# THE ROLE OF GREAT BRITAIN IN THE INDEPENDENCE OF COLOMBIA

Commemoration of the Bicentenary of Colombia's Independence in the United Kingdom

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ISBN 978-958-8244-74-7

June 2011

Bogotá, Colombia

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# INTRODUCTION

*Embassy of Colombia in the United Kingdom*

The year 2010 marks the Bicentenary of Colombia's Independence. To commemorate this important date, a series of events were programmed in Colombia and abroad to pay tribute to those who fought for the independence and for the building of the new nations and democratic institutions.

In the United Kingdom, the celebration started with a seminar organised by the Embassy of Colombia and the British Academy for Humanities and Social Sciences with the aim of highlighting the important role played by Great Britain in the independence process but also to strengthen the links between the nations and reinforce future collaborations in various areas.

The seminar entitled ***UK-Colombia Collaboration: Past, Present and Future*** took place in April 2010 at the British Academy. Researchers from both countries were invited to present their most recent work on the history of the Colombian independence process and the involvement of the United Kingdom. Dr Gustavo Bell, Dr Matthew Brown, Professor Anthony McFarlane and Dr Eduardo Posada Carbó participated in the event and their presentations are published here as a memoir of the commemoration in the United Kingdom of the Bicentenary of Colombia's Independence.

Looking to the future, at the end of the seminar the Director of Colombia's Scientific Research Agency (Colciencias), Juan Francisco Miranda, and the Foreign Secretary of the British Academy, Duncan Gallie, signed a memorandum of understanding intended to promote research collaboration between both organisations.

We would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all the British and Colombian academics who have dedicated their working life to strengthening collaborations between both nations; amongst them, Professor Malcolm Deas who has been invited to write the prologue of this book.

Special thanks to the British Academy for joining us in these commemorations, particularly Professor Linda Newson and Rachel Paniagua who helped organise the above-referenced seminar and the signature of the Memorandum of Understanding between Colciencias and the Academy.

# Prologue

*Malcolm Deas*

These four essays are a small contribution from British academia to mark the two hundred years of Colombian Independence – two by British authors, two by Colombians. Their subjects are agreably varied: Anthony McFarlane covers the course of British foreign policy from 1810 to 1825, Gustavo Bell the growing intensity of the links between Cartagena de Indias and the British Caribbean, particularly Jamaica, from late colonial times to the desperate and forlorn declaration (accompanied with the raising of the Union Jack) by the inhabitants that they wished to be part of the British Empire towards the end of Morillo's siege of the city in 1815. Matthew Brown throws a new light on the mercenaries and adventurers from these islands who joined the patriot cause after 1817, and Eduardo Posada speculates on the importance of the press in the Independence era.

Besides variety, there is also a welcome novelty of tone. Those who have attended more than a few Anglo-Colombian occasions will perhaps like me rather dread the inevitable references to the gallant British or Irish legionaries at Pantano de Vargas or Boyacá, and to Canning "calling the New World into existence to redress the balance of the old." I am always reminded of the description of the London banquet of speculators and loan sharks toasting eternal amity with the new republic under the portrait of the Liberator in Benjamin Disraeli's novel *Vivian Grey* , 1826 - Disraeli knew what he was writing about, as he was at the time of writing the book also a paid hack of the mining companies launched in the early years of the decade, good business for their promoters, but few of which ever returned a profit to their shareholders.

Canning's policy towards Spanish America was a lucid contrast to the obscurantism of the Holy Alliance powers on the continent, but realism is nearly always better than rhetoric, especially on the page. Canning's was a grandiose boast: it is rarely mentioned that when first uttered in the House of Commons on 12 December 1826 it was greeeted with a surprised silence, broken by an ironic laugh. Some of the mercenaries were indeed gallant, but as Matthew Brown shows they were a mixed bunch, relatively few had any previous military experience and many remained militarily useless.

British recognition of Colombia was certainly welcome, and as Anthony McFarlane states Manuel José Hurtado was in November 1825 the first Spanish American to be received by King George IV, and the first such envoy to be received by any court in Europe. British recognition was not however the first, President Monroe having received Manuel Torres three years previously, and Colombia's treaty with the United States dating from 1824. It came after years of ambiguity, during which the British government balanced its obligations to Spain, from 1808 an ally against Napoleon, with the prospects of predominance in trade with an independent half-hemisphere. By 1825 it was quite clear which side had won, and as Anthony McFarlane says, recognition was a "rather unheroic political act", and one that had been some time in coming. Given Britain's naval supremacy, it was nonetheless an important one.

British public opinion was rather more consistently favourable to the patriot cause than the government, and London did at least provide a haven for agents and propagandists such as Pedro Fermín de Vargas, Francisco de Miranda, Andres Bello, Luis López Méndez, José María del Real and Francisco Antonio Zea, the last of whom somehow managed to get buried in Bath cathedral. From the British government they received very occasional assistance – the case of Miranda – but for the most part benign neglect, which was at least prerable than the attentions they would have been subject to elsewhere in reactionary Europe. And from Britain and Ireland, despite the passage of the hostiler Foreign Enlistment Act of 1819, they got the 7,000 odd volunteers just a few of whom were useful, and in London they raised the loans and bought the supplies that put the seal on Independence. Too much can be made of the onerousness of the terms on which some of that business was done: risky infant republics do not have much choice.

For the British Colombia was in economic terms a disappointment. Its mines did not yield the expected bonanza, its markets were thin and sluggish. In New Granada merchants continued to trade with Jamaica, and later established their own connections with their suppliers in Liverpool and Manchester – a large British presence in the country was soon seen as unnecessary and unprofitable. Without it, Britain all the same remained Colombia's leading trading partner up until the First World War.

And after the era of illusion had passed some individual Britons and Irishmen still made important contributions to the country's life: Tyrell Moore,William Wills, Richard Cheyne, Daniel O'Leary … . That they were never sufficiently numerous to form a colony apart perhaps contributed to their popularity and prestige.

Colombia also began with Independence to form a public opinion to which, as Eduardo Posada shows in his contribution, the press contributed in important measure, despite low levels of literacy and small print-runs. It is hard to conclude that any one foreign influence predominated in that public opinion – all foreign powers were equally remote from the country, and the New Granadan creole could make an eclectic choice. French events were more exciting than English ones – revolutions, republics and coups d'etat offered more inspiration than sixty years of Queen Victoria – but English intellectual influences were to be by no means absent: Florentino González translated John Stuart Mill's Representative Government, Samuel Smiles was also translated and published in Bogotá, Rafael Núnez was profoundly influenced by his long residence in England, Herbert Spencer was as widely read as any other thinker of his time. Perhaps Colombia was the more permeable to British influences because of the relatively benevolent conduct of the British government at the time of Independence.

That "the meteor flag of England" - the phrase is from Michael Scott, whose novel *Tom Cringle's Log*, 1833, is an unsurpassed evocation of the Caribbean of the decade of the 1810s – did not float for long over Cartagena in 1815 has not meant that infdifference has prevailed between the two countries in the near two centuries that have followed. One item in the past half-century has been a rapidly growing scholarly interchange, of which these four essays are a most readable and welcome sample.

# British Foreign Policy and the Independence of Colombia, 1810-25

*Anthony McFarlane*

Formal diplomatic relations between Britain and the Republic of Colombia were first established in November 1825, when Manuel José Hurtado, Colombia's envoy in London, was presented to King George IV. Britain's recognition had already been signalled in 1823 by Foreign Secretary Canning's despatch of British consuls and commissioners to Colombia and by the decision in December 1824 to negotiate a commercial treaty with the republic. Hurtado's introduction to the Court of St James was an important moment. Although Mexico and Argentina were recognised by Britain in the same year, Hurtado was the first Spanish American minister to be received by the English King, and the first Spanish American diplomat to be received by any court in Europe. Thus his reception symbolised a major change in the international order, marking the fall of the Iberian American empires and the emergence of independent Latin American states into the concert of nations. For Britain, this was the outcome of a patient diplomatic strategy pursued since 1810, aimed at asserting British diplomatic and economic prominence in Latin America, preventing undue influence from the United States, and creating a potential counterweight against European rivals. Hence Canning's famous claim that he had 'called the New World into existence to redress the balance of the Old' and his assurance that, now 'Spanish America is free; and if we do not mismanage our affairs sadly, she is English'.[1]

While British recognition of Colombia and the other republics was well received in Britain, particularly among those interested in Spanish America markets and commerce, it evoked public jubilation in Bogotá. According to the British commissioner there, 'all the people of Bogotá are half mad with joy… Rockets are flying in all directions, bands of musick parading the streets, and the Colombians galloping about like madmen, exclaiming 'We are now an independent nation'.[2] Their rejoicing reflected the reasonable belief that British recognition guaranteed Colombian independence. For, although recognition came first from the United States - where Manuel Torres was formally received by President Monroe in June 1822 and a treaty of commerce signed in October 1824 - recognition from Britain was rightly regarded as more important. Diplomatic ties with Britain promised to prevent any fresh attempts that Spain might make to re-conquer its American colonies, while also encouraging other nations to accept Colombian independence; at the same time, economic ties allowed access to sources of British trade and capital that were regarded as vital to the republic's economic prospects.

If Britain's formal acceptance of Colombia as an independent state made a crucial, consolidating contribution to the independence of the region, the path to this position had not been quick or easy. Nor had it developed from a specific policy towards the region which became the Republic of Colombia. British relations with the region developed along lines which, on the British side, were governed by larger questions of foreign policy that arose from its relations with the main European powers during the era of the Napoleonic wars and their aftermath. The two great issues were how to deal with the crisis of the Spanish empire as it began to collapse in 1810 and how to ensure that British ambitions for political and economic dominance in Latin America were preserved during the early 1820s when Spain's imperial collapse (together with that of Portugal) became irrevocable. It is, then, within this larger context that we will undertake a brief analysis of the contribution which Britain made to the emergence of the first Republic of Colombia –known to historians as 'Gran Colombia'- from the time when the earliest challenges to Spanish rule surfaced in the Viceroyalty of New Granada and

1 **W.W. Kaufman**, *British Policy and the Independence of Latin America, 1804-1828, London, 1967, p.178.*

2 **Hamilton to Planta**, *Bogotá, March 8 1825, in C.C. Webster (ed.), Britain and the Independence of Latin America, 1812-30. Select Documents from the Foreign Office Archive, Oxford University Press: London, New York and Toronto, 1938, vol. 1. p.385*

the Captaincy-General of Venezuela in 1810 to the year when Bolívar's Republic of Colombia, merging New Granada, Venezuela and Quito, was accorded full recognition by Great Britain.[3]

* * *

Seen in the long view, British support for independence in Spanish America seems preordained. At the start of the nineteenth century, Britain had a long and well-developed interest in Spain's American territories, shaped by centuries of English animosity towards Spain and rivalry over American resources. From the later sixteenth century onwards, English adventurers, merchants and settlers had sought to seize a share of Spanish treasure, trade and territory in the Americas, and after England established its own colonial settlements in North America and the Caribbean during the seventeenth century, it became one of Spain's major enemies on both sides of the Atlantic. Anglo-Spanish antagonism, inflected by Protestant hatred of Catholic Spain, deepened during the eighteenth century when Britain burgeoned into an aggressive and expansive imperialist power. Competition with France, Britain's greatest European rival, sharpened antagonism towards Spain as the close relationship of Bourbon royal families drew Spain into an alliance with France that persisted even after the French Revolution. For the governments of eighteenth century Britain, a key aim was to ensure that Britain had access to the markets and resources of Spanish America and to prevent France from using its alliance with Spain as a means to secure a privileged position in the Spanish Atlantic economy.[4]

From the outset of the eighteenth century, the Colombian Caribbean became a particular target of British interest. After the War of the Spanish Succession, Britain extracted an important concession from Spain under the terms of the Treaty of Utrecht: namely, the 'asiento de negros' which gave the South Sea Company the right to import slaves through Cartagena. As a result, this port and its surrounding region became a growing market for illegal British commerce, mostly conducted from Jamaica, in disregard of Spain's prohibitions on foreign trade with its colonies. This contraband trade gave Britain new ambitions and when it provoked war between Spain and Britain in 1739-48, these ambitions were reflected in Vernon's assaults on Portobelo (1739) and Cartagena (1741). Vernon failed to take Cartagena but, although the British had been unable to take Spanish territory on Colombia's coasts, British contraband in and around the city continued to be one of the major channels for Britain's commercial penetration of Spain's empire, and hence a salient object of British economic interest.[5]

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, after Britain renewed its war with France and Spain in 1796, British political opinion became increasingly interested in finding ways of penetrating Spanish America by both commercial and military means. Naval blockades curtailed Spanish transatlantic trade and thus opened new horizons for British commercial interlopers: trade between the coasts of the Colombian Caribbean and Jamaica grew to unprecedented heights

3 **The principal work on British relations with Colombian during this period is David A. G. Waddell**, *Gran Bretana y la independencia de Venezuela y Colombia, Caracas, 1983.* **Its main findings are summarised in David A.G. Waddell, 'British Relations with Venezuela, New Granada and Gran Colombia, 1810-29' in John Lynch (ed.)**, *Andrés Bello: The London Years,* **Casa de Bello Foundation: Richmond, Surrey, 1982, pp. 25-47. Views from the Colombian perspective can be found in works on the diplomatic history of Colombia, including Raimundo Rivas**, *Historia diplomática de Colombia (1810-1834),* **Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores: Bogotá 1961, and Germán Cavelier**, *La política internacional de Colombia: Un ensayo de interpretación,* **Ed. Iqueima:** *Bogotá 1949.*

