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Caffeinated memories: The creation of historical narratives as public goods in the Colombian coffee industry

Marcelo Bucheli^a and Luis Felipe Sáenz^b

^aGies College of Business, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Champaign, IL, USA; ^bDepartment of Economics, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, USA

ABSTRACT

We study the process by which an organisation creates a historical narrative about itself as a strategy to legitimise the role it plays in a particular society. By using the concept of ‘public good’ as our analytical lens, we show that when the organisation creates a narrative that coincides with that of the nation-state, this poses enormous challenges to the organisation’s efforts to control how and by whom this narrative is used. This is because anyone belonging to the nation-state can legitimately make use of that narrative. Therefore, the boundary conditions that permit other actors to use these historical narratives are delimited by those able to define who belongs to the nation-state and who does not. We illustrate our argument with the rhetorical strategies developed by Colombia’s Coffee Growers Federation (FNCC) between 1927 and 2013.

KEYWORDS

Coffee; public goods; historical narratives; commodities; Colombia

Introduction

In this article, we study the process by which an organisation with disproportionate influence in the economy of a country creates a historical narrative about itself as a way of legitimising this influence. The creation and use of historical narratives with this aim are classified as ‘rhetorical strategies’, in which an organisation uses its own interpretation of history to ‘counteract radical change or to promote evolutionary or path-dependent change’ (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005, p. 52). For an organisation with a degree of influence such that it has an enduring say in shaping the wider political and economic environment, it is safe to assume that the strategies that that organisation will develop (rhetorical or otherwise) will steer towards the defense of the status quo. We focus here on the type of rhetorical strategy developed by an organisation with these characteristics. This strategy consists of the development of a historical narrative that equates the history of the organisation with the history of the nation-state and, as a result, the fate of the organisation with the fate of the nation-state. We maintain that this type of strategy turns the narrative created by the organisation into a ‘public good’ (Samuelson, 1954) in the sense that once the narrative has been created it can be appropriated (and re-shaped) by anyone who can legitimately claim to belong to the nation-state.

We illustrate our argument with a case-study of Colombia's Coffee Growers Federation (Federación Nacional de Cafeteros de Colombia, hereafter FNCC) between 1927 and 2013. During most of this period, the FNCC was the main organisation controlling Colombian coffee exports and developed a very close relationship with the Colombian state. We show how the FNCC created a historical narrative about itself that equated its fate with the political and economic stability of the country, that portrayed the organisation as a force of democratic values in the coffee-growing regions and as upholding values that matched those of the celebrated Colombian coffee farmers. The result of this strategy was that the FNCC's historical narrative became a public good that could be appropriated by any actor with a sense of belonging to the Colombian nation-state. This enabled some detractors of the FNCC to delegitimize the organisation's operations using the same historical narrative the organisation had created and claiming that the FNCC's values and operations no longer matched the historical role that it had defined for itself. This process brought to the fore the limits of the FNCC's ability to control its own historical narrative.

Business historians have analysed how organisations use historical narratives as rhetorical strategies in studies informed by the theoretical analytical tools developed by organisation studies scholars. The pioneering works of Hansen (2006), Rowlinson and Hassard (1993), and Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) served as the foundation for empirical studies such as those by Cailluet, Gorge, and Özçaglar-Toulouse (2018), Foster et al. (2011), Lubinski (2018), and Mordhorst (2014). We contribute to this growing field of research by showing the benefits of using Samuelson's concept of a public good together with the notion of the creation of historical narratives by organisations (Foster et al., 2011) and the theories about the creation of myths in nation-states as advanced by Hobsbawm (2012a, 2012b) and Anderson (1991), to analyse the creation of an organisational narrative that is closely linked to that of the nation-state and, therefore, liable of being appropriated by those identifying themselves as members of that nation-state. In doing so, we respond to the calls by O'Sullivan and Graham (2010) and Lamoreaux et al. (2007) to integrate conceptual frameworks of economics into business history.¹

We show that the FNCC's historical narrative was consistent with a series of myths and images that were both national and regional. This narrative can be read through multiple lenses: the strategies developed by the elites of peripheral countries to promote nationalism (Nairn, 1977; also consistent with the invention of traditions as characterised by Hobsbawm (2012a, 2012b) and Anderson (1991)); the narratives centred on the promises of development inscribed in commodities (Beckman, 2013); the nationalist narratives woven around a particular commodity (López-Alves, 2013); and the tendency on the part of organisations to associate their particular narratives with those broadly accepted by society (Foster et al., 2011; Suddaby et al., 2010). We can expect that this type of rhetorical strategy to be deployed mostly by organisations with strong control over a sector of the economy that has disproportionate weight as tends to be the case in peripheral countries with undiversified economies. With our analytical lens, we can study the consequences of using this type of rhetorical strategy by examining the difficulties an organisation faces in attempting to manage a narrative by which it sought to include all actors who identify with the nation-state. We show the resulting paradox of creating and defining the terms of a narrative and then being challenged by others who use the same terms defined by the organisation.

Some historical studies have analysed the use of rhetorical strategies by organisations dominating an important sector of the economy in peripheral countries. For instance,

Scandinavia and Finland have traditionally been considered as being on the margins of Western Europe with their economies dominated by a small number of firms that belong to diversified business groups that operate on limited internationally oriented industries in close coordination with their governments (Fellman, Iversen, Sjögren, & Thue, 2008). In these countries some organisations have a strong degree of control over an important sector of the economy and legitimise their operations by using rhetorical strategies that link their fate and values to those of the nation-state. Examples include Finland's telecommunications firm Nokia in the second half of the twentieth century, which cultivated a rhetoric of national pride around its operations, while simultaneously playing an important role in shaping Finland's economic and foreign policy (Lindén, 2021). In Sweden, the oft-quoted 1968 statement of its finance minister that 'what is good for Volvo is also good for Sweden' (Lindén, 2021, p. 31) (which we believe was an intentional paraphrase of General Motors' president Charles Wilson's 1953 statement 'what is good for General Motors is good for the United States'), shows a clear intention of developing a narrative that links the fate of a country's 'national champion' to that of Sweden as a whole.² Oil exporting countries expropriating their industry from foreign multinationals have used the slogan 'the oil is ours', as was the case for Argentina and Brazil in the 1950s or Venezuela in the 1970s (Philip, 1982), equating opponents to expropriation as opposing to the motherland, rather than state interventionism in the economy.

