reached the inter-Andean valleys and the coastal Pacific and Caribbean regions.

To meet with local politicians, Eduardo Santos visited various municipalities where authorities greeted Santos and his presidential party and encouraged local residents to welcome the president. Liberal party newspapers reported on the itinerary of the Santos tour, describing it as a "democratic" and "inclusive" gesture on the part of the president.[1] To these newspapers, Santos's tour across the country marked a major shift in how the central government would administer the country and exercise its power. A Liberal newspaper in Pasto, the capital city of the south-east department of Nariño, remembered that, before Eduardo Santos, presidents solely ruled from the capital. In their presidential palace in Bogotá, the Casa de Nariño, previous presidents received reports from "flatterers who twisted the truth" but: "Hoy existe un concepto más democrático de la presidencia de la república. El presidente viaja sin alardes, sin llamar la atención."[2]

In this thesis, I undertake an analysis of those encounters between the president and the "respectable" people in the municipalities. The central theme is the interaction of central and local power analyzed through the symbols and practices of Eduardo Santos and Lorencita Villegas' arrival, reception, balcony speeches, and gift exchanges. I am interested in the role of local politicians and prominent women in the municipalities and their relationship with the central State. I emphasize these interactions that constitute the culture of the State, which I understand as the study of the use of rhetoric, symbols, letters, newspapers, reports, performances, gestures. In short,

I concentrate on cultural politics in the small and mostly rural municipalities that hosted the president and his entourage.

This thesis analyzes this cross-country tour to argue that politicians in municipalities, mostly small and rural, still represented the predominant actors in the Colombian political scene.[3] In doing so, I try to find a middle ground between two opposing trends in the historiography. On the one hand, historians in Colombia and Latin America have labelled the 1930s a decade of transition, pointing out the process of state formation, urbanization, the rise of populism, and mass politics.[4] Eduardo Santos' tour exemplifies how Colombian historiography of the 1930s overestimates socio-political and demographic change. By travelling around the country to the municipalities, the newly elected president recognized the influence and ascendency of local politicians whose importance and relationship to the central government he emphasized publicly. On the other hand, I believe that scholars who criticize Bogotá's dominant role in politics, should not go in the opposite direction by stressing local isolation without acknowledging the importance of their connection to the capital.[5] Although I recognize that the municipalities played the predominant role in Colombian political life, I will argue that it is vital to consider their relations with Bogotá. Politicians in small villages recognized the importance of Bogotá during the presidential tour, as prominent women of these small villages proudly exhibited their connections with the capital city, using the presidential visit to develop and reinforce class and gender differences.

Culture of the State

Colombian historiography, mostly focused on Bogotá, has explored politics and the State in the 1930s through a cultural approach. The historian and sociologist Renán Silva emphasizes

the role played by intellectuals and civil servants working for the Ministry of Education during the Liberal Republic (1930-1946) in creating "popular culture."[6] The State formed and reproduced ideologies, by spreading "Colombian folklore" in the media and by using "culture" at the service of the Liberal administration.[7] Similarly, the historian Catalina Muñoz, working with documentation from internal correspondence at the Ministry of Education, argues that the authorities intended to change the governance of the country in the hopes of creating a new "cultural project" that included incorporating the common people into nation-building.[8] Focusing on the 1930s and 40s, the art historian María del Carmen Suescún Pozas studies art, culture, politics, and gender to analyze the public controversies between Conservatives and Liberals, stirred by an art exhibition of nudes, painted by Débora Arango and Carlos Correa.[9]

Colombian historians have considered culture as a mechanism of social integration located in the capital. Their analysis of the State, politics, and culture is in one way or another centered on Bogotá, and the main figures of their historical account are usually politicians or major institutions located in the capital city. Consequently, Colombian historiography has understood "culture" similarly to how Bogotá's upper class did - as elements such as music, dance, art, painting, literature, radio, and grammar.[10] Historians of this trend have sought to establish the relationship between culture and the State by looking at the way in which prominent politicians in Bogotá had described and used this relation to central power. My approach to the concept of the State distinguishes itself from previous Colombian historiography in that I focus on the municipalities rather than the capital and in that I emphasize the importance of the relation between these two levels of political administration. Influenced by French and Mexican cultural history as well as by notions of anthropology of the State, my understanding of the culture of the State is based on a

close analysis of symbols, rhetoric, representations and enactments of the State, especially so at the local level.

I combine approaches from the French cultural history to understand the culture of the State in Colombia through an analysis of the values and principles of behaviour promoted by local politicians. The Revolution was a social transformation as much as it was an ideological and rhetorical one.[11] Lynn Hunt, in one of the most influential works of cultural history, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (1984), argues that the French Revolution's leaders used symbols and language to establish the foundations of a new society.[12] In the hopes of truly breaking with the past and to signal the beginning of a new era, intellectuals strived to provide new meanings and ways of thinking through different discursive mechanisms. For her part, Mona Ozouf argues that during the French Revolution the State demolished symbols from the past in the hopes of allowing revolutionary culture to arise metaphorically from the ashes of the Ancien Régime. By breaking with the past, the authorities made way for a new future in rhetoric and discursive processes, thus signaling the beginning of national rebirth, the unity of the country, and the triumph of the revolutionary cause.[13]

Scholars of the social sciences who study the State do not seek to "come out into the light" and find an objective reality that unveils the true nature of the State concealed behind the symbols, speeches and representations of the State. Rather, they embrace the "culture of the State", which they consider as fundamental elements to understanding the way in which a State functions. Historians, sociologists, and anthropologists view the political symbols, representations, and gestures, not as accessories, but as crucial parts of the State. In his influential essay on studying the State, the sociologist Philip Abrams questioned the assumption that the State is an objective concept which could be found by social scientists behind a mask. He argued that the State is not a

reality that exists behind a mask but "it is the mask itself."[14] The State is not found beyond a specific separation: it is the intertwined conjunction of ideas, practices and institutions that define it and establish its existence. Studying the State is paying close attention to those symbols that shape and give coherence to what is contradictory and complex; to do so is to embrace the culture of politics as an issue in its own right. [15]

I find compelling historians' attention to the micro level and their focus on municipalities while studying the cultural politics of the State in México. They argue that the Mexican Revolution intended to reconstruct society through its plan to remodel institutions, change the structure of the economy, and create new individuals. Alan Knight examines the "cultural project" of the Revolution and the extent to which Lázaro Cárdenas was successful in his educational and agrarian reforms. [16] Elsie Rockwell's research looks at the educational missions during the Cárdenas administration in Tlaxcala, explaining the negotiations, interpretations, and adaptations of the central project to the local context. [17] Mexican historiography agrees on the importance of understanding cultural politics through an analysis of symbols. However, historians have come up with different conclusions about the success of the central State, analyzing the extent to which the Revolution brought about substantial changes.[18] Rather than delving into revisionist debates, I am more interested in pointing out a common concern in the Mexican historiography: the importance of cultural politics and the local context.

I find pertinent the Mexican historiographical approach to the Colombian context due to the importance of the culture of local politics. In Colombia, like Mexico, political leaders created an imagined reality, full of meanings, symbols, and representations, which they expected the common people to perceive and assimilate. Studying the cultural history of politics will allow me to understand how authorities wanted to represent themselves. However, I do not assume that the

central government's measures were successful at the local level because, being the product of lawmakers in Bogotá, the projects put forth during political speeches rarely turned into reality in small towns and rural areas outside of the capital. Local authorities and the common people in the municipalities had a different understanding of the State, and so related in other ways to the capital and its institutions.

Finally, the State exists both in its symbols as well as in its relationships. The separation between subject and object eludes the essential element in the process of understanding the State and its people - the idea that they reciprocally influence one another and are mutually related. I find useful the way some anthropologists, such as Akhil Gupta, approach the culture of politics and the way in which ordinary people in small villages perceived the state and related to the State institutions, and how the state manifested itself in their daily lives.[19] In his ethnographic study in India, Gupta concludes that the state serves as a vehicle to reproduce and reinforce inequalities of class, caste, and gender. My examination of Eduardo Santos' political tour leads me to a similar argument: that local relations with the state also reinforced existing hierarchies in the Colombian context. However, local politicians and prominent women tried to benefit from social inequalities.