4 **Anthony McFarlane**, *The British in the Americas, 1480-1815, Longman:* **London and New York, 1994, passim; Adrian J. Pearce**, *British Trade with Spanish America, 1763-1808,* **Liverpool University Press: Liverpool 2007, pp. 1-32.**

5 **Anthony McFarlane**, *Colombia before Independence: Economy, Society and Politics under Bourbon rule,* **Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1993, pp.99-120.**

around the turn of the century.[6] British policy also grew more militarily aggressive. In 1797, Britain invaded and occupied Trinidad, providing it with a base which might be used to attack Spain's mainland colonies, particularly Venezuela. Now, the idea that Britain might weaken Spain by attacking its colonies acquired growing credibility among London's political elites, leading to experiments in taking territory in Spanish America, either by using British forces to invade and occupy, or by backing Spanish American radicals to raise colonial rebellions against Spain. The former was tried in the Río de la Plata in 1806-7, when British troops fought to take Buenos Aires and Montevideo, and sought local support for secession from Spanish rule.[7] The latter was attempted in Venezuela in 1806, when the British cabinet provided resources for Francisco de Miranda to raise rebellion in his native land.[8] Both failed. Nonetheless, such schemes brought Spain's colonies firmly into Britain's military and political focus. When Viscount Castlereagh became Secretary of State for War and the Colonies (1806-9), policy became more clearly defined: the experience of defeat in the Río de la Plata suggested to him that British interests would in future be better served by giving support to Spanish Americans who wished to break with Spain, rather than seeking to bring them under British rule. This did not preclude the possibility of British military action: indeed, as British government grew increasingly anxious that France might impose its hegemony over Spanish America, plans for military strikes on Spain's colonies were hastily revived: in 1808, a fleet was assembled at Cork with a plan to attack a strategic point, probably Veracruz or Buenos Aires.[9]

British policy was, however, suddenly transformed in 1808 by Napoleon's capture of the Spanish monarchy. The French occupation of Spain triggered a great crisis in the Hispanic world and, at the same time, shifted Britain into one of its most sudden foreign policy reversals. On news of Spanish resistance to Napoleon, Britain immediately turned from Spain's leading enemy into its principal ally, offering support to the provincial juntas in Spain and Spanish America which were ready to fight Napoleon as the common enemy.

At first, the change of alliances seemed to simplify British policy towards Spanish America. Now that Britain had become an ally of Spain, there was no longer any need to force entry into Spain's empire. After 1808, both the British government and British merchants expected easier access to Spanish America: communications with British officials and the new juntas were opened, and there was a surge of British merchants towards areas where these juntas, freed from the Cádiz monopoly, opened their ports to foreign trade. However, while it was in Britain's economic interest to encourage Spanish American emancipation, the war against Napoleon imposed a conflicting political priority. Britain now had to support its allies in Spain, and in return for their collaboration against France had to support Spanish sovereignty over its American colonies. This created a dilemma for Britain: Spain's war with France not only changed British relations with Spain but had also dramatically altered Spain's relations with its American possessions. Now that Spaniards were absorbed in liberating Spain itself from Napoleonic rule, Spanish American had the chance to seek their own autonomy, even independence, and during 1810, new governments were established in most of the leading cities of Spanish South America.

6 **Ibid., pp.298-307; Pearce**, *British Trade with Spanish America,* **pp.170-9.**

7 **Klaus Gallo**, *Great Britain and Argentina: From Invasion to Recognition, 1806-26,* **Palgrave: London, 2001, pp.33-50.**

8 **Karen Racine**, *Francisco de Miranda. A Transatlantic Life in the Age of Revolution,* **Scholarly Resources: Wilmington, Delaware, 2003, pp.155-72.**

9 **On the evolution of British policy in the 1790s and early 1800s, see John Lynch, 'British Policy and the Independence of Latin America'**, *Journal of Latin American Studies, 1969,* **vol.1:1, pp. 1-30.**

The region in which Bolívar's Republic of Colombia was later established was among the first to produce new governments that declared themselves to be sovereign entities, in juntas which pronounced loyalty to Fernando VII but repudiated the authority of the Spanish Regency. Venezuelans were in the vanguard, establishing an independent junta at Caracas in April 1810. This was followed by the installation of similar self-governing juntas in New Granada, beginning in Cartagena in June 1810, extending through towns and cities in the interior, reaching Bogotá in July, and spreading south and west in August and September. Regarding themselves as sovereign bodies, these juntas were keen to establish mutually beneficial relations with other sovereign governments, including other juntas and foreign powers. Britain was, of course, the natural foreign ally to which such governments might turn, for not only was it now aligned with Spain but British bases in the Caribbean were geographically close and British trade essential.

The earliest efforts to engage British support came from the junta of Caracas which, after deposing its Spanish authorities in April 1810, refused to recognise the Spanish Regency and contacted the British authorities in the nearby Caribbean islands. At this stage, the junta did not repudiate Spain completely: it proclaimed loyalty to the abducted King Fernando VII, declared its determination to resist the French takeover which had swept through Spain, and called for permission to purchase arms in British possessions. And, when the opportunity arose to send correspondence and even envoys to London on a British naval vessel, the junta seized its chance to set up direct communication with London. Simón Bolívar, who later became Colombia's liberator and first president in 1819, was in this diplomatic vanguard. In June 1810, he travelled to London with Luis López Méndez and Andrés Bello with instructions to explain the junta's break with the Spanish Regency to the British Foreign Secretary and to seek British diplomatic and naval protection.

This was not an unvarnished claim for British recognition of an independent state: at this juncture, Caracas could present itself as another Spanish province that, like the junta of Asturias or Sevilla, wanted to remain free of French domination. The delegation nonetheless failed. Foreign Secretary Richard Wellesley received the envoys privately but, amidst protests from the Spanish ambassador that they were renegades without authority to establish separate relations with Britain, he refused any official recognition or help.[10] Bolívar quickly returned to Venezuela and was soon engaged in promoting independence in Caracas, while his fellow envoys remained in London with the intention of winning friends and influence in political circles. They made few tangible gains in the years that followed: lacking financial resources and political credibility, they were reduced to penury and marginalisation among the Spanish-speaking community that congregated in the Somers Town area of London.[11] Their principal problem was that the governments which they claimed to represent were weak and unstable. For, although Caracas declared its independence in 1811, the first republics of Venezuela (1811-12 and 1813-15) were too precarious to persuade the British government to see them as serious contenders for statehood. The most that London offered was a proposal to act as a mediator between Spain and the rebellious colonials, in return for free trade for the duration of the negotiations. This, however, did nothing to help the Spanish American dissidents, as Spain refused to accept any mediation unless Britain was prepared to take armed action should the mediation fail.[12]

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10 **Waddell**, *Gran Bretana y la independencia de Venezuela y Colombia, pp. 64-72,* **gives a full account of Wellesley's conversations with the Caracas envoys.**

11 **For a sketch of the Hispanic exile community in these years, see Miriam Blanco-Fombona de Hood, 'The London of Andrés Bello' in Lynch, (ed)**, *Andrés Bello, pp. 49-55.*

12 **John Rydjord, 'British Mediation between Spain and her Colonies, 1811-1813'**, *Hispanic American Historical Review,* **1941,**

While Britain was seeking to find a middle way, the autonomous governments of the Colombian region sought to engage British assistance by cultivating friendly relations with colonial officials in Britain's Caribbean colonies, encouraging trade and seeking to purchase arms. Caracas was active in this respect but neither the Junta or the first and second republican governments had much success in securing British aid.[13] Cartagena also tried to establish British connections, with no greater success. The governments in the interior of New Granada had even greater difficulties in attracting British, or indeed any foreign attention. Deep inland, the new juntas and their successor governments could not easily communicate with Jamaica, much less London: they did not attempt to imitate Caracas until 1814, when the United Provinces of New Granada sent José María del Real to London to get British support in preventing Spanish military retaliation –in conjunction with the Venezuelan envoys who were sent by Bolívar.[14] They were in any case generally too embroiled in internal conflicts and negotiations with each other to pay much attention to establishing relations with Britain.[15]

The leaders of new governments who aspired to independence found, then, that international politics did not favour ambitions for emancipation. The reason was simple. Given that they were not prepared to side with France in 1810, the juntas and their successors looked primarily to Britain as a potential source of support in Europe. But Britain had now completely reversed its policy towards the Hispanic world. Rather than breaking Spanish power, after 1808 Britain aimed to rebuild it. The key British aim was to support Spain's fight against Napoleon and, in order to ensure Spain's alliance against France, Britain became committed to defending the status quo in the Spanish empire. In principle, this meant that Britain had to abandon its previous policies of subverting Spanish sovereignty in the Americas and to adopt a position of neutrality between Spain and its American opponents. This was, it is said, a 'tactics of delay', designed to reconcile a long-term strategy for strengthening British interests in Latin America with the immediate need to fight for British interests in Europe.[16]

In practice, strict neutrality was not always observed. Given that British policymakers did not know how the war in Europe might end, they sensibly sought to avoid alienating either Spain or its Spanish American opponents. At the official, inter-governmental level, this meant that Britain resolutely refused to recognise Spanish American breakaway governments, while at the local level it allowed a little more latitude. Given the slowness of communications, Whitehall could not always control its colonial officials or naval commanders in the Caribbean, and such men sometimes provided unofficial support for Spanish American insurgents. And, while Britain officially refused recognition of new Spanish American governments and hindered the trade in arms, unofficial trading relations became steadily stronger: after 1810, both Venezuela and New Granada came to rely on commerce with the British

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vol. 21:1, pp. 29-50.

13 On relations between Caracas and British officials in 1810-15, see Waddell, *Gran Bretana y la independencia de Venezuela y Colombia,* pp. 55-60; 73-77; 101-8; 124-35. For Cartagena's relations with British authorities, see Gustavo Bell Lemus, *'Cartagena de Indias Británica' in Gustavo Bell Lemus, Cartagena de Indias: de la Colonia a la República,* Fundación Simon & Lola Guberek, Bogotá, 1991, pp. 48-55.

14 Waddell, *Gran Bretana y la independencia de Venezuela y Colombia,* pp.161-78.

15 For an original analysis of early diplomacy in New Granada, see Daniel Gutiérrez Ardila, 'La diplomacia "constitutiva" en el Nuevo Reino de Granada (1810-1816)', *Historia Crítica,* Bogotá, 2007, vol. 33, pp.38-72. For the larger political context of this early New Granadan diplomacy, see the same author's *Un Reino Nuevo. Geografía política, pactismo y diplomacia durante el interregno en Nueva Granada* (1808-1816), Universidad Externado de Colombia: Bogotá, 2010.

16 Kaufman, *British Policy and the Independence of Latin America,* pp, 52-75.

islands of the Caribbean and were thus absorbed into the British sphere of influence. These ambiguities could not sustained indefinitely. While at war with France, British officials were able to steer a political course between Spain and its rebellious American subjects, aiming to sustain the Spanish alliance while doing nothing actively either to encourage or prevent the secession of its colonies. But after 1814, when Napoleon had been defeated and Fernando VII returned to power in Spain, the attitude of the British government towards Spanish American dissidents became less accommodating. After Fernando VII's restoration, Britain was forced to take up a more clearly-defined position because Spain now had both the intention to impose its will on the insurgent colonies and the military forces for doing so.

Faced with the prospect of attack from a resurgent metropolis, Spain's opponents in Venezuela and New Granada redoubled their efforts to get British assistance. None was forthcoming. On the contrary: in 1814 Britain signed a treaty with Spain that banned the export of arms to the Spanish American colonies; in 1815, Britain did nothing to stop Spain from sending General Morillo's large army to retake control of Venezuela and New Granada. British officials also spurned appeals for help against the assaults of Morillo's army of re-conquest. In 1815, the government of Cartagena went so far as to inform the British government, via Jamaica, that it was annexing itself to Britain and, as a British dominion, deserved protection from the armed assault of a foreign power.[17] But this desperate offer was refused.[18] Cartagena was left to be starved into submission by siege, and by the end of 1816 Spanish rule had been re-imposed throughout Venezuela and New Granada.

The fall of the first republics in the Colombian region, from Caracas to the Cauca Valley, cannot of course be attributed solely to lack of support from Britain; its primary cause was internal turmoil, lack of widespread commitment to independence and disunion among the insurgents. Indeed, one reason why Britain supported the restoration of Spanish rule was that the new Spanish American polities had foundered amidst civil wars between loyalists and insurgents, and in 1814-15 showed scant potential for conversion into stable independent states, free from conflict within their own territories and capable of establishing durable diplomatic relations with foreign powers. Nonetheless, it is clear that, although Britain had refused to help Spain to crush rebellion in Colombia or elsewhere in Spanish America, it contributed to the restoration of Spanish imperial rule in 1814-15 by remaining resolutely neutral in the struggle between the Spanish crown and its rebellious colonies.

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The failure of theColombian insurgents to win British support in 1810-15 did not discourage Bolívar from continuing to see relations with Britain as an essential aid to independence. When in exile in Jamaica in 1815, he wrote to Sir Richard Wellesley appealing for support against Spain: 'The balance of world power and the interests of Great Britain are perfectly in accord with the salvation of America,' and 'England … will see prosperity flow back to her shores from this hemisphere which must depend, almost exclusively, on her as a benefactress'.[19] Bolívar's message fell on deaf ears. For, with the end of war in Europe and the restoration of the European monarchies in 1814-15, British policy towards Spanish America was constrained by the wider policy objectives defined by Foreign Secretary Castlereagh..