The basic characteristics of our case make it especially suited to contributing to the existing agenda on the analysis of rhetorical strategies. Business historians acknowledge that analytical lenses that are commonly used and widely accepted for core Western European countries or the United States cannot easily be transferred to other contexts (Austin et al., 2017; Frost, 2021; Tumbe, 2019).³ By focussing on Colombia we bring to the fore characteristics shared by most underdeveloped and emerging countries (which represent most countries where the world's population lives) that affect how organisations make strategic decisions. These include the existence of imperfect democracies, long-standing armed conflicts, scarce economic diversification, a blurring of the lines separating the private and public sector, and an ever-elusive promise of economic prosperity for all.

We posit that by bringing into the agenda underdeveloped countries that have historically been highly dependent on the export of a single commodity, which is controlled by one organisation, we can offer new and interesting perspectives. We show that in such situations, the rhetorical strategy also targets the citizens of the country as a whole because of the implications for political economy. As López-Alves (2013) maintains, countries with a high degree of economic dependence on a particular export commodity tend to develop historical narratives that are centred on those commodities and that aim to drum up a sense of pride. In such cases, we maintain, this organisation will develop a historical narrative that seeks to legitimise its activities by linking the fate of the commodity to the fate of the nation-state, in turn, linking the fate of the commodity to the fate of the organisation. Additionally, Beckman (2013) argues that poor countries that are highly dependent on the export of one or two commodities develop narratives in which those exports are symbols of the promise of future development. It is not clear when this prosperity will arrive, but the intelligentsia of those nation-states needs to develop a narrative of hope and pride around the particular commodity in which its country has specialised for the global markets. In this context, the rhetorical strategy developed by the organisation controlling the export of that commodity will be connected to this idea of national pride and future prosperity.

Our approach through Samuelson's (1956) concept of a *public good*, allows us to probe and identify the limits to an organisation's ability to manage the narrative that it has created. Cailluet et al. (2018) and Modhorst (2014) take into consideration the appropriation of the narrative by other actors but, as they focus on an organisation that exercises a limited degree of influence on the national economy and political system, the consequences at the national level were very limited. The appropriation of the narrative by other actors is not a major element in the Nokia case (Lindén, 2021). Plus, in countries with strong political and economic stability and generous welfare state, the consequences of that appropriation would not be as far-reaching as they are in unstable countries in which the basic livelihood of millions of people and the country's political stability depend on the fate of the industry controlled by the organisation that developed that narrative.

This paper is divided into the following sections. The second section discusses the benefits and implications of using the concept of a public good from Samuelson (1954) in the scholarship of rhetorical history for business history studies. The third section explains our methodology and our selection of sources. The fourth section provides a broad overview of the history of the Colombian coffee industry and its importance in the country's economy and political environment. The fifth section shows the evolution of the FNCC's rhetorical strategies and how they became a public good. The sixth section concludes the paper.

Historical narratives as public goods

We aim to contribute to the scholarship on rhetorical strategies by discussing two specific ideas developed by this literature. First, this literature argues that some organisations develop historical narratives about themselves that are consistent with the broader historical narratives of their nation-state (Mordhorst, 2014). This strategy allows these types of organisations to legitimise their operations with the larger society of the nation-state. However, due to long-term changes, at some point the narrative developed by the organisation ceases to be consistent with the organisation's activities or with new economic and social realities of the nation-state; it is in such a context that other actors in that society might challenge the legitimacy of the organisation's operations (Mordhorst, 2014).

Second, Rowlinson & Hassard (1993) maintain that organisations also 'invent' their own traditions by carefully selecting and emphasising particular moments, attributing historical meanings to some events or symbols and selecting crucial dates that contribute to defining a historical narrative that shapes the organisation's culture and legitimises its operations. This analysis borrows from Hobsbawm's (2012a, 2012b) concept of the invention of traditions at the level of the nation-state. Foster et al. (2011) add that the selection of broader historical events is more effective when deployed outside the organisation and connected to external values.

We contribute to this body of literature by introducing the concept of a 'public good' into the context of an organisation that exerts a significant influence in its nation-state and develops a rhetorical strategy consisting in equating its fate with that of the nation-state in order to legitimise what some might perceive as privileges. Public goods are defined as a subcategory of goods whose main characteristic is that 'each individual's consumption of such a good, leads to no subtraction from any other individual's consumption (...) simultaneously for each and every (...) individual and each collective consumptive good' (Samuelson, 1954, p. 387). Milleron (1972) and Holcombe (1997) consider that Samuelson's definition

implies the characteristics of non-rivalry (a public good, once produced, can be consumed by other consumers with no additional costs) and non-excludability (once the public good is produced no consumer can be excluded from its consumption). Romer (1990) emphasises that whereas rivalry is a purely technological attribute, excludability is a function of both the technology and the institutional framework. These features are two important elements in our analysis.

We build on Cailluet et al. (2018) who also considered history as a public good in their study of Emmaus, a French charity organisation. Cailluet et al. (2018) show that Emmaus developed a narrative around its founder that portrayed him both as a charitable saint and a rebellious priest. When analysing how this narrative evolved and was interpreted and appropriated over time by different stakeholders, Cailluet et al. (2018, p. 1822) maintain that the 'ownership [of a narrative] is a challenge for organisations. Just as for public goods, individuals cannot be excluded from using historical resources and the use of such a resource by one individual does not reduce its availability to others'. For Cailluet et al. (2018), one major root of the problem was the narrative's instability, because it revolved around an individual whose behaviour might change to be consistent with the narrative. Our analysis shows the implications of building a historical narrative around elements seemingly more stable than a particular individual: the symbols and myths of the nation-state. This stability, however, does not necessarily guarantee that the narrative is easier to control, because anyone belonging to the nation-state could legitimately claim ownership of that narrative even when the discrepancy widens between the narrative and the nation-state's economic conditions, or if the agenda of those adopting said narrative challenges that of the organisation that originally created it.

Our paper shows how the organisational rhetorical strategy consisting in developing a historical narrative that uses the myths and symbols of the nation-state can become a public good. We posit this because of the following characteristics of public goods. First, by their very nature, narratives are intangible, and their consumption by one actor does not preclude their consumption by another. Second, when a narrative is created around the foundational myths and 'invented traditions' (Hobsbawm, 2012a) of the nation-state, the scope and legitimacy of that narrative are bounded by how that nation-state defines who belongs to that 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1991) and who does not. Despite this boundary condition, we maintain that organisations' historical narratives that are consistent with those of the nation-state are not *club goods*, whose notion of membership is premised upon exclusionary mechanisms. Therefore, in the case of a historical narrative that is a public good, for someone to appropriate that narrative, it is sufficient for them to feel a sense of belonging to the nation-state.