The State During the Liberal Republic

The 1930s is considered the decade of "state formation" in both Colombia and wider Latin America. In Colombia, the central state increased public spending to unprecedented levels during the 1920s and 1930s, which enabled it to invest in education, transportation and national administration and to hire increasingly more civil servants.[20] Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Colombia had been experiencing constant economic growth based on coffee, oil, and banana production. The country had also gone through a period of industrial development,

particularly in Medellín and Barranquilla, but most of the tax income still came from trade taxes (i.e., export of raw materials and import of goods).[21] There were some signs of economic prosperity: the high prices of coffee, a rise in exports, more tax revenue, and increased state resources. Additionally, payments from the United States government to the tune of 25 million dollars in return for Colombia recognizing Panama's independence significantly increased the government's budget.[22]

However, the Great Depression in Colombia caused great economic instability and brought social discontent. The Colombian state, trying to contain the growing popular discontent following the financial crisis of 1929, implemented different strategies such as legalizing unions, regularizing working relations to ease tensions, and increasing investment in social services.[23] Bernardo Tovar convincingly demonstrates in the Colombian context that the fiscal reforms of the 1930s increased the central budget significantly and there was a substantial rise in public spending for transportation and road building.[24] Along the same lines, Aline Helg argues that in the same decade, the amount invested in education by the central government rose by 800 per cent.[25] When historians, such as Bernardo Tovar and Aline Helg, refer to state formation in Colombia in the 1930s, they define this as the increase in the fiscal capacity of the capital in terms of institutional, economic, and social capabilities.

However, there exists no consensus among historians as to whether the 1930s was a decade of rupture in the process of consolidation of the state. Some historians have argued that the rise of fiscal resources and institutional growth did not necessarily imply greater capacity on the part of the central state to control and administer the national territory during the 1930s. Mary Roldán points out that most of the civil servant positions, such as teachers, municipal employees and employees of public works, were still chosen by the departments and municipalities from the

respective patronage networks of each political party.[26] She suggests that the political scene in Colombia also comprised many states coexisting, national, regional and local, at the same time and that it is necessary to consider the departments in order to understand the Colombian state of the 1930s.[27] The sociologist Carlos Miguel Ortiz Sarmiento maintains that, for most Colombians, the embodiment of the state were the municipalities.[28] The prominent British historian Malcolm Deas argues that the idea that the central state ruled resolutely from Bogotá was an illusion that did not always coincide with reality.[29]

It is not my intention to undertake a discussion on whether, in the 1930s, the central state was already established or whether local powers were gaining prominence. As I explained before, I avoid understanding the state as a quantified object that could be defined and measured.[30] I understand the culture of the state as a constantly evolving process, that always reconfigures itself. Usually, adjectives such as "weak", "fragmented", and "non-existent" imply a preconception of the state, which is ahistorical and adopts a measure of comparison developed for and by Western Europe and the United States. It is a view which presumes that monopoly of force and firm control over the ensemble of the territory is necessarily positive. I do not wish to evaluate the existence or the strength of the Colombian state in such terms. Rather, I am interested in how the State manifested itself in its mutual relationship with the people in the municipalities who, in turn, shaped the state as well.

When Eduardo Santos took office, in addition to being an important moment in economic terms, the country was also undergoing a political transition, known as the Liberal Republic (1930-1946), a period that represented a break from the successive presidencies under the Conservative Party (1886-1930). The transition signaled a rupture in political terms, notably due the administration of Alfonso López Pumarejo (1934-1938 and 1942-1945). The latter was a president

known for his grandiloquent slogan of the "Revolución en Marcha,": it referred to his social agenda in Congress that focused on regulating labour relations and legalizing unions.[31] The most polarizing reform that the Liberal administrations implemented was the secularization of the state, undertaken mainly by López. The state began to take over many of the social services that the Catholic Church was previously responsible for, such as education, civil registration, and marriage. In response, the clergy and the Conservative party fiercely resisted the Liberals' reforms.

By focusing on Alfonso López Pumarejo, and Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, scholars have almost exclusively concentrated on the above mentioned "modern" political agenda, urban mass politics and, hence, neglected the political scene in small villages.[32] Historians have neglected the study Eduardo Santos by wrongly qualifying him as the traditional, moderate president who put on hold the "Revolución en Marcha."[33] To a certain extent, I agree with the characterization of Santos as a moderate; however, I do not believe that Santos' mandate should be approached through a teleological lens. Many scholars have dismissed his mandate as "traditional" and "moderate" as opposed to the "modern" and "progressive" politics of other Liberal presidents like López and Gaitán. However, I largely agree with the historian Marco Palacios who argues that the Liberal reforms of López were not as progressive as previously thought and were in fact rather moderate.[34] Instead of approaching the economic and political transition in terms of progress and interruption, between permanence and change, I propose to study the state as it was at the time through an analysis of the relations and symbols that characterized it. Although Eduardo Santos was a moderate politician, his presidency did not mark a major shift from the policies of his Liberal predecessors. He did not interrupt the reforms implemented during López's administration as these were moderate in nature as well. Eduardo Santos, similar to López before him, wanted the state to

intercede between owners and workers to avoid social conflicts. Neither one embodied a profound societal change; rather their reforms were undertaken to maintain the existing social order.[35]

Sources

To write this cultural history of the state, I consulted newspapers and correspondence from Bogotá such as *El Tiempo* and *El Espectador*. However, aware of the importance of small towns and other cities, I also read newspapers from villages in Antioquia, like *El Esfuerzo* (Titiribí) and *El Heraldo de Oriente* (Santuario), as well as excellent journals from other cities, such as *El Liberal* (Popayán), *El Heraldo* (Barranquilla), *El Diario* (Medellín), *El Heraldo* (Girardot), *La Vanguardia Liberal* (Bucaramanga), and *El Radio* (Pasto). These newspapers are rich with descriptions and are especially useful, since instead of studying the way in which the country was described from Bogotá's point of view, they offer the opportunity to understand how municipalities and other cities perceived the tour and their relation with the president. I consulted the three best newspaper archives in Colombia, the Biblioteca Nacional and the Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, in Bogotá, and the Hemeroteca de la Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellín.

This thesis also reflects on Eduardo Santos' private correspondence found in the Fondo Partido Liberal and Gobernaciones of the Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango. This archive has been minimally consulted by historians; thus it offered me unique possibilities for writing a history of the state, which can shed new light on the strong political participation in the villages in the 1930s and the enduring relations between the capital and the local people. This correspondence includes missives sent to the president by governors, mayors, city council members, lawyers, indigenous people, teachers, workers, trade unionists, women from liberal organizations, students, and thousands of other people who participated in politics and related themselves to the president, independently of their origin. Judging by the regional and social diversity of the material, the

excellent cataloguing, and the extent of available material—217 boxes and more than 1.000 folders—I consider it one of the best presidential archives that exists in Colombia to write political history.

Chapter I

After being elected president in May 1938, Eduardo Santos undertook a journey before assuming his new office in August of that same year. The president-to-be travelled to dozens of municipalities over fourteen departments to understand in person the "problems of the country" as experienced by the local authorities. The presidential party met the governors of the departments, the higher authorities of the executive named by Eduardo Santos in each department; the mayors selected by the governors in the municipalities; the deputies in the Assembly, the departmental legislative body elected every two years; and city councillors elected at the same interval by the

residents (*vecinos*) of each municipality. Political figures welcomed them, as well as the Liberal and Santista committee members who raised money, organized the campaign, and supported the president during the elections.[36]

I center on a short period of time—the few months of the tour--, which could be considered an episode in Eduardo Santos' presidency; however, as Georges Duby shows in his study of the Battle of Bouvines, an event can open a window for further inquiry into general questions.[37] Through analysis of the exchanges between the president and local politicians, the tour reveals that the municipalities were the center of the Colombian political scene. Also, I use the gatherings, along with the gift exchanges and the flowers, to exemplify how these seemingly trivial elements of the presidential tour disclose the relationship between the central state and municipalities, showing aspects of class formation and gender discourses.