Castlereagh's primary goal was to preserve peace in post-Napoleonic Europe by building a balance of power among the major powers; all other

17 'Acta de la legislatura de la provincia de Cartagena, 13 de octubre de 1815' in Bell, *Cartagena de Indias,* pp.68-73.

18 Waddell, *Gran Bretana y la independencia de Venezuela y Colombia,* pp.178-82.

19 Letter to Richard Wellesley, Kingston 27 May 1815, in David Bushnell (ed.), *El Libertador: Writings of Simón Bolívar,* Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2003, p. 154.

considerations were subordinated to this goal. Hence Britain played a key part in establishing the Concert of Powers in 1814-15, using its wartime 'Grand Alliance' with Russia, Austria and Prussia as a foundation and subsequently drawing in the restored French monarchy in order to integrate France. The new system was to be sustained through regular congresses of the powers in which they would iron out their differences and sustain a common purpose. Russia, Spain and France also formed the 'Holy Alliance' which proclaimed the principle of monarchical legitimacy and created a power bloc that was, inter alia, specifically committed to protecting the Spanish monarchy.[20] Castlereagh distrusted this reactionary pact but did his utmost to develop a policy that would keep Britain in step with these allies. He therefore accepted that Spain should keep its American colonies, while at the same time seeking to prevent rival powers, notably France and the United States, from gaining any advantage in Spanish America. He initiated this policy with a fresh treaty of friendship with Spain in 1814 and defended it for many years in a 'masterly display of busy procrastination', designed to defend British interests in Spanish America while persuading his allies that Britain was committed to preserving the integrity of the Spanish empire.[21]

Against this deeply conservative international background, the few insurgents who continued to struggle against Spain in Colombia's regions were forced to fight without external help of any substantial kind. The only military aid which Bolívar secured when seeking to revive the resistance in Venezuela came from Haiti, whose president gave help in return for a promise that the future liberation would include the abolition of slavery. The revolutionary resistance that was subsequently established in the backlands of New Granada and Venezuela, principally in the Llanos of the Orinoco, later managed to get help from Britain but this was private, unofficial and depended on having the means to pay for men and materiel. It was driven by Bolívar's envoy in London, Luis López Méndez, who engaged in buying arms and recruiting English and Irish adventurers, some of whom were professional soldiers demobilised after the Napoleonic wars, to fight in Bolívar's forces.[22] The British government, on the other hand, did all it could to appease Spain. In 1817, Castlereagh secured an order forbidding British subjects from serving in Spanish American armies; in 1819, he reiterated his determination to prop up the status quo in Spanish America by forcing the Foreign Enlistment Act through Parliament, despite considerable opposition.

British public opinion, on the other hand, was more inclined to favour the liberation movements in Spanish America. Not only did British economic interest groups press government to find a way of opening up Spanish American markets, but liberal politicians tended to see Spanish American independence as both politically desirable and, given Spain's continuing weakness, probably inevitable.[23] This view was cultivated by Spanish American agents in London, who, conducting a constant propaganda battle with the Spanish embassy, sought to convince the British public that independence was both desirable and credible.[24]

Neither British opinion nor British economic interests were, however, able to deflect Castlereagh

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20 On French policy from 1815 to 1819, see William S. Robertson, *France and Latin American Independence,* New York, 1967, pp.129-77.

21 Kaufman, *British Policy,* pp.103-5.

22 Alfred Hasbrouck, *Foreign Legionaries in the Liberation of Spanish South America,* New York, 1928, pp. 29-41, 46-54; Matthew Brown, *Adventuring through Spanish Colonies: Simon Bolivar, Foreign Mercenaries and the Birth of New Nations,* University of Liverpool: Liverpool, 2006, pp. 15-30.

23 José Alberich, 'English Attitudes towards the Hispanic World in the Time of Bello, as reflected by the Edinburgh and Quarterly Reviews,' in Lynch (ed), *Andres Bello,* pp. 67-81.

24 Daniel Gutiérrez Ardila, 'La campaña de propaganda de los estados hispanoamericanos en Europa (1810-1830)', *Anuario de historia regional y de las fronteras,* UIS: Bucaramanga, 2009, vol. XIII, pp. 9-38.

from his view that Britain's long-term interests were best served by appeasing Spain. Although he was faced by the intrigues of his allies and Spain's evident difficulties in suppressing the insurgents, he managed to sustain his non-interventionist position at the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1818, where he persuaded the powers to cooperate in mediation in the Spanish American wars. This was, however, a short-lived success. Spain refused to cooperate, and over the next couple of years it became apparent that events on both sides of the Atlantic were undermining Castlereagh's policy. For this reason, as preparations were made for the Congress of Verona in 1822, he began to shift his ground.[25]

Pressures to change came from several directions. Most important were developments in Spanish America, where the wars of independence were beginning to turn decisively against Spain. Between 1817 and 1821, San Martín had overturned Spanish rule in Chile, taken Lima and secured a Peruvian declaration of independence; to the north, Bolívar defeated Spanish forces in New Granada and Venezuela and on these foundations established the Republic of Colombia, to which he also appended Quito. The cause of independence in Spanish America was further strengthened by political turmoil in Spain. In 1820 rebellion against Fernando VII forced him to accept constitutional regime with a liberal government which sought to solve the American problem by sending envoys to negotiate the revival of an Hispanic constitutional monarchy that embraced all Spain's territories. This offered hope of an end to war but could not stem the tide towards independence. Even conservative Mexico opted for independence in 1821, while Peru, the last great Spanish redoubt, also moved towards secession with the declaration of independence in Lima in the same year and the subsequent advance into Peru of Bolívar's liberating armies over the next three years.

Bolívar's success in Colombia had a powerful effect on British government attitudes towards Spanish American independence. In the first place, he had forced Spain to the negotiating table and secured an armistice in 1820; secondly, he created a state which, unlike the previous governments in the region, was large, unified and seemed stable; thirdly, he was actively engaged in expelling Spain from other regions of South America. Moreover, as president of the republic, Bolívar also launched a new diplomatic offensive in Europe, seeking in particular recognition from Britain. In 1820, he sent vice-president Francisco Antonio Zea to cultivate external relations in the United States and Europe. Zea focused his first efforts on London, where he was rebuffed; from there he went to Spain to try to negotiate a peace treaty with the liberal government; when that failed; he concentrated on pro-independence propaganda in Paris and London, contributing to the cultivation of an international political milieu that was becoming increasingly favourable to Colombian independence.[26]

The change in British government attitudes towards Colombia and other Spanish American states was driven forward by the deepening crisis of Spain's colonial regime. Although Spanish politicians moved from the iron intransigence of Fernando VII towards negotiated solutions, Castlereagh and other European statesmen became convinced that the Spanish empire was expiring and that successor states were inevitable. Spanish America therefore moved to the forefront of the international political agenda and the powers manoeuvred to take account of the new realities on the ground. Indeed, the disintegration of Spain's empire now posited what might be called a 'Western Question', a parallel to the 'Eastern Question' created by Turkey's imperial decline.[27] If not as historically prominent as the Eastern Question, the fall of Spain's empire was

25 **Kaufman**, *British Policy*, **pp. 109-24.**

26 **For a summary of Zea's activities, see Waddell**, *Gran Bretana y la independencia de Venezuela y Colombia*, **pp.250-4.**

27 **Rafe Blaufarb, 'The Western Question: The Geopolitics of Latin American Independence'**, *American Historical Review, 2007, vol.112:3,* **pp. 742-63.**

an issue to which the powers, especially Britain, devoted increasing attention in the early 1820s, with important long-term consequences.

Britain's position on this 'Western Question', shaped by Castlereagh and sustained by his successor George Canning, was designed to stave off French and United States influence and ensure that Britain was the leading commercial and diplomatic force in Spanish American affairs. Until about 1820, Castlereagh did this by a cautious diplomacy which focused on Europe while seeking to prevent rivals from intervening in, or securing any advantage from the problems of the Spanish empire. He was, however, obliged to abandon this defensive strategy when Russia, France and the United States all engaged in activities that threatened to challenge British supremacy in the Western Hemisphere.

Although Russia had pretensions to becoming an American land power by extending south from Alaska, Tsar Alexander's ambitions were relatively easily contained, since Russia did not have the naval strength to pursue them. France was a greater danger because of the traditional closeness of the Bourbon monarchies of France and Spain and French determination to ensure that Britain did not impose its hegemony over Latin America. Weakened by Napoleon's defeat, France could not intervene directly in Spanish America and reverted to the traditional policy of close alliance with Spain. Ministers concentrated on defending the Spanish monarchy on the assumption that Spain would provide a commercial conduit to Spanish America that would benefit French economic interests. But the French were determined to prevent Spanish America from becoming a British dependency, 'a second Hindoustan' as French foreign minister Hyde de Neuville said in 1817.[28] Thus, when Spain seemed to be losing the capacity to hold its empire together, French loyalty to the Spanish king began to falter. The first signs of came in 1818, when Foreign Minister Richelieu proposed independence for the Río de la Plata under a monarchy 'protected' by Spain. Here began a French scheme for neutralising the danger posed by revolutionary movements in Spanish America by installing monarchies, the first stage of a slow and reluctant shift towards recognition of independence.[29] The project came to nothing, but it was a warning to Castlereagh that Britain had to adjust its policy if it were to stay ahead of its rivals.

Another reason for greater urgency in British policy towards the Hispanic world was growing pressure from the United States. American governments had hitherto hesitated to establish commercial and political relations with Spanish American governments because of fears of retaliation from Spain and Britain. But when the Adams-Onís treaty which ceded Spanish Florida to the United States was ratified in 1821, the federal government began to move onto a path which led towards recognition.[30] Castlereagh managed to deflect this move in 1821, but by mid-1822 had decided that Spain was a lost cause and that recognition had become more 'a matter of time than of principle'.[31]

Castlereagh died at his own hand before he could carry this policy forward at the Congress of Verona, and it was left to his successor George Canning to bring British policy to fruition. Like Castlereagh, Canning understood the need to counter French and United States influence. Unlike the aristocratic Castlereagh, Canning was closer to mercantile opinion – he was member of Parliament

28 Cited by Blaufarb, 'The Western Question,' p.747.

29 Robertson, *France and Latin American Independence,* pp.144-5; 164-77.

30 Blaufarb, 'The Western Question,' pp. 750-2. Another view of the United States' position, relating it to domestic politics, is given by Piero Gleijeses 'The Limits of Sympathy: The United States and the Independence of Spanish America', *Journal of Latin American Studies, 1992, vol. 24,* pp 481-505.

31 Kaufman, *British Policy,* p.133.

for Liverpool – and he considered that the question of Spanish American independence of utmost urgency, overriding European considerations.[32] British economic interests in Spanish America were growing, with an upsurge of trade and the beginnings of capital investment. Commercial treaties and consuls were thus required to protect British lives and property. It was also essential to ensure that the United States did not steal a march on Britain. In March 1822 Congress had approved funding for a diplomatic presence in five Latin American states and in December 1823 President Monroe expressed solidarity with independent Latin America by stating what later became known as the 'Monroe Doctrine'. This pointed to the essential difference of political systems in Europe and the Americas (where monarchy had given way to republics) and the United States' willingness to join with its sister republics to oppose any European interference in the Americas. The prospect of rivalry with the United States in Latin America disturbed Canning, who feared that United States' leadership of youthful American republics might be arraigned not only against the reactionary monarchies of Europe but also against Britain. This prospect, which accorded ill with his desire to keep Spanish America as a potential counter-balance to Britain's enemies in Europe, became a growing anxiety when Bolívar proposed ideas of an American confederation of republics to meet at the Congress of Panama in 1822.

Another spur to action came from a more traditional quarter. The French intervention in Spain in 1823, with an army to reinstall Fernando VII's autocracy, revived fear that France would interfere in Spanish America. Canning warned the French ambassador, Prince Polignac, that he would retaliate against any French interference in Spanish America by immediate recognition of the new states. Although he extracted a promise, known as the Polignac Memorandum, that France had no hostile intentions, his anxiety about French intentions was another impulse to move towards recognition.

This came in 1825. After intense political activity within the British Government to propitiate the reactionaries, including King George IV, Canning recognised Mexico, Argentina and Colombia –the greater part of Spanish America - by ratification of commercial treaties with Britain. A year later, on 12 December 1826, Canning defended in the House of Commons his policies towards France, Spain and Spanish America in a speech which included the famous phrase: "I resolved that if France had Spain it should not be Spain with the Indies. I called the New World into existence to redress the balance of the Old".

* * *

What, then, did Britain contribute to Colombian independence? Over the fifteen years from 1810 to 1825, one might well say that British governments, guided mostly by Castlereagh, had done more to hinder Colombian independence than to help it. Indeed, one might say that British neutrality delayed the achievement of independence for at least a decade. For it deprived Venezuelans and New Granadans of political and military support from the power that had previously been most enthusiastic to sever them from Spanish rule and which could have been a powerful ally at this crucial time of internal crisis within the Hispanic world.

However, there were other, indirect ways in which Britain contributed to independence and helped to shape the political future of Colombia. First, British neutrality ensured that new political entities had space to emerge and develop in 1810-15, while after 1815 Britain's opposition to foreign help for Spain helped Colombia's insurgent generals in their struggle against the metropolitan power. Second, Britain provided a channel for trade via Jamaica that largely replaced trade with

32 For a summary of Canning's policy, see John Lynch, 'Great Britain and Spanish American Independence. 1810-1830' in Lynch (ed.), *Andrés Bello,* pp.17-20.