We argue that historical narratives are non-rival goods. As a historical narrative is an intangible asset, it fits squarely in this definition. Not all historical narratives are pure public goods however, as the characteristic of non-excludability is crucial to determine whether a narrative is a club good or a pure public good. A historical narrative that exploits the symbolism around the nation-state becomes more inclusive in its pursuit of legitimacy. This aim of broad inclusion and legitimacy is what makes a historical narrative a public good. Therefore, when organisations leverage historical narratives anchored to the nation-state, they may face challenges in controlling the use of the narrative due to its non-exclusive nature, which implies that it can be consumed by multiple actors simultaneously and with markedly different agendas that are also perceived as legitimate. As a corollary, an organisation seeking

to exercise control over its historical narratives can develop exclusionary mechanisms that limit the scope of its influence. Historical narratives developed by organisations then face a legitimacy constraint if the organisation aims to exercise more control over the narrative, that is, to change the way it operates, making it more similar to a club good that cannot be leveraged against the organisation despite its non-rival nature. The inclusiveness of a historical narrative determines the boundaries of its legitimacy.

Methods

In this paper we borrow the concept of 'public goods' from economics to study the rhetorical strategies of an organisation with significant clout in the society in which it operated. In this way, we follow the approach of 'history as explicating' (Maclean et al., 2016) which uses theory to understand social processes by focussing on the actions of organisations.

Following Decker et al. (2021), we classify that our primary sources are comprised of social documents (internal records of the organisation) and narrative sources (those created by the organisation for a wider audience). The former consisting of internal documents from the FNCC archive located in Bogotá (Colombia). As these sources are not available to the public nor exist in electronic format, we were granted privileged access to them. These archives contain the details of the internal debates on the FNCC's strategy from 1927 on and include the minutes of the meetings held at the National Committee and National Coffee Congress. For our narrative sources, we drew from the FNCC publication *Revista Cafetera*, a 15–30 pages magazine produced and published twice a year for distribution among Colombian coffee farmers. This magazine crystalised the FNCC's worldview and was a crucial means for this organisation to shape a particular narrative of the industry among farmers. The coffee areas had relatively high levels of literacy (McGreevey, 1975) and the *Revista Cafetera* reached places where no national or local newspapers were available. This periodical kept the coffee growers updated about the national and international coffee economy, provided technical information, and highlighted the FNCC's achievements in the form of social spending on healthcare, infrastructure, and education. Given these characteristics, the *Revista Cafetera* provides us with a fascinating window through which to explore the worldview that the FNCC wanted to instil among the coffee growers. As the magazine is not available in electronic format, we consulted it at the FNCC archive in Bogotá and at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library.

Following Kipping, Wadhvani, & Bucheli's (2014) methodology, we take into consideration not only the intended audience of those primary sources, but also the agenda behind their creation in relation to the context in which they were written. For instance, the *Revista Cafetera*'s articles were short, straightforward, and directed to a population that although literate, did not have high levels of education, whereas the archival sources of the FNCC include internal discussions on corporate strategy and political economy held behind closed doors among members of the Colombian elite. For the period following the 1970s, we also draw on other means of communication developed by the FNCC, such as posters or newspaper ads aimed at the general Colombian population. Finally, to analyse the 2010s, we use social media posts, which were the main way of communication of the peasant organisations opposing the FNCC and addressed a larger audience.

We also interviewed individuals with a high degree of influence and ample experience in the Colombian coffee industry in Bogotá (Colombia) and Santa Cruz (Bolivia) between 2015 and 2016. These included Carlos Caballero (former director of Colombia's Central Bank), Juan José Echavarría (chairman of the Colombian Central Bank), Miguel Urrutia (former chair of Colombia's Central Bank and former Minister of Finance of Colombia), and Eduardo Lora (former member of Colombia's presidential commission to study the competitiveness of the Colombian coffee industry). These individuals provide us with an insider view of the industry from the viewpoint of those closely related to the FNCC's leadership and influential policy makers. Finally, we focussed on the FNCC's rhetorical strategies *within* Colombia as ways to legitimise its operations.

The rise and fall of a Coffee Republic

This section provides a brief overview of the development of the Colombian coffee industry and the role played by the FNCC in that process, outlining the contextual framework necessary to understand the FNCC's rhetorical strategies.

The birth and consolidation of the Colombian coffee industry, ca 1890–1930s

The history of twentieth-century Colombia is marked by the overwhelming importance of coffee in the national economy. Before the consolidation of coffee as the country's main export in the late 1910s, Colombia had undergone periods of high political instability. Its economy had been dominated by boom-and-bust cycles of export commodities, and the country was characterised by its limited integration due to an extremely poor internal infrastructure and a particularly challenging geography resulting from the country's particular topography (Melo, 2015). As a result, the country was described as an 'archipelago' of independent economies that were better connected to foreign markets than to each other (Nieto Arteta, 1971). Following a bloody civil war (1899–1903) Colombia's rulers organised the country around a highly centralised state, opened doors to foreign investment, and supported the development of commodity exports (Safford & Palacios, 2002).

The coffee industry's characteristics fit perfectly within the agenda developed by the Colombian elite throughout the twentieth century. First, by the 1910s a consolidated global coffee market already existed, with Europe and the United States consuming most coffee exports (Topik & Samper, 2006).⁴ Not only had US consumption increased during the nineteenth century at a staggering rate of 2,600 per cent, but the US government helped boost that consumption by decreasing tariffs on this commodity that showed little price elasticity (Topik, 2003). Second, Colombia had already begun to produce coffee in the late nineteenth century, and its quality proved to be higher than Brazil's, the world's largest producer at the time (Palacios, 2002). And third, coffee did not require major investments in technology or infrastructure. Labour costs were low, and it could be produced on small farms and transported by mule to the towns where it was dried and stored (Nieto Arteta, 1971).

Colombian coffee production was concentrated in the Western Andean slopes of the departments of Antioquia, Quindío, and Caldas, which are geographically separated from the capital city of Bogotá.⁵ Despite Colombia's strongly centralised political system, its variegated geography, and poor transportation infrastructure, the coffee regions (particularly Antioquia and its capital Medellín) achieved high economic relevance due to the growing

importance of coffee exports (Bejarano, 2015). Between the 1930s and the early twenty-first century, most of the influential policymakers and businessmen in Colombia originated from the coffee-producing areas rather than from Bogotá (Caballero, 2016). This started a decades-long period in which the national economic policy disproportionately favoured the coffee-producing regions of Colombia (Calvo & Meisel, 1999).