In the first section, I argue that urbanization in Colombia in the 1930s has been overestimated by economic and political historiography, both in demographic and electoral terms. This is followed by a discussion on the presidential exchanges, in which I examine the nature of the president's relation to the municipal politicians. I insist on the idea that the municipalities were not isolated administrative units whose relation to the capital was ambiguous or inexistent. The distance from the capital (hindered by the lack of infrastructure such as roads and other means of transport), poverty in remote municipalities, and fiscal difficulties reinforced the importance of local politicians and the connections with Bogotá that were vital for the acquisition of resources.

The second and third sections focus on the social relevance of relations with the center in the municipalities. Firstly, through an account of the symbols, gestures, theatricality and officials' relations, I examine the formation of the "respectable" local people. Following Joan Scott's reflection on "how politics constructs gender and gender constructs politics," I continue with a

discussion of the way in which, in small villages, women took part in the state's construction of gender discourses, thus reinforcing their female role through the consolidation of their social positions. [38] In short, I ask, what were the relations between the central State and the municipalities, and how did these relations influence the politics of the 1930s, status formation and gender discourses?

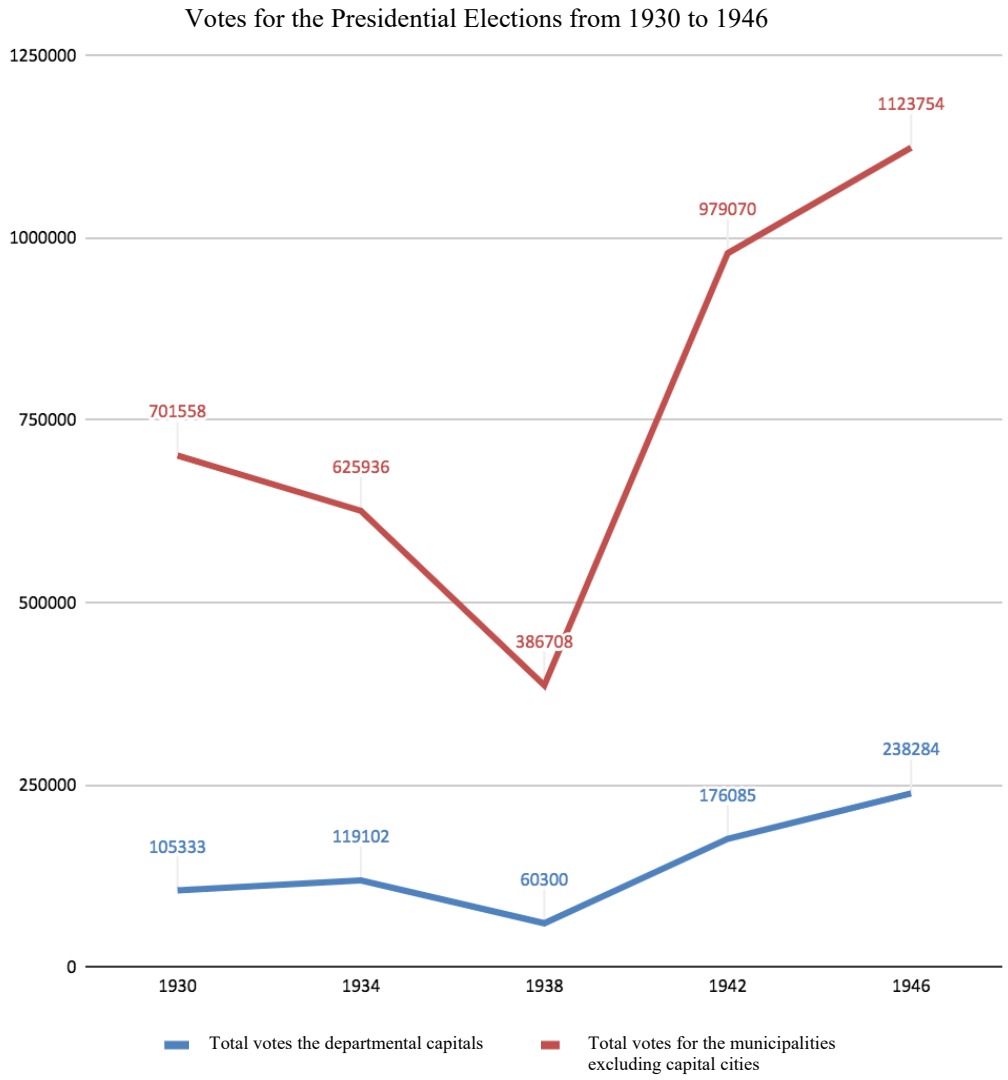
Gifts

Eduardo Santos' tour made me question the commonly accepted presumption by historiography that the 1920s and 1930s represented a demographic turning point which brought the advent of urbanization and of new ways of doing politics.[39] Jesús Antonio Bejarano holds that since the 1920s "the highest rates of urbanization in the country" occurred, which denote Colombia's transition towards a modernized country.[40] Based on this premise, the most notable works of political history have centered their attention on analyzing the new ways of doing politics in a "modern", urbanized society.[41] I claim that the presidential tour, rather than embodying a "traditional" politician refusing to abide by "modern" ways of navigating politics, reveals the way the perception of the urbanization process has been exaggerated. The presumption of "modernized" society has impeded the integral understanding of municipal politics in the 1930s and the firm local connections with Bogotá.

Contrary to the commonplace of the economic historians, the majority of the Colombian population in the 1930s continued living in small villages. For an astute politician like Eduardo Santos, the importance of small municipalities could not be underestimated. Eduardo Santos thought about politics and demography in a pragmatic way by understanding that not only cities were important, but equally or even more so were the small municipalities since they represented the majority of the votes. When Eduardo Santos set out on his tour of Colombia, he did not seek to point out that the country was undergoing substantial changes, nor that it was urbanizing or

industrializing. He was more interested in ensuring that his party would continue winning the elections.

The support of local politicians during the elections was one of the main reasons for undertaking a tour around the country. Eduardo Santos wanted to reinforce Bogotá's bond with small municipalities, which were the protagonists in Colombian politics in the 1930s (and before). According to the 1938 census, most of the population (67 per cent) lived in villages with less than 20.000 people, and the five major towns represented all together less than 10 per cent of the total population in 1938. [42] For instance, the following graph demonstrates the voter turnout for the Colombian presidential elections during 1930-1946, which I use to compare the total votes of the departmental capitals versus non-capital municipalities.



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During the 1930s and 40s, the municipalities held a greater electoral weight than did the departmental capitals. Although, in the graph, I can observe a rise in votes from departmental capitals, the numbers were still relatively insufficient to conclude that politics in larger cities were the new political epicenter of the electoral race during the 1930s. Over time, the departmental capitals began to have more electoral weight: the number of votes coming from the capital cities for the presidential elections of 1930 were 105,333 (13 per cent of the total votes) and 238,824 (18 per cent) in 1946. However, despite the growth of cities, the municipalities that were not departmental capitals represented 82 per cent of the total votes in 1946. By emphasizing the

importance of small municipalities, I am not arguing that Colombian historiography is completely mistaken in pointing out the impact of urban growth during the 1930s, but rather that it is crucial to measure the change in comparative terms, by recognizing the continuing centrality of small municipalities.

In the 1930s, in Bogotá, some prominent politicians, in their speeches, gave greater attention to urban demands and, in so doing, made them the focus and neglected local politics. This indicated these politicians' preference for the urban setting rather than being a sign of demographic change that reoriented local politics towards capital cities. Alfonso López Pumarejo centered his political agenda on urban demands such as the legalization of labour unions and the regulation of working hours.[44] Urban complaints and grappling with labour movements had been a preoccupation for politicians in Bogotá since the 1920s and into the 1930s.[45] However, safeguarding relations with the municipalities and with local politicians was just as important as attending to urban politics. Colombian politicians had to dedicate attention to both levels. Historians who have focused on the demographic changes associated with urbanization have tended to overlook the enormous importance of the central power's connections with politicians in small towns.