Spain, allowing the insurgent provinces to become economically independent of the Spanish monopoly. Third, British merchants made a direct contribution to the military campaigns fought after 1816 by supplying arms to the patriot forces, and, of course, English and Irish soldiers contributed to Bolívar's victories in New Granada and Venezuela. While it may be true that most were ineffective soldiers and more died of drink or disease than ever came near a battlefield, a minority of these men played key roles in the war with Spanish forces and some continued to sustain a British presence in Colombia after independence.[33]

Another, more indirect contribution from Britain came from London's position as a haven for Spanish American revolutionaries. While British governments refused to help, there were political circles in London, such as that at Holland House, which were ready to give ideological and sometimes material support to men like Andrés Bello and Luis López Méndez, enabling them to keep alive the ideas of independence during years in which they made little practical progress.[34] The influence of British political thinking should also be taken into account. Bolívar was the most obvious and influential devotee: he became an enthusiastic advocate of the kind of mixed constitution that he perceived in the British monarchy and his image of a strong executive power with a legislature balanced by an aristocratic senate, though probably taken from Montesquieu rather than directly from his brief experience of Britain, was strongly influenced by his understanding of British political practice.[35] Moreover, British-style aristocratic reformism, combining political freedom and social improvement with respect for property and a robust legal system, was deeply attractive to Bolívar and many fellow statesmen in Latin America.[36] In sum, 'Great Britain provided more than just military backing, commercial opportunities, and financial support to Spanish American leaders: it also offered a powerful, practical, living model for the construction of their post-independent nationhood.'[37]

Finally, however, Britain's most obvious political contribution to Colombian independence was its recognition of the Colombian republic in 1824. Coming after much hesitation, this rather unheroic political act had important implications for Colombia. The crowds who cheered Britain in the streets of Santafé de Bogotá in 1824 were right to do so. With British recognition, the years of war with Spain were effectively over and the chances of Spanish re-conquest virtually eliminated. The possibilities of access to British commerce and capital also promised a bright future of economic and social progress for a war-torn land. Now that it was free, Bolívar believed, Colombia could become 'the heart of the universe … the bond, the centre and the emporium of the human race'. [38]

In the event, winning the war against Spain, founding the republic and securing political and economic ties with Britain did not guarantee that

33 **Matthew Brown**, *Adventuring through Spanish Colonies,* **pp.61-74, 156-68.**

34 **J.R. Dinwiddy, 'Liberal and Benthamite Circles in London, 1810-1829, in Lynch (ed),** *Andres Bello,* **pp.111-36.**

35 **On the British influences on Bolívar's political thinking, see John Lynch,** *Simón Bolívar: A Life,* **Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2006, pp. 216-7, 284-7; Simon Collier, 'Simón Bolívar as Political Thinker' in Lester Langley and David Bushnell (eds.)** *Simón Bolívar: Essays on the Life and Legacy of the Liberator,* **Rowman & Littlefield: Boulder, Colorado, 2007, pp. 18-21.**

36 **Karen Racine, 'Simón Bolívar, Englishman: Elite Responsibility and Social Reform in Spanish American Independence,' in Langley and Bushnell (eds.),** *Simón Bolívar: Essays, pp.55-72.*

37 **'Karen Racine, ' "This England and this Now": British Cultural and Intellectual Influence in the Spanish American Independence Era',** *Hispanic American Historical Review, vol. 90:3, 2010,* **p. 425.**

38 **Vicente Lecuna and Harold A. Bierck**, *Selected Writings of Bolívar,* **New York, 1951, vol. 1, p.197.**

Colombia entered into a peaceful and prosperous future. Indeed, despite the political significance of securing an Anglo-Colombian alliance and politicians' fascination with British cultural and economic achievements, the new republic's ties to the emerging 'workshop of the world' did not produce all the benefits that admirers of Britain anticipated. Contact with the London money markets piled up a huge burden of debt, followed by a damaging government default, and British trade subsequently played little part in promoting Colombian development. Britain had, it seemed, recognised the Colombian Republic in 1824 only to see it fragment in 1830, and, confidence weakened, British capital and commerce turned away to other fields.

# British Cartagena de Indias

*Gustavo Bell Lemus*

On 13 October 1815 the British flag was raised over Cartagena and the political authorities issued a decree by which the people of the city were declared subjects of King George III. The following day a commission of three – including the British merchant Wellwood Hyslop – sailed to Kingston to notify Admiral Stirling, the British Governor of Jamaica, of that decision.

What were the main events behind it decision? What was the role played by Jamaica in those years? Why Kingston? Why did the people of Cartagena take such a decision, when they had successfully defended the city, in 1741, against the British Navy stationed in Port Royal under the command of Admiral Vernon? And why did Admiral Stirling have to reject it?

There were, in fact, a set of commercial, military, ideological and political events that explain Cartagena's decision. Some of them dated back to the beginning of the 18th century. Others were the result of Napoleon's invasion of Spain and the subsequent crisis in the Spanish monarchy.

In this context Cartagena was a good example of the dilemmas that British foreign policy had to face in the years of the Independence wars. Cartagena's decision was also the result of the political turmoil in New Granada and an angry political dispute with Santa Fe de Bogotá over who should rule what was then New Granada. However, what I intend to present here is the role played by Jamaica in our history, especially in the years of the struggle for independence.

The importance of Jamaica in Colombia's history cannot be reduced to Bolivar's brief stay in Kingston at the end of 1815. Even though his famous letter of September 1815, addressed to a merchant of that city, is one of the fundamental documents of our political history, the island itself had for many years a remarkable influence on the political and commercial affairs of New Granada. Similarly, Jamaica played a crucial role in the existence of Colombia as a republic during the first decades after independence.

## The wheels of trade

In order to understand the role that Jamaica played in the history of Colombia, we must go back to the end of the 18th century, when Colombia was still part of the Spanish empire. In those years, the foreign trade of the Viceroyalty of New Granada was almost entirely monopolised by Spanish merchants. Trade between the colonies and the import of goods from countries other than Spain were banned. However, the monopoly was never absolute. Since the early days of the colonial system, and due to the vast size of the territories that the Spanish authorities had to oversee, smuggling was always a generalised practice, which gave the local population access to other products and markets.

For over half a century, trade between Jamaica and the Spanish colonies had concentrated on the so called 'Annual Ship'. Through this mechanism, a result of the Treaty of Utrecht, England could send a small trading fleet every year to conduct business in the ports controlled by Spain. Additionally, and by virtue of the same Treaty, England was allowed to engage in the slave trade in the Caribbean Basin.

Despite these prerogatives, Jamaican merchants did not run the risk of direct involvement in smuggling – they left that to the Spaniards and Creoles. Due to both material need and cultural links, the Jamaican economy was closely bound to the English colonies in North America. The greater part of Jamaican trade was developed with Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, where the islanders had their commercial representatives. Trade was so prosperous that their interest in smuggling or in penetrating the Spanish American market came a distant second.

But this situation was to change when the British colonies in North America became independent. With the creation of the United States of America, Jamaica experienced a drastic break from those former colonies. The loss was so significant, that for a moment the Jamaicans thought about the possibility of throwing in their lot with the United States and declaring independence from

the United Kingdom, though in the end nothing came of that idea. The loss of the American market forced Jamaica to look towards the markets in the Spanish colonies in Central and South America.[1]

New commercial interests had already been favoured by London when Kingston was declared a "free port" in 1766. This status meant that trading ships from any friendly nation in Europe could bring their merchandise to Kingston. This policy had been drawn up not only to promote the empire's commercial navigation and manufacturing industry, but also to undermine the monopoly that Spain continued to hold over the broader Spanish-American market. Spain, on the other hand, also drew up its own policies to promote industry and trade with all its colonies via the Reglamento de Libre Comercio of 1778. These regulations allowed the Spanish ports to trade actively with the colonies, where customs duties were reduced and trade regulations were simplified.[2]

The outbreak of war between Spain and England in 1779 changed the type of trade that had been developing between Spain and its colonies, and between those colonies and the English islands in the Caribbean. Spain needed to supply its colonies, which meant that it had to permit trade to develop with neutral nations' colonies in the Caribbean. This type of trade initially covered basic products, but soon turned into the open practice of smuggling of all kinds of goods bound for New Granada on the pretext that they were ammunition and food.

Available statistical records of Cartagena's trade in the l780s show a strong increase in the volume of trade with colonies of other nations. This then declined progressively towards the end of the decade in the expectation of receiving better terms of trade from Spain.

After the war ended in 1783, the Spanish authorities considered that the need to continue trading with foreign colonies had ceased, and therefore restored the original systems of monopolies controlled by the Mother Country.

However, the legal trading practice that the Spanish colonies had established with foreign colonies was now customary; merchants therefore showed firm opposition to return to the old system and used a variety of mechanisms to maintain their economic links with the English, French, and Dutch colonies. Initially, the merchants at New Granada's main ports along the Caribbean — Cartagena, Santa Marta, and Riohacha– continued to introduce foreign goods using permits and licenses they had obtained during the time that they had been allowed to engage in "foreign trade".[3]

Two new factors then assisted the continuation of this trade with the foreign colonies: the scarcity of flour along the Caribbean coast of New Granada, and the fact that the Andean farmlands were quite unable to meet the demand for it. Despite the policies the Spanish authorities had established to promote the production of wheat and flour in the provinces of the interior of the Viceroyalty, they were never able to provide an efficient supply to the ports on the Caribbean. The distance between the plateau around Santa Fe de Bogota's plains and cost of transport to the coast, made it impossible for flour to reach Cartagena and Santa Marta at a reasonable price and or in adequate volume. This fact was used by merchants to argue the need to continue trading with the English colonies in the Caribbean - and even with the North American colonies that produced wheat.[4]

The situation eventually forced the Spanish authorities to allow imports of flour. The American colonies had only recently become independent, their

1 *Edward Brathwaite, The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820, (Oxford, 1971).*

2 *Dorothy Burne Goebel, "British Trade to the Spanish Colonies, 1796-1823", American Historical Review, Vol. XLIII, (1938), 288-320. Jacques A. Barbier, "Commercial Reform and Comercio Neutral in Cartagena de Indias, 1788-1808" in John R. Fisher, Allan J. Kuethe, and Anthony McFarlane (eds.), Reform and Insurrection in Bourbon New Granada and Peru, (Baton Rouge, 1990), 96-120.*

3 *Anthony Mc Farlane, "El Comercio Exterior del Virreinato de la Nueva Granada: Conflictos en la política económica de los Borbones, 1783-1789", in Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura, Vol. 6-7, Bogotá, 1971-1972, 69-116.*

4 *Alfonso Múnera Cavadía, "Comerciantes de Cartagena y el conflicto regional con Santa Fe a principios del siglo XIX", in Historia y Cultura, I, (1993), 17-33.*

trading fleet was still incipient and their ships did not take the risk of sallies into hazardous parts of the Caribbean. Flour was stored in Jamaica, and it was then distributed along the Caribbean coast. Merchants from Cartagena and Santa Marta visited Jamaica in search of flour; however, their ships returned loaded not only with flour, but also with English goods and this began to have an adverse effect on trade with Spain. The volume of goods that was smuggled from Jamaica increased to alarming levels. Merchants who conducted business with Spanish ports complained that it was impossible to compete against those who smuggled in products from Jamaica. The millers from the savannah around Bogota complained about the quantity of foreign flour that was openly sold on the Caribbean coast: a formal protest was sent to Madrid via the Municipal Council of Santa Fe de Bogota, the capital of the Viceroyalty of New Granada. It denounced the extensive practice of smuggling in the region and said that it was so open and tolerated at such high levels that the provinces on the coast looked more English than Spanish, under the dominion of the Catholic King.[5]

It was normal practice for merchants of Cartagena or Santa Marta to have a commercial agent in Kingston who would supply them with goods under ample conditions of credit. The illegal trading practices were not exclusive to Creoles, they were even employed by Spanish authorities. Archbishop-Viceroy Caballero had his own commercial agent in Kingston who would supply him, from time to time, with personal items, which according to Caballero were used in rendering services to the King of Spain.

Another factor that made it difficult to police the illegal trade with the English colonies was that the haciendas in the provinces of Cartagena and Santa Marta lacked a labour force with experience of plantation work. Part of the Bourbon reforms of the colonies was meant to encourage higher production levels in agriculture, and the slave trade, an activity that had been a fiscal monopoly of the Crown, was licensed out to ordinary merchants.

Again, Jamaica was the main market supplying slaves; it was where the slave traders went to satisfy the demand coming from farms and plantations along the Caribbean coast of New Granada.

The volume of trade - legal or otherwise - that New Granada's Caribbean coast developed with Jamaica became a specialised activity centred on Kingston. Jamaica's merchants knew Spanish commercial law and Spanish trading habits; some of them spoke Spanish, and were able to negotiate directly with the Spanish colonial authorities. Some English merchants spent long periods of time in Cartagena or Santa Marta conducting their business under the permissive eyes of the local authorities, who turned a blind eye to the King's decrees that ordered the expulsion of foreign merchants from his ports.