The FNCC and the Colombian economic policy in the 1930s and 1940s

The FNCC was established in 1927 by a group of coffee exporters in the midst of a dramatic fall in international coffee prices. To deal with the crisis, the coffee exporters decided that they needed to create an entity capable of defending the sector, overseeing the implementation of legal provisions affecting the industry, championing cost-reducing measures, improving internal transportation, and promoting Colombian coffee abroad (Junguito & Pizano, 1997). By that time, coffee exports represented around sixty percent of total exports (Grupo de Estudios del Crecimiento Económico (GRECO), 2002), and in fact, between 1923 and 1926 coffee's share in the total value of exports was above 75 percent (Bucheli & Sáenz, 2014).

With the growth of coffee exports, the FNCC and the Colombian government developed a symbiotic relationship. In 1931, facing the challenges of the global Great Depression, the FNCC made a request to the government and the Central Bank that they abandon the gold standard in order to give monetary authorities more room to devalue the currency and thus, increase export income for the coffee industry. Soon afterwards, Colombia abandoned the gold standard and devalued the currency by 10 per cent, in a measure that the FNCC celebrated (Bucheli & Sáenz, 2014). That year, the FNCC was also given a permanent seat on the Central Bank's board of directors (established in 1923) (Fedesarrollo, 1978).

In 1931, the FNCC convinced the government to create an agrarian bank (Caja Agraria) that would provide loans at favourable rates to the agrarian sector (mostly benefitting the coffee industry) and to subsidise 40 per cent of the debt that coffee exporters contracted with the country's main rural mortgage bank. This made it possible for the coffee industry to survive the 1930s with very low levels of debt, while the Caja Agraria was maintained through cash emission from the Central Bank until the 1940s (Cuéllar, 2004). The creation of the Caja Agraria had been proposed by Mariano Ospina Pérez, the congressman for Antioquia who was, at the time, the CEO of the FNCC and later sat on the Caja Agraria's board representing the FNCC (authors' interview with Carlos Caballero, Bogotá, October 5, 2016).⁶ Later, in 1933, the government established multiple exchange rates to protect the coffee sector (authors' interview with Carlos Caballero, Bogotá, October 6, 2015). Multiple exchange rates meant different values of the Colombian peso with respect to other currencies depending on the function of specific transactions. It is worth highlighting, that the government's efforts to aid the coffee sector were developed in the context of the major crisis created by the coincidence of the Great Depression and a dramatic fall in the international price of coffee (Ocampo, 2015). Therefore, it was in the interest of the Colombian government to keep the sector afloat.

The FNCC obtained another important tax benefit in 1940. That year, the government established the National Coffee Fund, financed by the taxes that had been paid by the coffee industry and that had to be spent in the coffee sector. This fund was used to stabilise the internal prices of coffee that the FNCC bought from individual farmers and to finance

warehouses (Palacios, 2002). This meant that the taxes paid by coffee growers were to be reinvested in the coffee industry.

The coffee industry also influenced Colombia's foreign policy, particularly after the start of World War II. Concerned about how the closure of European markets would affect Latin America's political stability, the U.S. called for a conference, after which the Inter-American Coffee Agreement was signed. This agreement guaranteed Colombia a quota of 10 per cent, measured in tons, of all the Latin American coffee exported to the United States (with Brazil obtaining 67 per cent; Inter-American Coffee Agreement, 1941). Originally, the Colombian government was going to send a delegate to the negotiations, but the FNCC firmly opposed this, demanding to be the sole negotiator and eventually achieving this aspiration.⁷ To comply with a final clause of the Inter-American Coffee Agreement that involved storing large quantities of coffee produced in excess of the quota allotted to Colombia, the Colombian government subsidised warehouses as a measure to store coffee and stabilise the price offered to the coffee growers through the National Coffee Fund (Junguito & Pizano, 1997). These arrangements were developed at a time in which Colombia was gradually falling into one of its worst periods of political violence, which unfolded primarily in the countryside (Pecaut, 1987), while simultaneously aiming to develop a manufacturing industrial sector (Ocampo et al., 2015). In this context, the stabilisation of agriculture was crucial to an ever-elusive political stability.

The Cold War subsequently guaranteed a market for coffee producers. Concerned about the potential for rural Communist-inspired revolts, the US and the coffee-producing countries (from Latin America and elsewhere) signed a new deal known as the International Coffee Agreement (ICA) in 1962, by which Colombia obtained a quota of thirteen per cent of the US market (from the fourteen percent it held by then) (Fisher, 1972). The idea was that a quota system would stabilise the markets decreasing the sources of instability in the countryside (Talbot, 2004). When a renegotiation of this agreement took place in 1977, the FNCC again demanded that the Colombian government fire government representatives and leave the negotiations entirely in the hands of the FNCC (authors' interview with Carlos Caballero, Bogotá, October 5, 2015). The Colombian government quickly complied. With a guaranteed US market, the FNCC focussed on promoting the *Café de Colombia* brand articulated around the image the fictitious character of Juan Valdez, created in 1960 (see Figure 1). The ICA was eventually dismantled in 1989.



Figure 1. Federación Nacional de Cafeteros de Colombia, Oficina de Prensa Twitter Page (2022).

The creation of the FNCC conglomerate, 1940s–1980s

Between the 1940s and 1980s, the resources provided by the National Coffee Fund allowed the FNCC to invest in areas directly related to the global coffee value-chain, including a merchant fleet, fertiliser manufacturers, port management firms, warehouses, a railway firm, and international coffee marketing firms. Investments included firms in industries indirectly linked to the global coffee value-chain such as the Banco Cafetero (one of Colombia's major banks and the only firm in which the National Coffee Fund had 100 per cent ownership), a mortgage bank, an agrarian bank, an insurance company, and seven regional investment banks. These institutions were all major players in the Colombian financial sector. Additionally, the organisation owned shares in several forestry firms, sugar mills, and fruit companies. Several of the major firms in which the organisation was a major investor, were in turn major investors in other ventures, such as a major domestic passenger airline and other minor financial institutions. By the early 1990s, the conglomerate built around the FNCC was one of the major business groups in the Colombian economy (García Molina, 2010).

In Table 1 we display the weight of coffee exports relative to Colombian exports of goods for the period between 1908 and 1999. As is clearly shown, during the first three-quarters of the twentieth century, Colombia was highly dependent on coffee exports. However, the predominance of coffee gradually diminished because manufacturing and other commodities accounted for a larger share of the national economy.