Eduardo Santos' tour demonstrates the need to re-evaluate the accepted historiographical turn which solely focuses on cities. It implies redirecting historical analysis to the municipalities with the objective of reflecting on the relations between local politics and the capital and the social impact of the latter relations. The gift exchange, for example, was a key strategy to reinforce the connections between the president and local politicians, which created social meanings and enabled prominent individuals to consolidate their social status. In Pasto, Eduardo Santos received a gold chain and was conferred doctor *honoris causa*, exemplifying the types of social rituals

undertaken by local politicians and women to symbolically formalize the relations with Bogotá.[46] More often, around the country, local politicians offered champagne and organized banquets, while the women presented bouquets to Lorencita Villegas de Santos. As a sign of recognition, Liberal newspapers named the bestower and the gift which he or she had presented to the presidential couple. Eduardo Santos expressed his gratitude through public gestures and reciprocal gifts such as the granting of four scholarships in a small municipality in Antioquia, memorialized by a sculptor's engraving of the president's gesture on marble in Tiribí.[47]

Eduardo Santos and local politicians exchanged vehemently as a way to forge links and distribute institutional resources. For the actors implicated in the exchanges, fortifying the relations with the central government not only had symbolic but also material implications; they expected an increase in the local budget and assistance especially in developing infrastructure. The local politicians specified the number of votes they amassed for Santos with the intention of gaining more resources for their municipalities. [48] I agree, as some scholars have claimed, that the majority of the population in small villages perceived their local government rather than the central power as the real form of the state.[49] However, in the 1930s, even if the majority of the municipal budget was collected from local rents and taxes, it remained that an important portion of the resources came from departmental capitals or Bogotá. On average, departmental and central budgets were responsible for 16.9% of the total budget of municipalities, and the Congress, for an additional 16.9 %. [50] Intertwining the departmental and central administration was vital to ensure a flow of financial subsidies coming from the central budget. Then, the ability to relate with Bogotá enabled local politicians to acquire financial assistance which was crucial for the consolidation of their position in their municipalities.[51]

Hence receiving the president-elect in the municipalities provided an opportunity to publicly exchange votes for favours. The politicians usually asked Eduardo Santos for assistance with road building, by specifying the number of jobs needed, the number of *vecinos* who should be hired and the budget that should be allocated for the wages of the workers.[52] Just after the elections, the president received thousands of letters reporting on who had helped the Liberals get ahead in the polls, and who, consequently, was eligible for governmental help. The politicians presented themselves as intermediaries between the *vecinos* and the president. The tour offered the local politicians an efficient platform to publicly perform their role as agents and mediators. Indeed, when Eduardo Santos arrived, local politicians and women proved to their respective villages the meaning of having voted for the Liberals as they could better fulfill local needs by virtue of their political networks.

The central government, the local politicians and women required that the government facilitate connections, through greater investment to enhance road building and expand river navigation; promises to build and improve infrastructure were met by a greater popular inclination to vote for the Liberal Party. In the municipalities, politicians argument was direct, explicit, and promoted by means of publicly given speeches or radio. The rise of votes for the Liberals meant greater access for the local population to central resources. [53] Santos and his political allies wanted to comply with the demands of the people to "improve infrastructure" as a way to "take advantage of arable land." [54] The intendent of Chocó—a coastal administrative unit called "Intendencia" which had less autonomy and resources than the departments—asked for assistance from the President to "fight" the tropical forest of the Pacific Coast that represented a life of "anxiety" and "misery" for those desiring to undertake agricultural endeavours. [55]

Relations with Bogotá were meant to "overcome difficulties" such as the lack of roads, which was associated with poverty, and the untamed environment deemed external and viewed as an "obstacle" to "development." In the words of Delfina Díaz, one of the women who wrote a letter to Lorencita Villegas de Santos, the state should help "defeat nature" in Tumaco. [56] Tumaco, whose population was mostly indigenous and of African descent, was described as a municipality devoid of infrastructure for basic necessities in which "there was not even access to drinkable water."[57] Delfina Díaz hoped that with the assistance of the central state Tumaco could be converted into a "puerto civilizado, un lugar de turismo, que atraiga los capitales, nacionales y extranjeros, para darle mayor vida económica e intelectual."[58] Delfina Díaz requested help for Tumaco's development since it seemed like the state had "forgotten" Tumaco and left it "abandoned to untamed nature." [59]

The president's arrival was compared to that of Jesus and Eduardo Santos' wisest choice had been going with Lorencita Villegas. As articulated by Delfina Díaz, women were seen as possessing a "natural intuition and better vision," to identify social deficiencies and the role the state could play to better the municipal conditions. [60] Hence the reason why the presence of Lorencita Villegas was so vital to the success of the presidential tour. Díaz believed that Lorencita Villegas:

> sabrá ayudaros a observar despacio, a la vez que las múltiples e imperiosas necesidades de esta región, la singular belleza de este conjunto de islas que plugo a Dios esparcirlas en el océano, a la manera de un bellísimo collar de brillantes esmeraldas que se arrancan y se desgranan al ancado con sus esbeltas palmeras que se mecen ondulantes al impulso de la brisa y se inclinan majestuosas como a rendiros también cariño y saludo.[61]

Delfina Díaz continued her letter alternating metaphors and proclaiming that the presidential arrival would not resemble the waves, "que mueren en nuestras desiertas playas;" but would rather leave a "huella luminosa que marque con sello de oro vuestro paso por esta isla." [62]

The politicians and "ladies" were vehicles to fortify the interactions with the central power and served to mediate relations in the hopes of obtaining more resources. Votes were used by the local politicians as leverage to express municipal needs to the president in the hopes of gaining, in exchange, greater resources for their communities. If a municipality had inadequate infrastructure or lacked resources, and the central state remained unable to provide social services such as education, health, infrastructure, and improved urban-rural connections, dependence on the central budget was more important. When Delfina Díaz claimed that the state abandoned Tumaco, she was implicitly asking for greater involvement from Bogotá by requesting that a larger portion of the central budget be invested in her municipality. When politicians and people emphasised poverty or the challenges posed by the "hostile" environment, they were calling on the state's active presence in their communities. I agree with Herbert Braun, when he argues that the hundreds of letters written by citizens from small municipalities to politicians in Bogotá, such as Eduardo Santos, were a demonstration of local interest in involving the state more broadly in their daily lives.[63] The politicians of the municipalities made their request for central resources in public as a way to demonstrate to their supporters that they were vehicles of change for their communities' growth.

I do not classify the presidential tour's gift exchanges and the relationships established by the president with the local community according to theoretical typologies which usually define "clientelism", "patronage", "friendship", and "godfatherhood" in a degrading or negative way. I try to avoid what the Italian historian Antonio Annino called the liberal history of liberalism, which consists in projecting today's liberal preconception onto the past, accusing historical actors of not conceiving democracy and the state in the same way as contemporary scholars.[64] In the 1940s, sociologists described Latin American, African, Asian, and non-Western European societies as

"traditional", "small", and "pre-capitalist", qualifying them as pertaining to the "Third World" or "developing countries" based on traditional relations which expressed their asymmetrical and hierarchical character. [65]

This approach put Western European states ahead of the rest of the world in terms of "development" and "advancement." [66] Theories of development arguing for the "transition" from "traditional" to "modern bureaucratic" societies have been counterargued by scholars who insist on the fact that the conception of a transition was a state discourse which sought to legitimize its "modern" and "rational" bureaucracy; however, without it implying that in practice social rituals, conventions, and gestures ceased to symbolically reproduce unequal relations. [67] Therefore, I undertake a description of the presidential relationships and their consequent hierarchical implications; however, I do so without a preconceived and "objective" idea of the state that would lead me to qualify Colombian society and the relations which shape it as "traditional" or "in transition." What interests me is the way in which the state manifested itself and was constructed locally by means of the local politicians' and prominent women's interactions with the presidential tour.

Horses

Public performances shine a light on the underlying mechanisms of the interaction between central and local authorities and demonstrate the central position that the municipalities occupied in Colombian politics. The prestige of the country's leading politicians relied on their ability to relate to local powers and comply with their demands. The tour exemplifies the way in which the local politicians used their networks, by interrelating politics, class, and gender. In order to efficiently make use of their political connections, it was necessary for authorities to know how to perform their role as intermediaries between different levels of power in order to be able to relate with the president. The tour provided a platform to enhance their prestige and to consolidate their

political and social status in their municipalities. During the presidential tour, words, rhetoric, gestures and performances of status were employed locally as a way to showcase which men and women belonged to the "select" group, that publicly represented their municipalities to the elected president.