Trade between Jamaica and New Granada's Caribbean coast was disturbed only during periods of war between London and Madrid. During the last few years of the eighteenth century, the two kingdoms seemed to be at war more often than not. But despite hostilities, trade was so valuable that although it decreased in volume, it never ceased altogether, and for obvious reasons the value of goods traded rose. During the war that broke out in l796, Jamaican merchants opposed a ban on their trade with the Spanish colonies, ordered for security reasons. The demand for foreign goods during times of war made prices rise; this pushed the patriotic sense of the island's native merchants into second place, and they demanded permission to continue trading with the Spanish colonies. The local authorities consented to their request and trade with the enemy's ports resumed, though licenses were now required.

The constant conflicts between England and Spain towards the end of the eighteenth century also became a reason to allow selected tradesmen from Santa Marta to establish contacts in Kingston during times of peace. The Spanish authorities permitted such contacts because they needed to know of the movements of British fleet in Port Royal, where there

5 *A. McFarlane, "El Comercio exterior del Virreinato de la Nueva Granada...", 109.*

was a naval base. The only possible way to do this was through espionage, and some merchants from Santa Marta were given this work.

It was already evident by the beginning of the 19th century that Spain was rapidly losing control over its empire on this side of the Atlantic. All the policies that had been drawn up to fight off the British trading attack were not enough to halt the rise in imports from growing all along the Caribbean coast. It is difficult to make any precise measurement of the extent to which this trade made New Granada's Caribbean coast dependent on Jamaica. But what is clear, at least in terms of smuggled products, is that trade with the island developed very rapidly. In some cases such as that of the Indians in the Guajira Peninsula, trade with Jamaica accounted for such high volumes that the Spanish authorities preferred to tolerate it, having in any case failed in their attempts to restore the Crown's control over the region.

## The Influence of Trade Practices with Jamaica on Political ideas in New Granada

The important role played by commercial relations as carriers of ideas and customs has been widely recognised. Products involve more than just individual buyers and sellers; they also impinge on social beings, that is, on individuals who belong to societies that have different customs. International trade used to be more complex in that sense and it implied a richer cultural contact between buyer and seller.

Through their dealings with Jamaica, merchants from New Granada had direct access to the Anglo-Saxon world. That access enabled them to come into close contact with the governmental institutions of the island, which had been inspired by the regulations prepared by John Locke in the late 17th century. A replica of the English Parliament operated in Kingston for the white Anglo-Saxon population, and it was governed by some highly democratic rules in its decision-making. British colonial administration on the island was very different from that implemented in the Spanish colonies. The Calvinist spirit of institutional government in Jamaica contrasted with the paternalistic style of the Spanish system. The merchants of New Granada saw how the English system worked in Jamaica, and could not help comparing the two systems.

However, the main conveyor of Ang1o-Saxon culture was Freemasonry. Jamaica was a great Masonic centre, with eighteen Lodges in its jurisdiction. The Lodges were active in Jamaica, and on all the other islands of the Antilles. The first Lodge in the Americas was founded in Kingston in 1739, and lodges at Port Royal and Spanish Town subsequently followed.

On their trips to the island, merchants from New Granada established contact with the Lodges, where liberal ideas and principles for a participatory democracy were often debated. In 1808, the Tres Virtudes Teologales was founded as the first Lodge in New Granada. It was based in Cartagena and its foundation was supported by Kingston,—seat of the Great Provincial Lodge of Jamaica, which in turn was a member of the Great United Lodges of England, based in London. Many of the future leaders of Cartagena's independence struggle were members of the Lodge in Cartagena. The Lodge held its meetings at the house of José Maria Garcia-Toledo where they discussed the political ideas then in vogue in Europe, which had been picked up from contact with Jamaica.[6] Garcia- Toledo subscribed to broadsheets that were published in Kingston, and he regularly requested books on history and politics that he was later to send to the interior of New Granada. Garcia-Toledo later became the first governor of the Estado Libre de Cartagena in 1814.

The Cartagena elite read the Jamaica Courier and the Royal Gazette and kept themselves abreast of political and military developments in Europe, which became of great importance to their own independence process. The close contact between the provinces on the

6 *Américo Carnicelli, La Masonería en la independencia de América, 2 Vols., (Bogotá, 1970), I, 78-85.*

Caribbean coast of New Granada and Jamaica reflected the rapid decline of the power of the Spanish Crown, and the rise of new political and economical forces in the provinces of the Caribbean region. Jamaica's influence on the colonies grew over time, in both commercial and political terms. The short life of the State of Cartagena de Indias from 1812 to 1815 also showed Jamaica's great influence on the destiny of part of a region that would later become Colombia.

## Jamaica and the Republic of Cartagena

The Province of Cartagena was the first to declare its independence from Spain. It then proclaimed itself an independent republic, maintaining that status from 1812 to 1815. During that time the role played by Jamaica's political experience was crucial. The first action taken by the Cartagena authorities was to declare the port open to international trade. Very soon, trade with Jamaica increased at an extraordinary rate. The docks were filled with ships loaded with English goods from Kingston. The local authorities appointed an official and permanent representative to Jamaica and to the other islands of the Caribbean.

Again, flour and ammunition were the most-traded goods. The domestic supply of flour was weak in the north, because any provisions received from the Andean provinces was interrupted when the supporters of the King of Spain blocked navigation up the Magdalena River, at that time the only route available between the Caribbean coast and the interior. However, the trade in arms and ammunition between Cartagena and Jamaica was more important than flour. The new republic on the Caribbean had to fight the Royalists, who had strengthened their army in the neighbouring province of Santa Marta.

The confrontation that broke out between the provinces of Cartagena and Santa Marta, brought about by the issue of independence from Spain, was followed by a request for help from each of the opposing parties to the British authorities based in Jamaica. Jamaica's stance was determined by directives from London, and the current European geopolitical situation had now caused a substantial change in the relations between Spain and Britain. Napoleon's threat forced the two monarchies, antagonists by tradition, to establish a political alliance. Britain's priority was to block the expansion of Napoleonic France by any means possible, and as a consequence it had to support Spain.

This policy could be executed easily enough in Europe, but not in the Caribbean. It was not convenient for London to make enemies by favouring movements that promoted independence in Spanish America. Support for them would not be considered as friendly action by Madrid, which was trying to repress them. With this dilemma, the authorities in Kingston had to use great skill when dealing with the various delegations that came from Santa Marta and Cartagena in search for support.

At the beginning of 1812, Cartagena sent a diplomatic delegation to Kingston to request support for the republican cause. The people of Cartagena stated that the recovery of control of the Magdalena River, at the time in the hands of the Royalists, was essential for the prosperity of British trade. The authorities of the island tried to mediate between the conflicting parties, without success. The Royalists from Santa Marta also tried to gain the support of the governor of Jamaica. To further this, they reported the imminent arrival in Cartagena of French troops sent from Europe to the Lesser Antilles. The Spanish Viceroy, resident in Panama at that time, demanded that the British set up a blockade of Cartagena to stop the French from landing. Once again the Kingston authorities refused to intervene directly in the conflict, on the grounds that they did not have a large enough military force to enforce a blockade, and in any case, they had not been authorised to supply weapons to the Royalists from Santa Marta.

Despite the authorities of Jamaica and Cartagena having faced commercial confrontations on several occasions lasting three years or more, the relations

between them were generally friendly. Cartagena enjoyed a commercial boom, and its cultural contacts with the Caribbean islands multiplied.

The course of the events in Europe was again to affect the fate of Cartagena and the development of its relationship with Jamaica. After Spain managed to liberate itself from Napoleon, and was again able to concentrate its forces on the re-conquest of its colonies, the government of the Provincias Unidas de Nueva Granada which included Cartagena, decided to send a commission to London to request political recognition and material support from there. However, the British government had just signed a new treaty with Spain, in which London reiterated its neutral position in the conflict between Madrid and its colonies, and accepted a clause that forbade them to sell arms to the rebels in Spanish America.[7]

Towards the middle of 1815, and despite the failure of the mission to London, Spain sent a substantial expedition to South America to reconquer its colonies. It had been thought at first that the objective of the expedition would be Buenos Aires, but as soon as it became known that the final destination was Cartagena, the authorities there urged Bogota to send support to face the imminent Spanish attack. Bogotá offered little support, and the local authorities sent a new commission to Kingston to plead for support for their cause, and to raise a loan to purchase arms. The Commission was authorised to pledge the province of Cartagena to Britain for this operation. As might be expected, the authorities in Kingston turned down the offer; but the Commission persisted and offered the authorities in Kingston an even more generous option - to build a British naval base and a military hospital in Cartagena Bay.

Weeks later, Cartagena's situation took a turn for the worse, when the first Spanish forces arrived to lay siege to the port. At that point a significant number of families fled to Jamaica in search of refuge. The Cartagena authorities, in a state of despair, decided to send another commission to Kingston, this time to offer the whole Province of Cartagena to Britain. On 13 October 1815 the British flag was therefore raised in Cartagena and the city declared itself part of the British Empire. However, some days before, the commander of the Spanish expedition had firmly requested the Kingston authorities to refrain from providing any type of support to the political refugees who had fled from Cartagena, or from acceding to any request to intervene in the conflict. Cartagena's decision produced no effect, as Britain was bound by the treaty it had signed with Spain in 1814. Spain then recaptured the city and subsequently, most of the rest of New Granada.

On the days that preceded Cartagena's final defeat, the political leaders of the independence movement had managed to evade the Spanish blockade and flee to Jamaica.

Curiously, that was not quite the end of the story: it was said that when the republican army besieged Cartagena in 1821, the last Spanish governor of the city made the same request to the British governor of Jamaica, that is, to take the port under British control.[8]

7 *Nicolás García Samudio, Capítulos de Historia Diplomática, (Bogotá, 1925), 29-32.*

8 *Luis F. de Rieux to Santander, Turbaco, 30 August 1821, in Roberto Cortázar, (ed.), Correspondencia dirigida al General Santander, 15 vols., (Bogotá, 1964), XI, 155-156.*

# Britain and the Independence of Colombia

*Matthew Brown*

The first time I visited Colombia was in 2000, to begin my archival research into the social history of the British and Irish mercenaries who served in the Wars of Independence in the countries that are now the republics of Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador and Panama. When I began to research the subject at the turn of the millennium, the bicentenaries of independence seemed such a long way off that I gave no consideration whatsoever of the relevance that my work might have for them. Over the course of the next few years, in Bogotá, Popayán, Cartagena, Tunja and Santa Marta, historians and archivists guided my efforts to locate sources and contextualise them within Colombian historiography. Supervised by Christopher Abel at University College, I persisted in my archival investigations and in my reading of printed primary sources in the British Library, gloriously unaware of the forthcoming commemorations. When I did think of 2010, I believed that it would be of little relevance to my investigations, as only a handful of foreign mercenaries reached Colombia before 1817, and so any bicentennial events to commemorate their presence would surely not be beginning until 2017. Even when my results were edited in book form, published in 2006 by Liverpool University Press, the bicentennial machinery around the year 2010 was only just cranking into gear, and my brief concluding observations on 'commemorations' were limited to observing the extent to which the participation of foreigners in supposedly 'national' wars of independence had been alternatively ignored or exaggerated in diverse historiographies.[1] Subsequent to writing those words I published two collections of primary sources from the period: one carried a foreword by President Alvaro Uribe, and another an introduction by President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela.[2] The distance that separates those two figures in political as well as diplomatic terms perhaps serves to demonstrate the extent to which 'Independence' as a subject for historical enquiry can be used to support the most disparate and even contradictory political agendas. It is therefore with a mixture of surprise and satisfaction that I now find myself contributing to a bicentennial volume alongside such distinguished historians of Colombia.

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During the year 2010 there have been numerous academic and public events across the world to mark the Bicentenaries of Hispanic American Independence.[3] At the XV Congreso Colombiano de Historia, in Bogotá in July 2010, there were over one hundred papers presented which revolved around the question of what Independence really meant. Alongside this professional parade of historical research, there has been a great public demand to question what independence really achieved; whether '200 años y seguimos siendo colonia', as a Bogotá graffiti asserted on 20 July 2010, or whether Colombia's relations with the rest of the world reached a new level of maturity with the coming of independence from Spain.[4] It is into this context of historical and political debate that I want to insert my reflections on Britain's involvement in the independence of Colombia.

An assessment of Colombia's relationship with the major geopolitical power of the time, Great Britain, is to my mind absolutely essential to answering

1 *Brown, Adventuring through Spanish Colonies: Simón Bolívar, Foreign Mercenaries and the Birth of New Nations (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006). There is a Spanish version, translated by Katia Urteaga Villanueva, Aventureros, mercenarios e la independencia de Colombia (Medellín: La Carreta Editores / Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia, 2010).*

2 *Brown and Martín Alonso Roa Celis, eds., Militares extranjeros en la independencia de Colombia: Nuevas perspectivas (Bogotá: Museo Nacional de Colombia, 2005); Brown, ed., Simón Bolívar: The Bolivarian Revolution, introduced by Hugo Chávez (New York: Verso, 2009).*

3 *I am grateful to all the participants in the events where I have presented work related to the subject of this chapter.*

4 *The graffiti stencil, apparently inspired by the style of the Bristol graffiti artist Banksy, was observed on Carrera 3A-13.*

the question of what independence really meant. Everyone knows that Britain provided unofficial support to the independence movements, in terms of mercenaries, trade and resources. Loans were also made from Britain to Colombia whilst the wars of independence were still ongoing, meaning that Colombia began its independent life with constant reminders that it was both morally and financially indebted to the British. Karen Racine has recently set out a strident argument that Spanish American independence took place under the shadow of British cultural and intellectual influence, stating that 'Great Britain was never far from the minds, hearts, or cultural vision of Spanish American independence leaders'.[5]

In the rest of this chapter I will assess the role of the British in Colombian independence, and provide a new interpretation of what this might mean. There are I think three distinct stages of the 'independence era', dating roughly from 1800 through to 1816, another from 1816 through to 1821, and a final stage running from 1822 through to the collapse of Gran Colombia in 1830-1.