The end of the Coffee Republic and the FNCC, 1980s–2010s

During the 1980s and 1990s, Colombia and the global coffee economy experienced dramatic changes that affected the FNCC's operations. First, in 1989, the ICA came to an end after the United States lost interest in keeping this Cold War institution afloat (Engler, 2015). Second, in the late 1980s, a new wave of free-market oriented technocrats assumed influential positions in the Colombian government, some of them with little or no connection to the coffee sector (Caballero, 2016). Third, the importance of coffee exports in the national economy decreased relative to manufacturing and other commodity exports (not necessarily from the traditional coffee-producing regions) (Ocampo & Romero, 2015). Fourth, a series of bankruptcies led to the disappearance of some of the most important financial and transportation corporations belonging to the FNCC conglomerate, leading influential policymakers to believe that this organisation had reached a point of exhaustion ('El ocaso del grupo cafetero', 2013). Fifth, the newly created illegal cocaine trafficking industry destabilised the coffee regions and destroyed their social fabric, turning the previously prosperous and stable Medellín into the world's most dangerous city and generating the conditions for cocaine drug lords to become some of Colombia's most influential political actors (Inter-American Development Bank, 2015). And sixth, in 1991 Colombia adopted a new Constitution which

Table 1. Colombia: Coffee exports as percentage of total exports (nominal US dollars).

Period	Coffee exports (USD millions)	Total exports (USD millions)	Share of coffee on total exports
1908–1924	414	699	59.2%
1925–1949	2,162	3,274	66.0%
1950–1969	7,441	10,447	71.2%
1970–1989	27,797	60,522	45.9%
1990–1999	12,807	71,105	18.0%

Source: GRECO (2002), p. 223.

wrested from the FNCC their representative's seat on the board of the Central Bank, while the government continued to have a representative on the FNCC's board (authors' interview with Miguel Urrutia, Bogotá, October 5, 2015).

This series of events forced the FNCC to adopt desperate measures in an effort to ensure its survival. Its main strategy was to bring the Colombian government on board to, in any and every way possible, negotiate a new quota agreement with both consumer countries and producing countries. Despite the Colombian president's direct involvement in negotiations with his US and Brazilian counterparts, efforts to revive a quota agreement failed spectacularly ('El fin del pacto cafetero', 2013). After ten years of efforts in the early twenty-first century, both the FNCC and the Colombian government realised that it was impossible to reach a new quota agreement. In the interim, subsidies paid for with loans from multilateral institutions kept flowing to the coffee sector to maintain the domestic price paid to coffee growers (Cuéllar, 2004).

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, the Colombian coffee industry faced its most serious challenges in history. The end of ICA led to a drop of more than 50 per cent in the price of coffee with respect to 1989, the size of the *Grupo Cafetero* had been reduced due to previous bankruptcies in the 1980s and 1990s, and its weight in government institutions had decreased (Lopera, 1992). In addition, efforts to make the Juan Valdez brand competitive abroad floundered as most of the international Juan Valdez coffee houses showed dismal financial results ('De la bonanza a la crisis', 2013).

Rhetorical strategies of the FNCC: 'Colombia is coffee'

In this section, we explore the rhetorical strategies developed by the FNCC by focussing on the historical narrative it created about itself. We divide the narratives on the basis of these rhetorical strategies into the following categories: (a) coffee as the industry that brought political and economic stability to the country; (b) the coffee industry as a promoter of democracy; (c) linking the FNCC's operations with myths about the population of the coffee-growing region; (d) equating the fate of the FNCC's operations with the fate of Colombia as a whole.

Narrative of the coffee industry as a source of political and economic stability

Since its inception, the FNCC created a narrative linking the organisation's failure or success with that of the nation. In the process of developing this narrative, the image that the FNCC promoted about itself from its early years was consistent with long-held views of the coffee industry. Since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Colombian intelligentsia praised coffee as a product that could lift Colombia out of the long period of political and economic instability that had followed Independence from Spain in the 1830s (Bergquist, 1978). The rise of the coffee industry in the 1910s and 1920s did indeed put an end to a long period characterised by booms and busts of different commodities. It also unified the Colombian economy, brought about economic stability, and coincided with the longest period in Colombian history of relative peace and political stability (which lasted until the late 1940s) (Ocampo, 2015).

A reading of the FNCC's foundational documents, written in 1927, reveals how its founders appealed to the historical role of coffee by portraying this industry as inaugurating a break

with a previously chaotic history and ushering a period of economic stability and peace.⁸ This rhetoric, as stated above, was consistent with the Colombian reality of the time and specifically dialogued with the contemporary crisis in the global coffee industry. In this sense, the rhetoric deployed in the FNCC's foundational documents reminded the readers of the country's past and the risks Colombia faced should the coffee export industry collapse.

Through the *Revista Cafetera*, the FNCC appealed to the wider audience of farmers growing coffee beans. A very telling address published in that magazine in which the FNCC's president justifies the special relationship between the coffee sector and the Central Bank is worth citing in its entirety:

I am fiscal equilibrium, because customs revenues, which are the axis of our budgets, depend on coffee exports: I am the external credit of the nation and the departments, because the external debts, both public and private, are serviced with the exchange from coffee; I am the Central Bank, because if coffee exports ceased at a given moment, the Central Bank would go bankrupt in less than three months; I represent and sustain the sound monetary system based on the gold standard, the stability of exchange, the possibility of introducing into the country machinery, rails, scientific books, foreign professors, in a word, the civilization of Colombia from the material point of view. (*Revista Cafetera*, January 1931, p. 771)

The 'I' in that quote refers to the FNCC, which is equated to coffee exports and the benefits those exports brought to the nation.

Narrative depicting the coffee industry as promoter of democracy

This section studies how the FNCC articulated and disseminated an image of itself as an organisation that furthered democracy in Colombia's coffee-growing areas. It did so by emphasising the unique characteristics of its organisational structure and by showcasing the social composition of the coffee growing areas.

The FNCC has a unique governance structure that is central to the organisation's motives for developing an inclusive narrative. At the top of the FNCC's structure is the *Congreso Cafetero*, a body composed of 90 people elected as representatives of the Departmental Coffee Committees. What makes the FNCC unique is that the base of its hierarchical pyramid is composed of *cafeteros cedulados*, independent coffee farmers who obtain membership in the organisation as coffee suppliers and who elect the members of the Departmental and Municipal committees (Reina et al., 2007). This membership gives the coffee growers privileged access to technical assistance and credit, among other benefits, but does not preclude non-*cedulado* coffee growers and other members of Colombian society from consuming the public goods offered by the FNCC, such as roads, infrastructure, branding, or, of course, from adopting the historical narratives around coffee and the nation-state.

The FNCC has traditionally highlighted its governance structure as evidence of how democratic the industry and the organisation are. In fact, FNCC literature uses the word 'democracy' to describe the organisation's corporate structure (Reina et al., 2007, p. 103). It emphasises how the FNCC 'empowers' individuals, even those who are not employees of the organisation. The *Revista Cafetera* made efforts to propagate this idea among the coffee growers in articles that portrayed the FNCC as having been 'democratic' from its early days due to its 'cooperativist' structure and its social spending that benefitted small farm holders. In this way, the FNCC legitimised its operations and decisions by portraying them as the result of a consultative and collective process that included the celebrated coffee farmers.