In Colombia, scholars agree that the "high class" was absent from local politics in small municipalities. Sociologists and historians have denominated local politicians as members of the "middle class" and, in so doing, differentiated them from the urban "upper class."[68] Carlos Miguel Ortiz Sarmiento went beyond the binary narrative of the poor versus the rich by focusing on the middle sectors.[69] Similarly, Mary Roldán studied politicians who were climbing socially and individuals from small villages who were anxious to succeed.[70] Ortiz and Roldán devoted their attention to the rural middle class through their studies of politics and violence. Their awareness of class on a local level enabled these scholars to produce insightful social histories that went beyond rigid binary divisions.

Although I understand their attention to the social history of politics and their determination to go beyond binary narratives, I do not comply with their classification of local politicians. When studying the social dimension of class, due to their understanding of society from an urban perspective, they perceived class as an objective category, in a hierarchized classification, and transposed this conception nationally. They denoted the upper class as limited to major landowners based in cities, the industrial bourgeoise or the large-scale merchants; they then identified local politicians as belonging to the middle sectors and represented them as white-collars workers, along with attorneys, clerks, shopkeepers, public officials, small landowners, and local merchants. I found that the social classifications used by these historians did not conform with the sources that I read on Eduardo Santos' tour.

Contrary to how the historiography has identified them, local politicians saw themselves as the most distinguished members of society, rather than as the middle class. They used the arrival of the president to consolidate their positions at the pinnacle of local political life, and displayed symbols of elegance to show their refinement and prestige. In the newspapers from Bogotá and other departmental capitals, and in local dailies, journalists presented local politicians as "elegant" and "dignified" individuals, not as social climbers. Instead of limiting our understanding of class to an economic classification, determined by the type of ownership of the means of productions, historians should also consider class as an "idea" and a discourse, which is historically and culturally constructed. By considering David Parker's study of the formation of the middle class in Lima during the twentieth century that shows it is vital to understand local meanings and their political weight, we can better appreciate the social dimension of local politicians and their connections with Bogotá.[71]

Belonging to a class depended on symbolic elements and routines that created prestige. The coming of the president gave public recognition to the municipal authorities and Liberal politicians. By enabling the local "gentlemen" (*cabelleros*) and "*damas*" "ladies" (*damas*) to accompany him upon his arrival in the municipalities, Eduardo Santos invested them with authority and demonstrated which individuals had the possibility to access institutional resources, hence reinforcing their local status. In a municipality in the department of Nariño, five hundred horsemen escorted Eduardo Santos around the town, raising red banners—the colour of the flag of the Liberal Party. [72] The horsemen performed their social role by combining symbols of class and politics, since having horses was indicative of their social status. Horses implied the financial means one had had to buy them, the ownership of extra pasture to feed them, and especially, the

ability to employ personnel to tame them. In small municipalities, riding one's horse in a public procession while also accompanying a notable figure exemplified a type of social differentiation.

The newspapers noted the "enthusiasm" of the "crowd" by expressing how: "Liberals" and "citizens" "fervently welcomed" the president-elect and accompanying party composed of his closest advisors and the communities' noteworthy individuals.[73] Journalists described the way in which the horsemen formed cavalcades and the guard of honour until the president arrived in the main square.[74] *El Tiempo* asserted that the politicians from small municipalities who welcomed Eduardo Santos were "the leaders of Liberalism."[75] Santos' tour was not only a way for the President to recognize the support received from the local politicians, but also a unique opportunity for the latter to consolidate their local prominence through the enactment of various symbolic elements such as the use of horses in official receptions. The enactment of their social role in front of the common people contributed as well to their recognition as "leaders of Liberalism" and members of the "respectable *vecinos*." Liberal newspapers reported on the meetings for an extensive readership located in municipalities in the same department or further away, hence breaking local barriers and providing local politicians with an opportunity for recognition beyond their immediate communities.

The gatherings between Eduardo Santos and the "leaders of Liberalism" created bonds at the local level with the central power. These exchanges gave municipal politicians a sense of belonging in the overarching Liberal political administration and enabled them to mutually acknowledge their status with the capital. In every city and small villages, journalists expressed how the president gathered with the "local authorities" and the "more respectable" people, which often meant private meetings with the local "high class." The meetings were sometimes meant to publicly exemplify who were the "dignified" members of society.[76] *El Radio*, a Liberal newspaper

in Pasto, stated that in one room that hosted the president the "supreme representatives of society" gathered together. At a presidential soirée in Pasto, were reunited secular and religious authorities composed of the governor, representing the highest authority in the department, the high-ranking members of the military, the bishop accompanied by priests, and the prominent "gentlemen" and "ladies" of the "upper class." [77]

The sense belonging in local and central politics was a process that depended on one's ability to navigate politics, which illustrates the importance of the tour as an opportunity to advertise one's social prominence. The "prestige" of belonging to the "high class," and being described as "dignified" was not just related to remuneration, but, more importantly, it was also a recognition of one's social and political connections.[78] In that sense, the meaning of "class" was shaped by discourses, rhetoric, ideas, images, and performances. Newspapers, in their rendering of official receptions, always mentioned that the gatherings hosted a "very exclusive" selection of guests. [79] To be one of the chosen ones to welcome Eduardo Santos conferred a distinctive social status. The president-elect danced with "hidalgos" and "aristocratic ladies."[80] Although Colombia did not have a nobility or grand fortunes, journalists used hyperbolic adjectives to convey excitement, and magnify the prominence of parties and guests. Despite consolidating their position in society through these sorts of official gatherings, these "most dignified" individuals still had modest incomes.[81]

The rituals of the tour, the arrival in the municipalities, and the official meetings symbolized the union of the president and local authorities. Encounters between the central and the municipal authorities naturalized the hierarchic order of administrative figures, and it was presented as a part of "democracy." The links established between the president and the "distinguished" local authorities made the republic "great" and the government "fair." [82] *El*

Esfuerzo, a journal from the small municipality of Titiribí, Antioquia, recorded the words of the president of the municipal council (*el concejo municipal* or *cabildo*) that summarized the emotion precipitated by his meeting with Eduardo Santos:

> Nosotros nos tendimos subyugados en este recinto por la majestad de la República y la sublime belleza de la democracia, que apenas si distingue a los hombres por sus actos. ¡Qué alegría democrática más patética! El más humilde mayordomo de un cabildo municipal preside una sesión en que se encuentran altos dignatarios del Estado, las primeras damas de Colombia, distinguidos jefes políticos.[83]

After celebrating the advent of democracy, the councilman noticed that equality was sublime but "stirring."[84] The councilmen acclaimed the equality yielded by democracy: a simple man in a small municipality could preside over the highest local authority figures, and over the "gentlemen" and "ladies" of Bogotá.[85] The speech is more insightful that it looks: equality was celebrated as a virtue, but symbols of status and other forms of social differentiation remained authoritative. The councilman noted the hierarchy that existed between the "notable" people in Colombia, and, although they could all be described as "dignified" members of society, it was one thing to be a "humble butler" of the town hall and another a "high dignitary" of the state. The idea of elites was disjointed and very difficult to define since a wide range of people was qualified as "respectable", thus making the upper class itself an amalgamated and very confused entity. However, although there was an awareness of the existing hierarchies within the "respectable" class, rather than considering the differences, the councilman insisted on the common symbols. The journal described the luxury of the house that hosted the president, the luxurious decoration, the lavishness of the meal and the elegance of the etiquette—more than 150 types of flatware were used. [86] The article described the menu, ordered from a German, since it was considered à la mode to have a meal catered by a foreigner. The journalist lauded the orchestra and mentioned the cost of the banquet as well as the person who paid for the event. Newspapers took note of the central

role women played in the organization of official events for their "touch of prestige" and the "elegance" they added to the proceedings in specific places.

The symbols, relations and the rhetoric of the trip served to consolidate the status of the prominent politicians in the municipalities since their connections with the president worked to test, act, and formulate the distinction between them and the "common people." Rather than present the local politicians as the "middle class," the sources I consulted emphasized their distinctive status in society and signaled the symbols they shared with the dignitaries arriving from Bogotá. In Colombia, very few historians have undertaken the study of "class" as an idea shaped by a series of cultural symbols, which has prevented the understanding of the interdependent and intertwined relations between politics and class. A notable exception is historian Ricardo López who argues that in the 1930s, office workers and public officials were beginning to identify themselves as Bogotá's "middle class," hence explicitly differentiating themselves from the lower and upper classes of the capital. [87] The discrepancies between his findings and my own are explained by the fact that the perception and construction of class depends on the context in which it is analyzed. In the larger cities, like Bogotá or Medellín, being a city councilman, office secretary, or teacher did not necessarily correlate with being a "distinguished" citizen to the same degree that it did in smaller towns and municipalities.