The first stage, 1800-1816, is one where trends from the colonial period continued and reached something of a conclusion. As Adrian Pearce has shown British trade with South America seems to have been increasing throughout the late colonial period, running through diverse channels – official, contraband, and indirect – that had the British Caribbean colonies as their locus and fulcrum. The changing patterns of Napoleonic war alliances erected many temporary barriers to the waves of commerce in the Caribbean, which served, Pearce's work suggests, to divert commerce into new avenues on its journeys between the British Caribbean colonies and the Caribbean coast of the Viceroyalty of New Granada.[6] In these years the number of British subjects who visited New Granada for non-commercial purposes were few. Some individuals joined the service of the armies fighting for independence, such as Gregor MacGregor, who allied himself with Simón Bolívar and followed his new mentor to Haiti and Venezuela.[7]

The second period, 1816-1821, is characterised by the arrival of around 7,000 British and Irish adventurers to Venezuela and New Granada. These adventurers were a mixed bunch. Some of them were 'volunteers in the cause of liberty' like MacGregor, who sought to unite themselves to a universal struggle against tyranny which they saw unfolding in Spanish America. Others were more conventional 'mercenaries', hardened war-veterans seeking payment for their services in the wake of the end of the warfare that had swept Europe for two decades. The majority, however, had no military experience or radical politics. They were young, generally in their low-twenties, and the majority were Irish. They were predominantly a mixture of agricultural labourers and artisans, whom economic displacement had pushed towards emigration. The generous promises of pay, status and land attracted these adventurers towards South America in preference to other destinations popular in the period, such as North America, Australia and the Cape colony. Many of the adventurers knew very little about their destination. Many were enlisted in port cities such as London, Leith and Dublin by improvised recruiters operating under licence from official South American agents like Luis López Méndez and José María Del Real. Upon reaching Margarita and Angostura, they were often astounded by the lack of provision for their arrival by local authorities who either never believed that the longed-for foreign

5 *Karen Racine, '"This England and This Now": British Cultural and Intellectual Influence in the Spanish American Independence Era', Hispanic American Historical Review, 90:3 (2010), p.452. See also Gabriel Paquette, 'The Intellectual Context of British Recognition of the South American Republics, c.1800-1830', Journal of Transatlantic Studies, 1:2 (2004), pp.75-95.*

6 *Adrian Pearce, British Trade and South America, 1767-1808 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009). These conclusions appear to be supported by another work on the same period, which focuses primarily on New Spain's commercial relations with Europe: Stanley Stein and Barbara Stein, Edge of Crisis: War and Trade in the Spanish Atlantic (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).*

7 *Matthew Brown, 'Inca, Sailor, Soldier, King: Gregor MacGregor and the early nineteenth century revolutionary Caribbean', Bulletin of Latin American Research, 24:1 (2005), pp.44-71.*

expeditions would ever actually materialise, or who were so financially-strapped by the ongoing conflict that they simply did not have the resources to provide food and water, let alone pay, to their new soldiers.[8]

The nature of the involvement of British adventurers in the independence of Colombia was just as mixed as the characters of the adventurers themselves. There were, to be sure, some experienced military soldiers and officers who provided important services to the Colombian army, such as Coronel James Rooke, who led the British Legion in the terribly debilitating crossing of the Andes through the Páramo de Pisba in 1819, and commanded them at the Battle of Pantano de Vargas, where he received the injuries that led to his death, three days later, at the age of 49. Others included James (Santiago) Fraser, who wrote a guide to military tactics in Spanish for use by the Colombian army, and who settled in Norte de Santander province where he founded a dynasty of soldiers including his son, Donaldo Fraser, who fought in many of Colombia's civil wars in the first half century after independence.[9]

Yet despite these and other considerable contributions and sacrifices, the idea that the British Legion and Irish Legion were distinguished by their heroic and generous contributions to the cause of Independence falls only a little short of being a self-serving myth. The legend of British heroism in the cause of Colombian independence is of course strapped tightly to the stories of patriotic martyrs like Rooke, but it was elaborated primarily in the two decades after independence by adventurers who had survived the wars and now petitioned the state for special recognition for their services and, ideally, generous pensions. The new republic was unable to pay as much as these veterans felt they deserved, and their rhetoric was therefore ratcheted up a notch with each piece of correspondence. Retired officers who had settled in Bogotá, such as John Mackintosh, Thomas Manby and Edward Brand reminded republican officials that the British soldiers had been 'distinguished by their particular bravery' at the key battles of independence. Somehow, over the course of the first century of independence, it gradually slipped from the national memory that the principal reaction of contemporaries had been that the foreign adventurers had often also been 'bandits and cowards' (in the words of Admiral Luis Brion), 'despicable and dishonourable barbarians' (General Mariano Montilla), 'desertors' (José Manuel Restrepo), 'vile mercenaries' (President Simón Bolívar) and 'scandalously subversive' (General Pedro Briceño Méndez).[10] The five hundred or so British and Irish adventurers who settled in and around Bogotá after the end of their military service, around 1822, had a considerable and often negative reputation to overcome before they could be welcomed into the hearts of the newly-liberated nation. They were helped in their efforts to make friends and influence people by the rise in an official British presence in New Granada in the years after the fighting ceased.

The third period under study here, running from 1822 to 1830, witnessed what I would argue was the strongest British influence in Colombia in the entire nineteenth century. The promise of diplomatic recognition of Colombian Independence (granted in 1825) was dangled in front of successive Colombian representatives, guaranteeing excellent treatment for British subjects in the first half of the decade. After recognition Britain received considerable trading privileges which prevented Colombia from falling under French or U.S. influence, and which also gave new social status to British subjects resident in the country, where they could act as mediators between London and Bogotá by manipulating the contacts they

8 *Brown, Adventuring through Spanish Colonies, Chapters 1-2.*

9 *I have discussed the Fraser family in some detail in Matthew Brown, 'Soldiers and Strawberries: Questioning Military Masculinity in 1860s Colombia', Bulletin of Hispanic Studies, 87:6 (2010), pp.725-44. I looked at Rooke's role as a patriotic national hero in 'Soldier Heroes and the Colombian Wars of Independence', Hispanic Research Journal, 7:1 (2006), pp.41-56.*

10 *These quotes are all drawn from primary sources cited in Matthew Brown, 'Rebellion at Riohacha, 1820: Local and International Networks of Revolution, Cowardice and Masculinity', Jahrbuch für Geschichte Lateinamerikas 42 (2005), pp.77-98.*

had made during the wars of independence with the officers who were now the officials in charge of the state's financial purse-strings and political decision-making. The power of British capital, especially in the form of the enormous loans made to Colombia in 1822 and 1824, entrenched British influence in Colombia's financial heart.[11]

The arteries that brought British capital to Colombia generally went through Antioquia. The 1822 and 1824 Loans consolidated an Antioquia-Britain nexus which had its roots in colonial trade through Jamaica.[12] The loans made some Antioquian agents extremely wealthy. They brought Colombia and Antioquia firmly into the British world view. One Antioqueño, former vice-President Francisco Antonio Zea, died in the English town of Bath (about fifteen kilometres from where I write these words in Bristol), where he is buried in the cathedral. Despite Zea's death, the dominance of British capital was manifested in the 1820s in Antioquia through the gradual rise to economic power of the other loan negotiators, particularly Francisco Montoya. Though already wealthy before his trip to London, and accustomed to lending money to foreigners in Antioquia throughout the independence period, upon his return it became increasingly obvious that Montoya was now in a different financial league to his old friends and neighbours.[13] Montoya's new wealth did not assure him of political power, however, because the final moves of the Wars of Independence, culminating with the Battle of Ayacucho in 1824, produced another Antioquian with considerable accumulated prestige and political capital: José María Córdova. The tension between the language of popular sovereignty fought for and increasingly epitomised by José María Córdova, and the continued political and economic influence of foreign powers, as manifested by the new extent of Montoya's wealth and his links to Great Britain, became the driving force of political events in Antioquia and Colombia throughout the 1820s until the Battle of El Santuario in 1829. These events directly brought about the end of the golden age of influence that the British had enjoyed in Colombia during the independence era.

British prestige in Bogotá remained considerable during the 1820s. British subjects exercised some cultural and social influence on political representatives, though it would be important not to overstate its extent. One of these, Mary English, was resident in Bogotá between 1823 and 1827 as the representative of Herring & Richardson, who were creditors of the Colombian republic. In this public capacity, as well as for her personal charms, Mary English was the 'belle of Bogotá', admired and desired by members of the diplomatic community and some local politicians alike.[14] Mary English was observed by the young family of British Consul General James Hamilton, including his daughter Fanny Henderson, who marvelled at the prestige accorded to Mary English in these years. English language newspapers were published in Bogotá, British customs respected and every effort was made not to offend the representatives of such a powerful and rich nation. Though generally absent from the capital, Simón Bolívar was in these years one of the principal supporters of encouraging British penetration of Colombia. Karen Racine argues that Bolívar felt a great affinity with British political culture,

11 *For an excellent overview of the subject see Malcolm Deas, '"Weapons of the Weak? Colombia and Foreign Powers in the Nineteenth Century', in Brown, ed. Informal Empire in Latin America: Culture, Commerce and Capital (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), pp.173-186.*

12 *For an overview of the Antioquian dimension see Fernando Botero Herrera, Estado, nación y provincia de Antioquia: Guerras civiles e invención de la región, 1829-1863 (Medellín: Hombre Nuevo Editores, 2003). On this particular subject see the ongoing doctoral research of Gustavo Bell at Oxford and Jorge Peña at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Medellín.*

13 *Luis Fernando Molina, Francisco Montoya Zapata. Poder familiar, político y empresarial 1810-1862 (Medellín: Nutifinanzas, 2003) and Roger Brew, El desarrollo económico de Antioquia desde la Independencia hasta 1920 (Bogotá: Banco de la República 1977), pp.129-62.*

14 *Drusilla Scott, Mary English, Friend of Bolívar (Lewes: The Book Guild, 1991), p.111, also Matthew Brown, 'Mary Greenup née English', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (2009), online at www.odnb.com.*

the British model of constitutionalism and aristocratic reform.[15] My own interpretation would be to emphasise instead Bolívar's astute sense of geopolitics, and his pragmatic decision to flatter and woo representatives of the undisputed Atlantic power of the 1820s. Bolívar did indeed draw on British models in his Constitution for the Republic of Bolivia, for example, but he was equally if not more generous with his praise of Rome, Greece and Haiti.[16] However, it should be no surprise that many of Bolívar's strongest supporters in his later years, as many of his allies began to desert him, were British adventurers like Daniel O'Leary and Rupert Hand. (This does not discount the many other Europeans who surrounded Bolívar in his final years, such as the Frenchmen Louis Perú de la Criox and the doctor who attended him in his last days, Alexandre Prospero Reverend).[17] The status of British subjects in Colombia began to wane in a more or less parallel process to the decline of Bolívar's own political prestige. In 1826 and 1827 resentment of the British first began to grow, for two main reasons. Firstly the 1826 London financial crisis pulled the carpet out from beneath the promised wave of British investment in Colombia, which never materialised. Secondly, Bolívar's plans to model a strong central government on the British system and potentially under overt British protection opened him to charges of giving up hard-won Colombian sovereignty.

## Conclusions

In my present research project I am trying to pick apart the different strands of British relations with Colombia in these years. I am doing this by writing a collective biography of all of the participants in the aforementioned Battle of El Santuario, which took place in highland north-east Antioquia on 17 November 1829. While the British participants in the battle were relatively few (they included Daniel O'Leary, Rupert Hand, Thomas Murray and Richard Crofton), the build up to the battle can provoke some concluding reflections relevant to this discussion of the diverse nature of British influence in Colombia in the late independence era.

General José María Córdova rebelled against Bolívar's rule in August 1829 and formed a rebel 'Army of Freedom' to support himself in his stronghold of Rionegro in Antioquia against the central government. Córdova was a close friend and correspondent of the British Consul in Bogotá, James Henderson. Córdova had also been romantically linked with the Consul's daughter, Fanny Henderson. When news of the rebellion reached Bogotá, Henderson was accused of complicity in Córdova's rebellion. He left the country soon after news of Córdova's defeat reached the capital.

The commander of the expedition that defeated Córdova, General Daniel O'Leary, was of the belief that Henderson had been in truck with Córdova. O'Leary himself was corresponding with other British diplomats throughout his time in the Colombian military service, especially the British Minister in Bogotá (and Henderson's direct superior), Patrick Campbell. Henderson and Campbell had fallen out two yeas previously, ostensibly over Campbell's ill-fated romantic pursuit of Mary English (who soon after married a British merchant, William Greenup, and then left the capital to settle in Cúcuta). As well as matters of love, the two representatives also disagreed on most aspects of Colombian politics. Nevertheless, it would be unwise to extrapolate from either Henderson or O'Leary's activities towards a general theory of British involvement in the end of Gran Colombia. Instead it seems safer to observe at this stage that British involvement was almost

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*15 Karen Racine, 'Simón Bolívar, Englishman: Elite Responsibility and Social Reform in Spanish American Independence', in Bushnell and Langley, eds., Simon Bolivar: Essays on the Life and Legacy of the Liberator, pp.56-70.*

*16 See my discussion of the constitution in Matthew Brown, 'Enlightened Reform after Independence: Simón Bolívar's Bolivian Constitution', in Gabriel Paquette, ed., Enlightened Reform in Southern Europe and its Atlantic Colonies, c.1750-1830 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), pp.339-60.*

*17 Mónica Cortés Yepes, Armando Martínez Garnica and Natalia Silva Prada, eds., Una mirada íntima al Libertador en los dos últimos años de su vida (Bucaramanga : Universidad Industrial de Santander, 2008).*

everywhere in 1820s Colombia; on both sides of the political divide, in most regions and in favour of a diverse range of (often contradictory) interests.