The FNCC backed its claim of promoting democracy in the coffee-growing regions with its own studies. In 1932, the FNCC conducted the first 'coffee census', an initiative aimed at providing the organisation with accurate information about the population and general socio-economic characteristics of the coffee-growing regions. Highlighting their finding that most coffee growers were small farm owners, the analysis of land ownership concluded that this 'truly unexpected data shows how the coffee industry is not only the fundamental and decisive factor of our national economy, but at the same time is also an admirable element of social equilibrium. Given the very nature of its organisation and its exceptionally favourable circumstance of providing adequate and almost permanent employment to women and children, it achieves property division in and of itself, in an automatic fashion, without the need for laws or expropriations' (cited in Farnsworth-Alvear, Palacios, & Gómez López, 2017, p. 484).

The particular governance structure of the FNCC and the narrative the organisation developed around this structure had tangible results. In 1937, the Colombian government attempted to gain control over some of the FNCC's operations. The FNCC strongly opposed the government's initiatives and mobilised peasants to demonstrate against these (Bates, 1997; authors' interview with Carlos Caballero, Bogotá, October 5, 2016).

The FNCC used the narrative around stability and democracy during the International Coffee Agreement negotiations, in which it was Colombia's negotiator. In that context, it brought back the argument—used previously during World War II—that coffee exports were what kept Colombia from falling into political and economic chaos, and that they had prevented the seeds of an eventual Communist revolution from being sown (authors' interview with Eduardo Lora, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, October 16, 2015).

In the following decades, the FNCC, developed the successful motto '*Colombia es café*' ('Colombia is coffee'), disseminating it in its promotional literature, in which it was prominently displayed. *Colombia es café* was also used in Colombian magazine and newspaper ads promoting the FNCC, and in the *Revista Cafetera*. An article in the latter quotes the words of the nineteenth-century liberal politician and intellectual Rafael Uribe Uribe: 'in Colombia everyone is a coffee grower until proven otherwise' (*Revista Cafetera*, 1947, p. 3). The FNCC's strategy consisted in linking its own activities to the very existence of Colombia as a nation-state and portraying them as a precondition for the latter. In this way, the FNCC was developing a narrative around its operations that fit with the narrative that the country's intelligentsia had previously promoted for the nation as a whole.

Narrative linking the FNCC to regional myths: Juan Valdez's values

The FNCC also developed a rhetoric strongly tied to the myths around the coffee-growing regions. This rhetorical strategy was aimed at the country as a whole. The image of the coffee-growing regions as being more 'democratic' and egalitarian than the rest of Colombia is consistent with the portrayal of Antioquia consistently promoted by the region's intelligentsia (López, 1927; Parsons, 1968; Mayor, 1984).⁹ The FNCC took advantage of and promoted a particular myth that already existed in Colombia about the coffee-producing regions to create a non-exclusive narrative. Not only did the FNCC appropriate this myth, but it also even used it in crafting the biographies of the members of the FNCC leadership and framing their decisions. We show how the FNCC equated national and regional traditions with its own and promoted national pride around coffee by linking the fate of the organisation to that of the nation. In this way, a sense of national pride was built around an export

commodity (as studied by Beckman (2013) and López-Alves (2013)) controlled by a particular organisation. Foster et al. (2011) posit that organisations create a tradition by establishing a particular culture crystallised in symbols, important dates, and ‘heroes’. In this section we show how the FNCC manufactured this type of tradition by appealing to the symbols, myths, and heroes related to the Colombian nation-state. In this way, the organisation was able to generate a sense of pride whose reach extended beyond those who worked directly for the organisation and included other citizens of the country. Through this strategy, the organisation was using the specifically non-exclusive character of the narrative to create a public good. We show that the type of culture the FNCC promoted was centred around production rather than consumption, as it was shaped by the role Colombia played in the world markets as a coffee producer.

The coffee-growing areas (particularly Antioquia) have traditionally played an important role in the Colombian imaginary. Since the nineteenth century, the stereotypical image of *antioqueños* portrays them as natural-born entrepreneurs whose work ethic, ambition, and risk-taking attitude stands in contrast to the stereotype associated domestically with the rest of Colombians as timid and risk averse (Dávila, 2012).

This stereotype was reinforced in the twentieth century due to Antioquia’s role as the country’s economic engine, given the region’s importance in Colombia’s coffee exports and the presence of a manufacturing industry in its capital Medellín.

Speculations (often promoted by the *antioqueño* intelligentsia itself) abound in the quest to explain this region’s relative prosperity; these appeal to ethnic factors (unproven Jewish Sephardic or Basque origins; Twinam, 1982), the strong work ethic and independent spirit developed by families who had conquered nature and Indigenous people in order to establish independent farms (Twinam, 1982; Parsons, 1968), the *antioqueños*’ desire to gain status in an unequal society (Hagen, 1963), and their openness to adopting ‘practical’ instead of humanistic knowledge (Safford, 1976). In fact, a classic Colombian economic history book concludes that Colombia succeeded at creating a modern economy in the 1920s because the coffee-linked *antioqueños* had ‘decided so’ (McGreevey, 1975, p. 308)—an interpretation challenged by other scholars (see Echavarría & Villamizar, 2007; interview with Juan José Echavarría, July 12, 2019).

The *antioqueño* elite has not been shy about celebrating this stereotype. Biographies of the main entrepreneurs who had founded or led the FNCC explicitly celebrate their *antioqueño* roots, their childhoods spent on coffee farms, their humble origins, and the work ethic ingrained in them since their early years by austere and entrepreneurial hard-working fathers and pious Catholic mothers (Mayor, 1984). For a country that had long been ruled by a Bogotá elite that despised manual labour, discouraged social mobility, and was more interested in European high culture than in business, the celebration of pragmatic entrepreneurs who embraced rural work broke with existing traditions (Nieto Arteta, 1971; Mayor, 1984).