In the small towns and their rural areas, which comprised the majority of the country, and which Eduardo Santos visited during "his triumphal tour," the primacy and social prestige of a politician was much greater than in capital cities. Especially if the municipality was poor and there was a greater need for an active presence of the state, a politician or a teacher could be the most influential figure since they were the only ones who could ensure better social services such as employment and infrastructure. Another issue is the politicians' own valuation of their status in

society. Municipal politicians identified themselves in multiple ways depending on the circumstances in which they found themselves: during the presidential tour, they displayed their social distinction and elegance while also claiming pauperism when they pleaded the central government for institutional or financial aid.

Flowers

At the foot of the Andes mountains, in the department of Nariño, the town of Barbacoas extended along the Telembí river, in the humid forest of the Pacific region. Pastora Santander, a "notable" Liberal woman of the municipality, was the one chosen to give a bouquet to Lorencita Villegas de Santos. After presenting her with the flowers, Pastora Santander gave her a letter in which she wrote to the first lady that: "Desde estos valles tropicales, cargados de ensueños y emociones, acariciados por este río de ciudad musulmana, hemos seguido vuestra trayectoria iluminada como una virgen de las Leyendas Áureas."[88] News of the president's journey across Colombia had reached Barbacoas. Pastora Santander was making an analogy between the travels of Lorencita Villegas and the stories of the saints from the *The Golden Legend*, a book from the thirteenth century written by Jacobus da Varagine, the archbishop of Genoa, composed of liturgical and hagiographical magical tales that converted the sacred lives into allegories.[89]

Pastora's letter is an example of the convergence of politics, class, religion, and gender. Local perceptions of the behaviours of each sex shaped political and state discourses. Discourses about the behaviour, attitudes, and duties women and men needed to abide by according to their sex were not imposed by the state as an external abstraction from Bogotá that taught guidelines of conduct. Rather the people -- men and women from small villages -- locally formed the very core of politics' relation with the state and participated in the construction of ideas about gender and class. The idea of a state composed of many local and departmental actors that constructed political

images, discourses, rhetoric, and cultural symbols appears more convincing to me than a national state imposing unidirectionally from the capital its vision of class and gender.

As women recognized themselves as "distinguished," they demonstrated that they knew what it meant to be a "lady" and what their "role" was. When women prescribed the behaviour Colombian women should adopt, they were appropriating the discourses employed by the Spanish colonial "elite." Colonial Catholic values such as the concept of female "honour," associated with virginity, were maintained to ensure the mediation of status through the safeguarding of the "purity of blood." According to Asunción Lavrin, during the colonial period, whereas the largest part of the population had children without worrying about being married or virginity before marriage, there was an "elite" anxiety to keep the Spanish "pure", which manifested itself through regulations imposed on women's sexuality.[90]

Latin American historiography has discussed the continuity of gender discourses associated with the "elites" during the Republic and its expansion to "popular sectors," which reinforced the idea of female virginity and the importance of marriage, hence relegating women´s role to the household. [91] In contrast to Sandra McGee Deutsch who contends that the upholding of these female values and the limited role of women in the household was a right-wing discourse present in Brazil, Argentina and Chile in the twentieth century, in the Colombian context I will argue that the use of gender discourses during the journey was less a question of political orientation, and more one of social status.[92] The analogy between women and flowers did not necessarily infer a certain political affiliation: Lorencita Villegas could be compared to a flower to the same extent as a female communist activist. For instance, María Cano, also known as the "Flower of the Workers," was an activist of the newly-founded Communist Party of the time.[93]

Even though James Sanders argues that political participation and gender discourses in the nineteenth century varied according to race, social class, and political orientation, I rather argue, from the documents consulted, that the situation had changed by the decade of the 1930s.[94] I did not notice a significant difference between gender discourses held by women based on their political affiliation. No matter their political penchant, women continued to reinforce the social value of female virginity, their role within the family, and the secondary role they held in public life since it was more of a question of social status than of party association. Neither do I consider that it was inherently a question of race: gender discourses relied on social circumstances that could be racialized but were not necessarily so. In the small municipalities the presidential tour visited, the local "ladies" would refer to gender as a matter of status and a means to strengthen their social position more than as a criterion held only by white women of the "upper class" in the urban centers. In small villages, women whom previous writers have qualified as belonging to the middle class demonstrated their literary knowledge and their consciousness of their roles, which in turn exemplified to their social milieu their understanding of what it meant to be "respectable" women.

The historian Magdalena Vázquez Toro assumed that in the Colombia of the 1930s, women were seeking political participation in an ongoing fight for their civil rights, for democracy, and thus, for their struggle against gender discrimination.[95] However, she primarily focused on finding signs of struggles for equality and so overlooked women who celebrated and reinforced social discrepancies. Women who received Eduardo Santos and Lorencita Villegas were proud of helping mediate social relations between the municipalities and the center. They created and strengthened existing women's and men's roles through their actions or letters. I argue that defending these gender roles was a way of creating social status and demonstrating social distinction. Even though

I agree that the idea of ideal womanhood often emphasized delicacy, abnegation, virginity and purity, and that it implied a social hierarchy characterized by male prominence, the sources I consulted pointed out that women actively endorsed the existing gender discourses in the hope of consolidating their own social prominence and status.

When women were writing and giving flowers to Lorencita Villegas, they reaffirmed ideas of gender through the public display of what it meant to be a "lady," which equally served to strengthen their own social position. Women who presented themselves as "ladies" from the "upper class" offered bouquets to Lorencita Villegas, threw petals on the first lady's path and handed her letters in which they described the commendable behaviour a "lady" should espouse. Liberal newspapers took care to make public which "ladies" of the "most upper class" had been chosen to present Lorencita Villegas with flowers.[96] Being a "distinguished" woman (*mujer*) implied behaving as a "lady". Mary Roldán assumed that the expansion of the state during the 1930s had opened up labour opportunities for people that she classified as "popular" and "middle classes," hence allowing them greater access to institutional recourses.[97] Yet, rather than endorsing a different social class, women identified with a class discourse that traditionally and uniquely had been espoused by the white and urban population. Women used the construction of gender to achieve upward social mobility and to prove that they were "respectable" "ladies."

Discourses on gender were part of the formation of status and social prestige. Women needed to adopt common status symbols so as to be distinguished and notable members of "high society." Gender discourses became vehicles of social ascension and mechanisms of belonging; this was a way to exhibit the status to which one belonged. The status does not exist in and of itself since it is shaped by behaviour, symbols, discourses, and access to resources. Women appealed, among other virtues, to delicacy, virginity, beauty, and purity to reinforce their position.

Throughout their travels, Eduardo Santos and Lorencita Villegas met mayors, shop and farm owners, lawyers, and city councilors. They also met with prominent women, such as the mayors' daughters and politicians' wives. Usually, the families' income was fairly modest, especially if they were civil servants who came from more remote villages. However, regardless of their economic conditions, they appealed to the same common symbols of status.