As we look back at British involvement in Colombian independence, it is perhaps worth bearing these stories in mind. Alongside the famous heroism of national heroes like James Rooke, we should remember the hidden stories of those hundreds of often nameless adventurers who perished of fever or malnutrition at the very beginning of their participation in the wars of independence. British influence in this period drew on a variety of factors involving commerce, capital and culture. These factors had a very strong human presence during the independence era, especially after the arrival of the several thousand adventurers after 1817. As Alonso Sánchez Baena has observed, it is often the 'characters, feelings, family lives, histories' of the individuals involved which form the myths and legends which shape our understanding of History. As we enter the next wave of bicentenary commemorations, it is worth bearing the diversity of this experience in mind.[18]

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*18 Alonso Sánchez Baute, Líbranos del bien (Madrid: Alfaguara, 2009), p.18.*

# The press and the independence of new granada:

# Some introductory observations

*Eduardo Posada Carbó*

## 1

The history of modern journalism in Spanish America has its roots in the period of independence from colonial Spain. Newspapers did exist before. However, their nature substantially changed as the principle of freedom of expression developed alongside the events that led to emancipation. Newspapers have long been an important documentary source for the work of historians of the region, but with some significant exceptions they have been largely neglected as a subject of study. As François-Xavier Guerra has noted, the emergence of public opinion during the years of the struggle for independence underlines the importance of the role played by the press, thus the need to incorporate it more fully into historical enquiries of the Spanish American revolutions.[1]

The Colombian historiography on the press lags behind recent trends that are paying increasing attention to this topic, in Latin America and elsewhere,[2] although there are of course key references, including some classic works like those of Luis Martínez Delgado and Sergio Elías Ortiz and the pioneering efforts from modern disciplinary approaches by David Bushnell and Renán Silva.[3] More recently, the press during the independence period has been the focus of studies by scholars such as María Teresa Ripoll and Rebecca Earle, while new initiatives –such as those of a research group led by Francisco Ortega at the Universidad Nacional, or the making available of digital editions of newspapers at the Luis Angel Arango Library website- have provided fresh impetus to the subject.[4] Rebecca Earle in particular offers some interesting and stimulating propositions that are worthy of consideration.

Earle questions whether or not in New Granada "the establishment of printing presses and newspapers followed rather than preceded the outbreak of war". While Guerra found that the printed word was a significant factor in explaining the Mexican independence, "nothing of the sort occurred in the print backwater that was New Granada. There the printed word did not play a central role in the dissemination of news or opinion through the population

1 *See François-Xavier Guerra, Modernidad e independencias. Ensayos sobre las revoluciones hispánicas (Madrid, 1992), specially chapters vii and viii.*

2 *For recent perspectives on the history of journalism in Latin America: Paula Alonso, ed., Construcciones impresas. Panfletos, diarios y revistas en la formación de los estados nacionales en América Latina, 1820-1920 (Buenos Aires, 2003); Angel Soto, ed., Entre tintas y plumas. Historias de la prensa chilena del siglo XIX (Santiago, 2004); and Iván Jaksić, ed., The political power of the word. Press and oratory in nineteenth-century Latin America (London, 2002). There are some useful general historical surveys for the region, for example: Alvarez, Jesús Timoteo y Ascensión Martínez Riaza, Historia de la prensa hispanoamericana (Madrid, 1992); and Antonio Checa Godoy, Historia de la prensa en Iberoamérica (Sevilla, 1993). For a discussion of the literature on Mexico, Jacqueline Covo, "La prensa en la historiografía mexicana: problemas y perspectivas", Historia Mexicana, 3: 167 (January-March 1993). For a recent overview of the period 1880-1930, see Eduardo Posada-Carbó, 'Prensa y opinión pública', chapter in Enrique Ayala and Eduardo Posada-Carbó, eds., Historia general de la América Latina; VII. Los proyectos nacionales latinoamericanos: sus instrumentos y articulación, 1870-1930 (9 vols., Paris, 2008), vii, pp. 469-86. . See also Posada Carbó, "Newspapers, Politics and Elections in Colombia, 1830-1930", The Historical Journal, 53, 4 (2010), pp. 939-962. On the history of journalism elsewhere, see, for example, Jeffrey L. Pasley, "The tyranny of printers". Newspapers politics in the early American Republic (Charlottesville, VA, and London, 2001), p. 3. Andrew W. Robertson, The language of democracy. Political rhetoric in the United States and Britain, 1790-1900 (Charlottesville VA, 1995); and Jeremy D. Popkin, Press, revolution and social identities in France, 1830-1835 (Pennsylvania PA, 2002).*

3 *See Luis Martínez Delgado and Sergio Elías Ortiz, El periodismo en la Nueva Granada, 1810-1811 (Bogotá, 1960); David Bushnell, "The Development of the Press in Great Colombia", Hispanic American Historical Review (30, 1950); Renán Silva, Prensa y revolución a finales del siglo XVIII (Medellín, 2004; 1a ed., 1988); and "El periodismo y la prensa a finales del siglo XVIII y principios del XIX en Colombia", in Silva, La ilustración en el virreinato de la Nueva Granada. Estudios de historia social (Medellín, 2005). See also Gustavo Otero Muñoz, Historia del periodismo en Colombia (Bogotá, 1936); Jorge Conde Calderón, Jorge. "Prensa, representaciones sociales y opinión en Cartagena republicana, 1821-1853", Debate y perspectivas, 3 (Diciembre 2003); and Alonso Valencia Llano, Luchas sociales y políticas del periodismo en el estado soberano del Cauca (Cali, 1994)*

4 *Rebecca Earle, "Information and Disinformation in Late Colonial New Granada, The Americas, 54:2 (October 1997); and "The Role of the Print in the Spanish American Wars of Independence", in Iván Jaksić, ed., The political power of the world. Press and oratory in nineteenth century Latin America (London, 2002); and María Teresa Ripoll, "El Argos Americano. Crónica de una desilusión", paper presented at the VII Simposio de Historia de Cartagena, Cartagena, 2007.*

at large".[5] There very few readers and printing presses. Illiterates, the majority of the population, were not "receptive to newspapers and pamphlets, political or otherwise". By 1810, there were only five printing presses, in Bogotá and Cartagena, a number that only increased to nine in 1815.[6] A few additional journals were established during the subsequent years of war but "it was not until the effective end of the war in 1821 that any real growth occurred in Colombian publishing".[7] Under these circumstances, Earle argues, the impact of the print media was limited: "the printing press itself was not a key ingredient in the outbreak of war with Spain. Opinion was not roused by revolutionary pamphlets and the radical press".[8] Furthermore, newspapers were not the major sources of information; people got their news through letters and above all through word of mouth.

That the majority of New Granadans were illiterate and that the number of printing presses during the independence years was small are undisputable facts. It is also undeniable that the role played by the press in the course of independence before 1810 was limited. Earle is also on solid ground when she argues that most people resorted to other means rather than newspapers to be informed. Yet the extent to which the printed word, including that of newspapers, shaped the events after 1810 -even under the limited circumstances identified by Earle- remains to be more fully explored. A reconsideration of some of her propositions serves as point of departure for the observations offered here on the history of the press in New Granada during the period of independence.

5 *Earle, "Information and Disinformation", p. 168.*

6 *Idem., pp. 169, 170, 172.*

7 *Idem., p. 173.*

8 *Idem., p. 183.*

## 2

A few general points underpin the analysis that follows. Firstly, there is a need to revise some common assumptions regarding the impact of the press on illiterate societies. Such impact may vary according to their previous exposure to the printed word. As Adrian Hastings has observed, "the effect of a relatively small increase in a number of books in a community which has, hitherto, had none or very few is far greater than people in a world used to a surfeit of books can easily realise, and it extends far beyond the literate".[9] Secondly, any study on the impact of the press has to take into consideration the various ways through which the printed word reaches the public, including oral communication -be it from the pulpit, in conversations in social gatherings or through the practices of reading aloud .[10] Thus the number of newspapers in itself cannot be a measure of their political effects. Similarly, literacy rates do not define in themselves the audience of newspapers.

With independence came the end of the Inquisition and the adoption for the first time in Spanish America of a key principle for the development of

9 *Adrian Hastings, The construction of nationhood. Ethnicity, religion and nationalism (Cambridge, 1997).*

10 *Paul Star, The creation of the media. Political Origins of Modern Communications (New York, 2004), p. 24. On the links between the printed and the oral modes of communication, see Robert Darnton, 'An Early Information Society: News and the Media in Eighteenth-Century Paris", The American Historical Review, 105:1 (February, 2000), pp. 1-35. Earle does acknowledge the links between the printed and the spoken worlds, but marginalizes the importance of the former while stressing the role of the latter. See her "Information and Dissinformation". "Formas colectivas de lectura", as Silva has noted, date back to the colonial period. See his essay "El periodismo y la prensa", p. 93. A letter from Cartagena in1791 described that the Papel periódico de la ciudad de Santafé de Bogotá was "el favorito de las tertulias no solo seculares sino religiosas"; one single copy of the paper "suele servir a más de cien personas si acaso no es a una tercera parte de la ciudad"; Silva, Prensa y revolución, pp. 38-9.*

newspapers: freedom of the press.[11] The journals established during the first years of independence were ready to praise and defend their newly acquired liberties. "Compatriotas... La libertad de imprenta es nuestra esperanza", El Argos Americano stated in November 1810: "Háblese, escríbase franca y libremente, si es que deseamos poner los cimientos de una justa y sabia constitución". A few months later, the newspaper warned those in government that now "ya no hay que temer al despotismo y arbitratiedad de los xefes"; their actions could be checked by "qualquiera particular, que con sana intención exponga por medio de la prensa, que ya está libre, sus opiniones políticas, que servirán par instrucción de los Magistrados, y para instruir al público sobre sus intereses".[12] When in 1811 the Cundinamarca government demanded from publishers a deposit of 20 issues out of their newspaper editions, La Bagatela argued that the measure was a prohibitive tax, which contradicted the constitutional principle of press freedom.[13] The first piece of work by Jeremy Bentham published in New Granada was precisely an article on the freedom of the press, which appeared in La Bagatela on 21 July 1811. Indeed the principle of press freedom was incorporated, together with the "Derechos imprescriptibles del hombre y del ciudadano", in the written constitutions that were adopted during the first republic, in Cundinamarca, Tunja, Cartagena, Pamplona, Neiva, Antioquia. They all followed a similar formula to that of Art 3 of the Antioquia constitution of 1812: "La libertad de imprenta es el más firme apoyo a un Gobierno sabio y liberal; así todo ciudadano puede examinar los procedimientos de cualquier ramo de gobierno, o la conducta de todo empleado público, y escribir, hablar e imprimir libremente cuanto quiera; debiendo sí responder del abuso que haga de esta libertad, en los casos determinados por la ley".[14]

Embracing the principle of press freedom was of course part of the modern idea of liberty that was cherished among the intellectual elites at the forefront of the independence movement. "Liberty" was perhaps the most repeated term in the "Prospecto" of the Diario Político de Santa Fé, on 27 August 1810.[15] As its editors –Joaquín Camacho and Francisco José de Caldas- announced with naive enthusiasm,"escribimos en el seno de un pueblo libre, escribimos con libertad". Camacho and Caldas encouraged the "literatos y sabios" to write: "escribir para hacernos libre, independientes y felices". There was nothing to fear now: "la Patria es libre, libres sois vosotros". They ventured a definition of liberty, different from licency, the lack of "todo freno y todo respeto... suma de todos los vicios y de todos los males". Although there were references to classic Rome, their definition of "liberty" was clearly modern: "el hombre libre es el que obedece solo a la ley, el que no está sujeto al capricho y a las pasiones de los depositarios del poder. Un pueblo es libre cuando no es el juguete del que manda". They foresaw the coming of a "golden age" where the "ciudadano tranquilo en el goce de sus derechos podrá entregarse a las dulzuras de la vida privada".[16]

The impact of newspapers during the independence period must be examined against the previous background of the Inquisition and the absence of modern liberties, including of course the lack of press freedom. A handful of newspapers had been

11 *See Silva, "El periodismo y la prensa", pp. 141-4.*

12 *El Argos Americano, Cartagena, 5 November 1810; and "El anciano N.3", El Argos Americano, Cartagena, 11 February 1811. I wish to thank María Teresa Ripoll for kindly providing me a photocopy of this valuable source.*

13 *"Imprenta", La Bagatela, 11 July 1811, in Antonio Nariño, La Bagatela, 1811-1812 (Bogotá, 1966), p. 5.*

14 *José María Samper, Derecho público interno de Colombia (Bogotá, 1951), vol 1, p. 94.*

15 *See "Diario Político de Santafé de Bogotá. Prospecto", 27 August 1810, in Boletín de Historia y Antiguedades, 1:7 (Bogotá, March, 1903), pp. 341-5.*

16 *Idem.*

established before 1810, the first being the Papel periódico de la ciudad de Santa Fé, edited by the Cuban Manuel del Socorro Rodríguez from 1791 to 1797. In 1806, Jorge Tadeo Lozano and Luis de Azuola founded El Redactor Americano; in 1808 Francisco José de Caldas started editing El Semanario del Nuevo Reyno de Granada.[17] According to Otero Muñoz, these first newspapers were characterized by "la divulgación de conocimientos sobre geografía, historia, comercio y necesidades del vireinato". They all faced some of the problems of viability that haunted newspapers after independence: very few subscribers and limited readership, high production costs, and lack of profitability.