Two examples illustrate this narrative around identity and values. Biographers of Mariano Ospina Pérez, founder and first president of the FNCC, conservative congressman for Antioquia (1922–1926), and president of Colombia (1946–1950), highlight his non-aristocratic origins, the fact that his father was a self-made man, the work ethic his father instilled in him and his many siblings at an early age on the coffee farm, and the influence of his mother’s strong Catholic faith (Mayor, 1984). Rafael Uribe Uribe, a liberal general who in the late nineteenth century promoted the wide-scale cultivation of coffee across Colombia, was also portrayed by his biographers as an austere and pragmatic individual, always more

concerned with the long-term economic growth and political stability of his country than with the arts and poetry (Bergquist, 1978). The promotion of this image rippled beyond academic studies. Articles in the *Revista Cafetera* published biographies of the FNCC founders that portrayed them as practical, forward-looking, austere men who travelled by foot around the coffee region, worked alongside the coffee growers or had grown up on coffee farms (Chalarca, 1975a, 1975b; Ospina Pérez, 1976; Pastrana, 1997).¹⁰ This strategy appealed to coffee growers, seeking to foster in them a sense of identification with the FNCC leadership and the organisation as a whole (Rodríguez, 1997). Finally, in 1989, the FNCC published a two-volume biography of the organisation's CEO Manuel Mejía (who held that position between 1937 and 1957). The first volume attributes his negotiation skills, work ethic, and patriotism to his *antioqueño* upbringing (Morales Benítez, 1999).

In short, the FNCC linked its own evolution to that of the personal life and individual traits of its leaders, which brought into play a particular stereotype about the inhabitants of the coffee-growing regions. Information unearthed from our archival research in the FNCC's internal documents shows how, between the late 1920s and early 1930s, this organisation developed some initiatives that sought to generate loyalty among coffee farmers along similar lines as those defined by Foster et al. (2011). These included the creation of the *Revista Cafetera*, the composition and adoption of a 'Coffee Anthem' to be taught and sung in schools across the region, the establishment of the *Día del Café* (the Day of Coffee), the organisation of the Coffee Beauty Pageant in which young women from the coffee regions competed, and the publication of different types of reading material, including the *Revista Cafetera* and the popular comic *The Adventures of Professor Yarumo* in the 1980s (Saldías & Jaramillo, 1999).¹¹

The creation of the iconic figure of Juan Valdez in 1960 is part of this celebration of the coffee farmer. It is telling that Juan Valdez does not represent a traditional Latin American peasant working for a large landowner. Rather, he emblematises the small independent entrepreneurial farmer. The fact that Juan Valdez has no Indigenous or African ancestors is not coincidental, because Colombian coffee farmers are located in areas that are traditionally viewed as having a higher proportion of 'white' population in the country (Appelbaum, 1999). The 'whiteness' of Antioquia (and that of its coffee farmers in particular) has traditionally been celebrated and highlighted by the region's intelligentsia, despite the high presence in the region of Indigenous peoples and descendants of African slaves (Wade, 1995).

The character of Juan Valdez was central to the global marketing of Colombian coffee and also came to brand Colombia more broadly (Molleda & Roberts, 2008). For a country with a reputation tainted by its association with cocaine trafficking, the image of an honest, hardworking, humble individual offered a means of promoting pride among coffee growers and Colombians in general (Reina et al., 2007).

Narrative equating the FNCC with Colombia

The FNCC portrayed the defense of the coffee industry as a quasi-patriotic duty. During the 1970s, the FNCC embarked on an expensive campaign to protect Colombian coffee trees from a disease known as 'coffee rust' or *roya*. Billboards located in strategic locations (such as airports or highways) and television ads repeatedly emphasised the message '*Colombia sin roya: un propósito nacional*' (A Colombia without roya: a national goal). These messages summoned the entire Colombian population to defend the industry, depicting this as a patriotic duty that involved everyone in the fate of coffee.

The gradual transformation of this narrative, which projected upon the entire population concerns specific to the FNCC, into a public good is illustrated by its adoption beyond the confines of the FNCC. In the early 1990s, Colombia became a major producer and exporter of soap operas, one of the most successful of which was called *Café: con aroma de mujer* (Coffee: with the scent of a woman) (Medina & Barrón, 2010). This show follows the life of a woman who starts out as a coffee grower on a farm and climbs the ladder of the coffee industry to eventually become a major negotiator for Colombian coffee in international organisations. In her process of social mobility, the protagonist works in all segments of the coffee value chain. *Café* was a global success, shown in 77 countries and dubbed in several languages (Lozano & Mendoza, 2010).

The sports industry is also a site in which strategies are deployed that identify Colombia with coffee on a global scale. In the early 1980s, an underdog Colombian cycling team made headlines because of its surprisingly good performance in the Tour de France. The team was sponsored by the FNCC and all the sportsmen wore a jersey which prominently displayed the Juan Valdez logo and the phrase *Café de Colombia*. The FNCC-sponsored Colombian cycling federation promoted the use of the nickname *los cafeteros* for this team (a nickname adopted by the European sports media) even though most members of the team did not come from coffee-growing regions. Later, for the 2018 World Cup, the Colombian Football Federation designed a jersey for its national team that emulated the type of *poncho* traditionally worn by coffee growers and whose design was similar to that used by Juan Valdez ('La nueva camiseta', 2018). During the tournament, the international sports media nicknamed the Colombian national football team *los cafeteros*. For emerging and underdeveloped countries, these examples are not trivial, as their national pride is often linked to the international success and recognition of domestic sportspeople or entertainers. This echoes Nairn's (1977) interpretation of national pride in peripheral societies.

The FNCC's initiatives to manufacture a coffee culture attest to the organisation's desire to define as its own the type of culture existing in the coffee-growing regions, or to portray itself as the representative of the people living in those areas. As long as the FNCC gained economic power, it invested in areas that typically fell within the purview of the state, such as schools, social programs, or infrastructure (Palacios, 2002), and prominently displayed these initiatives in the *Revista Cafetera*. This means that the coffee farmers' loyalty was not based exclusively on a shared culture, but also on the material benefits derived from conducting business with the FNCC. The FNCC made considerable efforts to include other actors within Colombian society as part of the narrative it promoted. This strategy could backfire once those other actors adopted this narrative as their own particularly when challenging the FNCC, as we show in the following section.

The FNCC's historical narrative as a public good: its adoption by challengers

In this section we show that the narrative created by the FNCC was eventually adopted by other actors in the economy, including those opposing this organisation. By equating its historical narrative with that of the nation-state, the FNCC opened the possibility for all Colombian citizens to identify with that narrative and to believe that they could use it as their own. In this process, the FNCC's narrative became a public good and, as such, impossible to control by the organisation that had originally created it. In this section, we show how different groups used the FNCC's narrative to challenge this organisation, particularly in

instances in which they believed the FNCC was not behaving in accordance with that narrative.