Traditional notions of gender, which reasserted the primacy of virginity and marriage, were understood as a vehicle for racial and social climbing. Lorencita Villegas's fair skin was a symbol which represented the "virtues" and "charm" of the Colombian women, their "race." The analogy turned purity and whiteness into criteria of social distinction which established a social and racial hierarchy reinforcing chastity, since sexuality was deemed as perverted. Eloísa Forero, a "lady" from Zambrano, a village in Los Montes de María with a strong indigenous presence, located in the department of Bolivar on the Caribbean coast, associated fair skin not with static terms of racial subdivisions, but as a representation of "purity." She referred to "prehispanic legends" to make an example out of Lorencita Villegas' values. "Our aborigines tell us" that at the summit of the mountain grows a flower, the rarest and most fragrant that keeps the millenarian secret of the Andes. Eloísa Forero rhetorically said that she climbed the peaks of the Andes seeking the flower. She explored the region "with her thoughts and heart" looking for the ancestral flower; however, her dedicated efforts did not equal any botanical discovery. Ultimately, she decided to take the most beautiful and fragrant flowers of the countryside to offer Lorencita Villegas whose hands as "white as lilies, [were] of the Colombian woman who symbolizes the tradition of our race by her virtues and charm."[98] In other words, any woman, regardless of her race, could become a "lady" through "pure" and "virginal" behaviour.[99]

Before meeting Lorencita Villegas, the "ladies" turned her into an allegory by transposing Christian values to the state in order to consolidate their social status. Since the Liberals had come to power in the decade of the 1930s, they had intended it as part of their program to make the state a secular institution, making education and civil marriage secular issues rather than religious ones.[100] However, the choice for the state to be secular, agnostic or Catholic was a male right. In their letters, the "ladies" emphasized the importance of virginity along with that of passivity and abnegation. During the tour, to be acknowledged as "ladies" of the "upper class," women based their conception of their role on Catholic analogies that compared women to saints, virgins, and priestesses of ancient Rome. Lorencita Villegas was a "sublime example" of the way in which "the Colombian woman" should be imitated "everywhere."[101] According to Eloísa Forero, women with the appropriate behaviour "kept in their hearts the purity of the soul, like vestals."[102] The comparison with the vestals, pagan priestesses of ancient Rome who sacrificed their virginity to protect the sacred fire of the city, was a recurrent Christian analogy to portray virginity as a virtue to embody. Eloísa Forero exemplifies the way in which local women transmuted gender notions of the Catholic Church into characteristics of the state, and related them back to Lorencita Villegas, thus portraying her as a national archetype.

Reinforcing female virginity occurred at the same time as hierarchies between men and women established themselves. "Ladies" wrote to Lorencita Villegas to express their consensus regarding their "social role." They "undertook the most beautiful actions," not as executors but rather to "inspire" and support men in the accomplishment of the "most noble causes."[103] As Delfina Díaz, a women from Tumaco, had expressed: "….there is no conciliatory work without a woman's cooperation."[104] Women were part of public life and their role was recognized; they "cooperated" with men, they organized debates, were responsible for the preparation of banquets,

"introduced" discourses, and ultimately served to "accompany" and "embellish."[105] Indeed, they were not the protagonists of social events as they mainly managed and enlivened the receptions. During the presidential tour, ladies reaffirmed and reinforced their public and private role. In Piedecuesta, Santander, Paulina Mantilla wrote a letter telling that "we want to keep on collaborating with men, but secretly without stridency. Our preoccupation is not the public sphere, neither the House of Congress nor the media. From the family's shadow, we exert our power, which under no circumstances we would resign from."[106]

An important local newspaper of Bucaramanga, *Vanguardia Liberal,* explained how Lorencita de Santos' presence symbolized gender roles and the way in which each gender complemented one another. The man appeared in the spheres of public life in which he played an active role, while the woman came along to "elevate his prestige," "support," and "inspire him." Eduardo Santos and Lorencita Villegas publicly enunciated how "the Colombian family should be." The presidential couple, as a whole, represented an axiom for all families around the country to follow. The newspaper article explained how "it [was] beautiful to contemplate" the wife of a politician, "of the public man," and see how "she praise[d] him for the fight" and maintained ignited "the enthusiastic popular support with a breath of love." [107] While Eduardo Santos toured around the municipalities, gave speeches or attacked his rivals with his "sharp wit," his wife remained composed, smiling. The flowers symbolized appreciation for a lady who knows "which mission is hers" as a wife and a Colombian woman, and who, through the exaltation of her own and her husband's status, publicly demonstrated her awareness of her social role. Lorencita Villegas had proven "her virtue and strength nationwide by remaining anchored to her strong husband's arm to imbue the presidential tour with greater prestige and touches of praise."[108]

My discoveries with respect to gender in relation to class are similar to Elizabeth Dore's that draw attention to Diromo, an indigenous and ladino village in Nicaragua. Dore argues that culture and politics are essential to the formation of differences of gender and class. In the context of social change driven by the coffee boom, local political institutions in Nicaragua led by men expressed great anxiety to control women, hence strengthening codes of honour that stipulated how a woman should behave and, in so doing, increased the importance of female virginity. However, in Elizabeth Dore's essay, women appeared absent from the process of state formation, and politics were portrayed as external and exclusively male-dominated, which as a consequence relegated woman and subjugated them to foreign discourses.[109] I consulted numerous letters written by Colombian women who accepted, reinforced, and participated in the construction of the gender discourses in the relations that they established with the state.

Gifts, Horses, and Flowers

The politicians could claim publicly that they were the "leaders" of a municipality by assuming its place. The status of a "leader" and his ability to access state resources was formalized through many acts. When the presidential tour arrived in the capital city of a department, politicians had to march in a specific order that displayed social differences. An example was the entry into Bucaramanga, the capital of Santander. Businesses were closed and crowds were waiting to welcome the president-elect. The public space was converted into a scene where the departmental authorities imagined an order and enacted it to symbolize the state. Three hundred automobiles waited outside the city for Eduardo Santos' arrival to accompany him through the town square.[110] The president proceeded towards García Rovira Park and the cars followed him in order: at the head was the president and his wife and the retinue representing the central authorities, many of whom would later become his ministers and governors. Behind, followed the acting

governor, the members of the assembly, who were popularly elected in each department, and the national and departmental members of the Liberal party. Lastly, walked the municipal councillors and the liberal committees of the villages.

The relationships between the capital and the municipalities were reciprocal, but asymmetrical in many regards. In Bucaramanga as much as on other occasions during the presidential tour, municipalities despite being the basis of state power, found themselves ranked below other institutional bodies in the hierarchical administration. Equally so, the tour authenticated the representatives of the citizenry as the most "notable" men from the villages who gained access to state resources and were responsible to directly mediate the relation between the local sector and the president, which they were meant to express publicly.[111] Women of "high society" also participated in politics and had their own female mediation channels through Lorencita Villegas de Santos' presence in the tour. However, the condition for women to preserve their privileges was to accept their "subordinate" position. The local leaders navigated through the administrative hierarchy which began at the municipal level, then to the governors and finally to the president.

The presidential tour accentuated many forms of inequality. However, rather than seen a contradiction between "democracy" and hierarchies, the "*vecinos*" underscored the common symbols that united them to the high dignitaries of the state and that distinguished them in their own municipalities. Differences were celebrated since they enabled a certain access to institutional resources. Women did not contest the patriarchal and external structures of the state that subjugated them. In order to benefit from the privileges that being a "*dama principal*" entailed, they actively participated in the discourses, which accentuated male predominance and limited female roles in the public and private sphere. No actions conveyed contempt for existing differences, whether

from a social or gender perspective. Complaints towards the state regarding their "abandonment" were numerous, but rather than expressing an overt opposition to the way in which institutions functioned, common people and authorities at the local level simply wanted more attention from the president and central administration. The enactment of municipal leaders' relations with central power brought about consensus of the established political and social order and attested to the means by which these local leaders gained symbolic and material benefits.

Conclusions

In *El Banquete*, a 1958 short story written by Julio Ramon Ribeyro, Don Fernando, a politician from a small town, prepares a glamorous welcome for the Peruvian president.[112] He remodels his house, changed his walls, refurbishes his furniture, and acquires a new wardrobe. He even orders to have planted and designed a Japanese garden where, along with his distinguished guests from Lima, the president could attend a concert on the night of the visit. Notwithstanding his Andean diet, and his fondness for *chicha*, whiskey and Andean food, Don Fernando designed a new menu solely intended to impress the visiting gentlemen. From his research on hotels and restaurants, he selected European wines and dishes to serve his guests. The extravagance was such that he almost was bankrupted. He and his wife were expecting to recover from their dissipation of resources, through his appointment as ambassador in Europe or through the construction of a railway that would cross his properties.