None the less, in contrast with the colonial past, the number of newspapers and publications grew. Even if the figures were still limited, they did represent a major jump from what existed before. Francisco Ortega and his colleagues at the Universidad Nacional have identified some 187 periodicals established in New Granada between the 1780s and 1830. Only six of these were set up before 1808. There were 34 new journals between 1808 and 1816, and then further 147 between 1816 and 1830. Also in contrast with the colonial past, their frequency intensified. In 1810, the Diario Político in Bogotá was published three times a week –Mondays, Wednesdays and Friday: "esta era una innovación muy atrevida dentro de los escasos medios con que se contaba. Hasta allí la experiencia en publicaciones peródicas solo llegaba a semanarios...".[18]

Newspapers of "transition": this was how Renán Silva labelled the journals established during the early years of independence, like the Diario Político de Santafé, Aviso al Público, (Bogotá) and El Argos Americano (Cartagena) in 1810, and La Bagatela (Bogotá) in 1811. They all had a short life. With the very adoption of its name, El Efímero –established in Cartagena in 1812- made its readers aware of its precarious existence.[19] The Diario Político barely lasted five months. In January 1811, its editors announced its closure and explained the reasons for this decision: "Siendo muy poco el expendio en esta capital y casi ninguno en las provincias, de donde hasta ahora no se ha podido recaudar los que se ha vendido, crecídismos los gastos por la carestía del papel, nos hallamos en la incapacidad de proseguir en la empresa".[20] Similarly, El Argos Americano had suspended publication in November 1810: "los editores avisan al público que se ven en la necesidad de suspender este periódico hasta tener bastante número de suscriptores para cubrir los costos de imprenta y papel... Dentro de un mes si hubiera suscriptores continuará el Argos Americano". A month later the paper did reappear but thanks only to the financial support of the local Junta Suprema, the local authority.[21]

With the available information, it is hard to know the scope of the market reached by these newspapers, or to estimate levels of readership. Editors did aim at reaching a public beyond their local surroundings. The Argos Americano offered subscriptions at different prices. As the expenses postage had to be covered, the paper explained, the subscription was cheaper for those living in Cartagena than for those living outside the city. A similar policy was followed by El Mensagero de Cartagena de Indias in 1814, which also anounced that the newspaper "llevará a los pueblos interiores

17 *See Silva, Prensa y revolución.*

18 *Martínez Delgado and Ortiz, El periodismo en la Nueva Granada, p. xxviii.*

19 *Regularity of publication was not a feature of journalism during the nineteenth century. In 1825, El Aviso con Notas warned its readers that "este papel saldrá cada y cuando se le diere la gana"; El Aviso con Notas, Bogotá, 24 February 1825. Unless indicated otherwise, the newspapers cited here were consulted through the Biblioteca Luis Angel Arango's website: www.banrepcultural.org*

20 *Martínez Delgado and Ortiz, El periodismo en la Nueva Granada, p. xxxii.*

21 *See El Argos Americano, Cartagena, 12 November and 3 December 1810.*

sus propias noticias".[22] In 1811, Cartageneros could buy the Bogotano Diario Político in Antonio Angulo's tienda (local shop). In turn, the Argos Americano expected 40 copies of the paper's editions to be sold in Santafé.[23] When the Diario Político closed down, it claimed to have distributed some 15,000 copies during its existence in the provinces, for which it had not been paid.[24]

The contents of these newspapers reveals the existence of a wider world, beyond the confines of the provinces where they were published. Consider the case of El Argos Americano. Published in Cartagena, El Argos reprinted articles from foreign newspapers, from Jamaica, Spain and the United States. Above all, it carried regular stories from Tunja, Pamplona, Mompox, Simití, San Benito Abad, Girón, Popayá,. Chocó, Antioquia, Santa Marta, Ríohacha and, of course, Bogotá; that is, from most provinces in New Granada, north and south, east and west. Occasionally, the paper published articles sent specially from other cities, outside its own province, as on 12 November 1810, when it published a letter from Bucaramanga by Eloy Valenzuela. It also acknowledged newspapers and leaflets published elsewhere in the country. On 17 June 1811, El Argos published a piece criticizing a Santafé publication on the question of federalism. What Paul Starr has referred to as a "network phenomenon" –the early seventeeenth-century European practice by which "much of the content of individual papers consisted in news items from other papers"[25]- started to take shape in New Granada during the period of independence.

Regardless of the size of the market, the function of newspapers substantially changed during the years of independence, as modern public opinion emerged. Their role was now fundamentally political, closely linked to the discussions brought about by the monarchical crisis and the subsequent struggle for independence. In such role, newspapers provided basic information about the complex developments both in the metropolis and in the Americas, while serving a variety of functions, including as forums of debate about the forms of government that New Granada should take; vehicles for 'national' integration; platforms for political leaders and partisan movements; and organs of the newly emerging legitimacy. A brief look at some of the early newspapers will help to illustrate some of these points.

After proclaiming the coming of a new era, which was replacing the "barbaro sistema del gobierno antiguo", El Argos Americano outlined its purposes: "comunicar con criterio y discernimiento las noticias ministeriales de esta Suprema Junta de Gobierno, las comerciales de bahía, las de las naciones ultramarinas, de toda la América, y con particularidad las de este Reyno".[26] It first issues were almost fully devoted to informing its readers about the establishment of the various Juntas in New Granada. The establishment of Junta Suprema in Cartagena was also recorded in a special issue of Las noticias públicas de Cartagena de Indias, describing "la afluencia del Pueblo de todas clases que paseaban las calles y las hacian resonar con sus canticos de alegria".[27] In October 1810, El Argos Americano carried further news on the measures taken by the Congreso Provincial de Antioquia. On 5 December of that year it published a story on "la revolución de Buenos Ayres a favor de los nativos del país y la absoluta independencia del Vireynato que comenzó el 20 de mayo, deponiendo de su autoridad al Virey Cisneros". Two weeks later, its attention moved to the "Revolucion en el Reyno de Mexico". On 7 January 1811, it informed readers about the inauguration of the Cortes in Cádiz (which had taken

22 *El Mensagero de Cartagena de Indias, Cartagena, 11 February 1814.*

23 *El Argos Americano, Cartagena, 4 February 1811, and 22 October 1810.*

24 *Martínez Delgado and Ortiz, El periodismo en la Nueva Granada, p. xxxii.*

25 *Starr, The Creation of the Media, p. 33.*

26 *"Prospecto", El Argos Americano, Cartagena, September 1810.*

27 *N. 140 Extraordinario de Las Noticias Publicas de Cartagena de Indias, 29 August 1810.*

place on the previous 24 September). Local events of course could be covered more speedily. On 4 February 1811, El Argos Americano published a "Suplemento" with news of a mutiniy in Cartagena. In Bogotá, the Boletín de Noticias del Día in 1812 was not a daily publication, in spite of its name, but it was a regular leaflet with current news related to the political struggles of the times.[28]

This informative role, however, was secondary to their primary political aims. Prominent among various subjects, newspapers encouraged discussions about the forms of government for the Hispanic world. In its second issue, El Argos Americano published an article on "Independencia de la América" – although this did not mean that the paper was already supporting outright independence. But the Cartagenero paper was soon involved in a debate about federalism, raised on 22 October 1810 in response to some ideas published in Bogotá against the federal system. "Por aquella turbulenta época" –Otero Muñoz noted with reference to the 1810s- "empieza, pues, nuestro periodismo de oposición, cuando [...] los patricios comenzaron a dividirse por cuestiones constitucionales o por simples disidencias de ocasión, ya sobre la marcha de la guerra, ya sobre los hombres que la conducían".[29] Above all, the press played an important role in spreading the ideas of independence and modern representative institutions. El Aviso al Público in Bogotá, for example, published the Carta a los españoles americanos written by Juan Pablo Vizcardo y Guzmán, and, in a special issue, reprinted the Constitution of the United States of America, whose Spanish translation had been published in Caracas.[30] In Cartagena, El Efímero praised the advantages of the "democratic over the monarchical government".[31]

28 *See various issues, 30 November 1812; 1, 3, 6, 20 and 23 December 1812.*

29 *Otero Muñoz, Historia del periodismo en Colombia, p. 37.*

30 *Martínez Delgado and Ortiz, El periodismo en la Nueva Granada, p. xxxv.*

31 *El Efímero de Cartagena, 5 September 1812.*

From the early years of independence, some of those involved in writing and editing newspapers became leading political figures. Antonio Nariño had gained notoriety before he established La Bagatela, but the paper became an important political weapon. As Otero Muñoz oberved, "este periódico tumbó un gobierno y creó otro, encabezado por el propio periodista".[32] Beyond individual and partisan aspirations, newspapers articulated a "political nation", linking distant towns and provinces with common aims through the printed word. As already mentioned, El Argos Americano carried news from all provinces of New Granada. Furthermore, the press also provided narratives of legitimacy for the revolutionary developments. Soon after its establishment, for example, the Diario Político de Santafé published a history of the events of 20 July 1810, when Bogotá declared independence.

## 3

It is hard to assess the impact of the press on the course of independence. It may be the case, as Rebecca Earle has noted, that newspapers were not a "key ingredient" in explaining the origins of independence. Their role as conduit of information and as opinion formers was certainly limited before the crisis of the Spanish monarchy in 1808. However, as this short essay has tried to show, there is a need to revise the extent to which newspapers, and the printed word more general, influenced the developments that led to the independence of New Granada. In this article, I have only focused on a few publications during the early 1810s. But a full analysis of the subject would require to expand the examination into the following decade, until independence from Spain was consolidated.[33]

As suggested above, any study of the role of the press during this period should start by revising

32 *Otero Muñoz, Historia del periodismo en Colombia, p. 37*

33 *A very useful essay for this is Bushnell, "The Development of the Press in Gran Colombia".*

some of the premises that have hitherto dominated our historical understanding of the topic in New Granada: the number of newspapers and literacy rates do not in themselves tell us much about the impact of the press. Those involved in the politics of the times were aware of the existence of an emerging public whose opinions mattered. That is why they bothered with the printed word. In 1814, while comanding the army of the south in Popayán, Antonio Nariño reported to the government in Santafé that "estoy haciendo armar una imprenta nueva que he encontrado aquí para que se comienzen a imprimir algunos papeles y ver si de algun modo se puede fixar la opinión pública corrompida al exceso".[34]

"Casi por definición", Francois-Xavier Guerra has observed, "el impreso [...] está destinado a una amplia difusión".[35] The exact size of its public will always be a matter of speculation. But a modern public opinion tied to the history of newspapers did emerge during the independence period in New Granada. Such important development merits more serious attention; they provide a research agenda outlined by Guerra when he referred to the need to know "de qué manera [...] evoluciona esta opinión popular y cómo se articula con los diferentes lugares y soportes de las elites: tertulias, sociedades diversas, periódicos, folletos". By studying newspapers, we also learn "quiénes son los que participan en la vida pública. El estudio de los publicistas es una parte esencial del análisis de la vida pública". Firthermore, "hay también que considerar el periódico mismo como un actor, a veces como uan prolongación clientelar de algún personaje o facción política [....] Hay [...] que considerar el papel que juegan los periódicos en la lucha política... un cambio de gobierno o de régimen, las elecciones, un pronunciamiento, una guerra civil".

Two decades ago, in assessing the advances of the historiography during the bicentennial of the French revolution, Jeremy Popkin argued "for putting the history of the press at the center of the revolutionary story".[36] In particular, Popkin underlined the significance of "the journalistic language of the revolutionary period", a field where the history of the press "would obviously take on an entirely new importance". For Popkin, "the consciousness of the revolution as a new age" in France, "diferent from what went before, is inseparable from the appearance of ts press". The press in New Granada did not have the dimensions or the influence of the press during the French revolution, but its history should have at least a most visible place in the story of independence.

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*34 Nariño to the Governor of Cundinamarca, Popayán, 20 January 1814, in Suplemento al Mensagero de Cartagena, 11 February 1814. Nariño seemed to have always paid particular importance to the role of the press. According to Restrepo, his reasons to resign his post as president in Cundamarca in 1812 were: "la guerra abierta que se había hecho a sus opiniones políticas por los particulares, los pueblos y las corporaciones, tanto valiéndose de la imprenta, como usando de las armas"; Restrepo, Historia de la revolución de la República de Colombia en la América meridional, (Bogotá, 1942), vol 2, p. 40. In 1811, Nariño wrote in La Bagatela: "... es imposible propagar la instrucción y fijar la opinión pública sin papeles periódicos", in Silva, "El periodismo y la prensa", p. 119.*

*35 See Luis Miguel Glave, "Epílogo. Entrevista con Francois-Xavier Guerra: 'considerar el periódico como un actor'", Debate y Perspectivas (Madrid, December 1993), 3, pp. 189-202.*

*36 Jeremy Popkin: "The Press and the French revolution after two hundred years", French History Studies, 16:3 (1990).*

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