Don Fernando was jubilant once the president confirmed his invitation. Crowds awaited, curious and impatient, the arrival of the head of state to Don Fernando's property. Exotic drinks from abroad and a full course meal with pheasants awaited the president and his ministers who, once arrived, reveled listening to the orchestra, toasting with champagne, and delivering speeches. Once the evening was coming to an end after the ritual digestif and cigars between men, Don Fernando took the opportunity to approach the president to call in some favours. The president expressed his gratitude by granting Don Fernando his petitions and informing him that the Peruvian embassy in Rome had a vacancy for the position of ambassador, for which the president was willing to appoint Fernando. Ecstatic at the prospects that the appointment implied, Don Fernando and his wife went to bed. Their beatitude, however, was short-lived. The next morning, Don Fernando awakened to the cries of his wife who, while he was still opening his eyes, gave

him the devastating news. A successful coup d'état had been undertaken by one of the president's ministers. At a lack of words, Don Fernando fainted on his bed.

This comical story written in Peru in 1958 reminded me of the municipal receptions in Eduardo Santos' honour. I believe the study of these relations to be fundamental, apart from the history of urban growth in Latin America. Even though Colombia's political history has not been characterized by coups d'état, the emotional engagement expressed by municipal politicians receiving the president and the exuberant display and performance of symbols of power during each presidential visit, echo Rubeyro's story. However, rather than focusing on the extravagance of these receptions, I am interested in recognizing the role exercised by the municipalities in national politics. As I have suggested, the state was in the process of formation, both within the capital and outside, in the municipalities and the departmental capitals. The state does not originate from an external position to govern the rest of the territory. In order to understand the political culture of the state, we must also analyze politics at the local level in order to understand the way in which municipalities interacted with the central power. The local demands, the gestures and symbols enacted in honour of the president, and the speeches delivered are essential to the comprehensive construction of the state.

In my study of Eduardo Santos, I argued that the municipalities are central to our understanding of the Colombian state during the 1930s. Their relevance was not due to the central power being weak, but rather by virtue of their active participation in the political sphere, which led to the capital's recognition of their social and political weight. After reading more than five thousand letters and reflecting on the idea of the state and its formation, I became convinced of the fact that the state cannot be viewed as a definite and monolithic object whose power is exercised only from one city. The state does not function as an apparatus disconnected from the happenings

in the hinterlands. The state is exercised, negotiated, and created in daily practices at all levels of society. Rafael Uribe Uribe, a very influential Liberal politician at the beginning of the twentieth century, affirmed that municipalities were the root of the state. For him, strengthening local power was "the only way to spring the people's interest in getting involved in government." In a speech in 1911, Uribe Uribe displayed a recurrent concern intrinsic to his Liberal conceptions: "It is important to empower the municipalities to prevent their languishing before the sectional (departmental) or national powers."[113]

Although Eduardo Santos did not engage in any theoretical analysis of the state, the receptions in his honour expressed a certain conception of it. The president was proud of the rejoicing and the celebrations that his tour produced nationally. Traveling around the country and reaching different regions, was described by a newspaper in Pasto as a "democratic", "inclusive" and "popular" gesture. The political role of the municipalities, and accordingly of the country's hinterlands, was being vindicated and recognized. When the enthusiastic newspapers praised his receptions, they declared that his visit was a symbolic act to honour the relevance of the municipalities. Certainly, there were local complaints regarding the lack of attention, the absence of the state and the significant poverty. These grievances were not aiming to reform the state: rather they were calling on the existing one to enable greater access to institutional resources and to increase support and attention locally. Rather than understating the state as "traditional" and basing myself on a prejudiced preconception of how it should be, I focused on the manifestation of the state by studying the way in which different actors related to politics, which were the symbols through which they reinforced their relations with one another, and what these connections consisted in.

Whereas the existing historiography has mainly focused on the cities to understand the formation of the state in the 1930s, I proposed to pay greater attention to the small municipalities. I strove to do so without regarding these areas as isolated from the rest of the country and Bogotá, as if local politics were hermetic and constrained to a small territory, only dependent on and influenced by their local leaders. Politics are formed and navigated through networks and relations; for instance, the financial and administrative capacity of a politician depended on his networks, which were both internal and external to the municipality. I tried to avoid the prejudices regarding the "ideal characteristics and role" of the state, with the aim of understanding and analyzing the meanings that different actors incorporated in their relations. Instead of providing a series of pre-established criteria for the evaluation of the state, I undertook an analysis of the meanings of Eduardo Santos' tour and local receptions.

I studied the local receptions for the president as sources embedded with social and political meaning. The study of the formation of social classes as an idea, a discourse, or a symbol rather than as an economic reality, enabled me to understand the tour, its politics, and its connection with the formation of the social status of local respectable individuals. The definition of class determined only by economic relations did not seem convincing, especially when the primary sources I consulted related a different account on class. Indeed, there was not an unequivocal separation between the municipalities and the cities. Equally so, Eduardo Santos, as a politician, was not so different from the local politicians—he probably would have found relatives on his way around Colombia. Although secondary sources describe the local politicians as "middle class," 1930s newspapers portray the dances and feasts as being flamboyant and elegant, which suggests that prominent individuals of the time perceived themselves quite differently from the qualification attribute to them subsequently. Had I neglected these newspaper descriptions or reduced their

significance to mere rhetoric, I ran the risk of overlooking certain political relations of actors, imposing external hierarchies that do not concord with the framework of the primary sources I consulted.

Colombian politicians strived to establish symbols of status. Their connections with the capital served to consolidate prestige and had an impact on the material conditions of the municipalities and their leaders. I did not want to disregard the historical wealth of the letters' elaborated descriptions as meaningless elements. Instead, I specifically wanted to pay close attention to the feasts, the discourses, the gifted bouquets, the presidential and local performances, and the style of description of the letters. Rather than asking myself what the president's projects were and what were his ideas regarding working conditions, I wanted to devote myself to the formation of class in the villages, a rarely studied topic in Latin American history. Even though there have been many developments due to the application of sophisticated theories and methodologies, historians have mostly dedicated their attention to cities and very rarely to small towns.[114]

While reading the documents, I also paid close attention to the meanings of gender and politics since I was interested in understanding the intertwined relations between gender and the state. After a lengthy study of Latin American historiography, I deduced that to undertake any examination of the state implied necessarily a reflection on gender as well. I wanted to understand how state and gender mutually influence one another. In the primary sources, I noticed that women were not absent from the discourses on gender formulated by an external and male state. The overwhelming majority of the documents that I analyzed to write the section on gender were written by women. Equally so, I thought that it was important to highlight that if I were to understand the state, not as an external and disconnected entity, but rather one framed through its

relations, whose political culture I could delve into, I consequently had to focus on how gender was formulated locally, by men and women, in the different towns and villages.

At least during the presidential tour, the ones who reinforced most of the gender discourses, were the "ladies" of Colombia, who offered flowers and wrote letters to Lorencita Villegas. I wondered if the reason for their expression of gratitude had to do with their Liberal political affiliation or their race, but I concluded that it depended more on the way in which these "ladies" conceived their status and social distinction. The discourse on gender, more than a matter of partisanship—of whether one was Liberal, Conservative, or Communist—was a way to inspire respectability, to publicly proclaim one's honour, and to consolidate prestige. Similar to my conception of social classes, I did not want to undertake gender as a static field of study, easy to define, limited to urban settings, or simply reduced to "white women." I realized that the "ladies" from different rural towns were resorting to the same means to demonstrate their status in their communities: gender was becoming a mechanism for belonging and building respectability.

The municipal links with the central apparatus, which constitute my understanding of the state itself, are actually constantly creating the idea we make of it. Those relations are not acquired at a determinate moment in time, when the state was "founded," became "strong, or reached the whole extent of the national territory. Just as Akhil Gupta suggests in his research on the small villages in India, I argue that the Colombian state, throughout Eduardo Santos' presidency was already in the process of *being* through its relations, its enactments of power, and its everyday practices.[115] State formation is a collective endeavour, with many centers and thousands of local people continuously establishing new connections by writing letters, trying to steer their future. Hence, local individuals were actively shaping the state in their daily lives. Some people had more privileges and thus, greater access than others to the institutional resources, others had better

contacts and social networks. All of them were representative of an unequal and hierarchical ensemble, which was, in turn, part of the "state" as it was during the Santos administration.

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COL-BLA-H	Colombia, Bogotá, Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, Hemeroteca.
COL-BN	Colombia, Bogotá, Biblioteca Nacional, Hemeroteca.
COL- HUA	Colombia, Medellín, Hemeroteca Universidad de Antioquia.
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