Colombia is (no longer) coffee: the Colombian government and the coffee industry in the post-1989 world

Despite changing global conditions and the country's new orientation towards market-oriented reforms in terms of economic policy in the 1980s, the government showed support for the FNCC's operations during the first post-ICA years. In a telling speech to the FNCC, César Gaviria, the newly elected president (and a champion of liberal market reforms), explicitly resorted to this organisation's narrative. In his speech Gaviria said,

We are facing a challenge of historical proportions. We cannot disappoint our forebears who conquered the mountains by the force of their own axes. They who were wearing only their hat, poncho, and *carriel* [a personal bag widely used by coffee farmers] fought like decent free men against evil forces. (...) Those of us linked to coffee will continue to be attached to our land, working with the same honesty and generosity. That is the only way we will be able to conquer the path towards the great future we want to build for our children. Let's give our children a new opportunity. (Gaviria, 1992)

Gaviria was drawing upon the well-worn image of the pioneers conquering the mountains with their axes. This is clearly borrowed from a phrase used by Alejandro López (a 1920s *antioqueño* intellectual) in which he spoke of the 'struggle between the axe and the official document', when studying (and celebrating) the *antioqueño* pioneers who conquered lands to settle them and establish their family farms during the nineteenth century and to confront larger (and in López's view 'parasitical') landowners who used legal tricks in attempting to take over the farmers' hard-won land (López, 1927). This image is also closely connected to what many articles in the *Revista Cafetera* reiterated for decades in statements such as '[Colombia] depends on the calloused hands of coffee growers. Where do all the resources for the manufacturing industry come from? How do we pay for the imported components of our car industry? (...) We owe that to all of those sweaty coffee growers who work in the Colombian mountains with their calloused hands' (López Michelsen, 1978, p. 68). At the time he wrote this article, Alfonso López Michelsen was president of Colombia.

The context of Gaviria's message is crucial to understanding his use of the FNCC's narrative. The speech did not aim to defend the FNCC's privileges, but to announce to the organisation that it would not be able to continue to rely on state support in the coming years and that the FNCC needed the skills acquired over decades to compete in the new globalised world. In short, in the president's speech the FNCC's own narrative was used to justify the end of the status quo.

Juan Valdez rebels: coffee strikes and the FNCC's loss of historical legitimacy

In February 2012, a large group of coffee farmers created a parallel organisation known as *Movimiento por la Defensa y Dignidad de los Cafeteros Colombianos* (Movement for the Dignity and Defense of the Colombian Coffee Growers, hereafter *Dignidad*) to protest the plans of the FNCC and the Colombian government to increase the share of these farmers' mandatory contribution to the National Coffee Fund. The protesting farmers considered that the terms of agreement between the FNCC and the government were detrimental to coffee farmers

but beneficial for the FNCC leadership and the central government. By late 2012, *Dignidad* threatened to go on strike and they and their sympathisers used the narrative about the coffee industry that the FNCC had crafted and harnessed for decades, intentionally linking it to the wider narrative about the Colombian nation-state, and the promises of economic development around coffee. This shows how the non-exclusionary narrative created by the FNCC eventually became a public good liable of being used by those identifying either with the coffee industry and the Colombian nation-state.

By early February 2013, a strike of the coffee farmers seemed imminent. Both the FNCC and the Colombian government made efforts to delegitimize *Dignidad*, arguing that it did not officially represent the coffee farmers. Once the strike started, it quickly became violent, but it nevertheless received support from representatives on opposing sides of the political spectrum. The leaders of the communist FARC guerrillas reminded the president that, in his inaugural speech, he had promised to turn every Colombian farmer into a 'prosperous and smiling Juan Valdez', and asked rhetorically, 'Where is this fairy-tale Juan Valdez?', while former right-wing president and staunch anti-FARC politician Alvaro Uribe expressed his 'unconditional support' for the strikers ('Uribe y "Márquez" en apoyo al paro cafetero', 2013).

During the 2013 strike, the FNCC and *Dignidad* launched mutual accusations of illegitimacy. The *Dignidad* leaders rejected the agreement between the FNCC and the government, arguing that only the elites had participated in it, while the FNCC used its historical role as representative of every level of the coffee industry to defend its legitimacy (Cruz-Rodríguez, 2013). Images used in the *Dignidad* demonstrations contrasted poor farmers with rich FNCC officials (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Banner contrasting poor farmers with rich FNCC officials (2013 Coffee Strike). Source: Movimiento Dignidad Cafetera (2013).

In a very telling interview with a striking coffee farmer, the farmer repeats how a 'blood-sucking' FNCC had funnelled the 'fruit of [his] labour' in useless investments in a conglomerate that had not benefitted the farmers, even though for 'more than 80 years the farmers had created wealth and economic growth in Colombia', immediately after which he bursts into tears in front of the camera (Salmón Urbano [SALMONURBANOTV], 2013).

The strikers also used images linked to the early champions of the coffee industry. Some strikers' banners quoted the nineteenth-century liberal politician Rafael Uribe Uribe who, in 1888, invoked the historical vulnerability and uncertainty of international coffee prices to advocate for government support for the coffee growers (see Figure 3). A study on the strikers' narrative shows a striking resemblance between it and the narrative promoted by the FNCC decades earlier, as the strikers equated their cause (and fate) to the fate of the country as a whole and maintained that defending their interests was a patriotic duty (Cruz, 2014). Demonstrators also used the iconic image of Juan Valdez, this time portraying him as an impoverished farmer and victim of the FNCC's greed (see Figures 4 and 5). In March 2013, the Colombian government yielded to the strikers by creating a commission that included a *Dignidad* member to study the state of the industry. The commission's final report was critical of the FNCC (Echavarría et al., 2014), but the FNCC remained the most important organisation in the Colombian coffee industry.

In sum, the coffee strikers of 2013 and those supporting them made heavy use of a particular historical narrative promoted by the FNCC. The narrative became a public good (especially because it was also related to the Colombian national identity) that was used to dissent from and oppose the FNCC.



Figure 3. Coffee strike, 2013.
Source: Movimiento Dignidad Cafetera (2013).



Figure 4. Coffee striker using the Juan Valdez logo in 2013. The text reads 'See the face, don't know the coffee', relating to the popular adage 'See the face, don't know the heart'. Source: Romero (2013).



Figure 5. Use of the Juan Valdez image during the 2013 coffee strike. Source: 'Cauca y Popayán, en crisis por paro cafetero' (2013).

Conclusion

This paper uses the concept of a public good to study the rhetorical strategies of Colombia's Coffee Growers Federation (FNCC) between the 1920s and 2013. We show how the FNCC developed a narrative about itself that linked its operations to the fate of the Colombian nation. In this process, the FNCC made use of myths about and symbols of Colombia and equated its rise with the consolidation of a national economy and the insertion of Colombia in global markets. The limits of this rhetorical strategy, however, came to light when groups challenging the power of the FNCC appropriated the organisation's narrative. These groups considered that their use of this narrative was legitimate because they also belonged to the Colombian nation-state. The paper shows the benefits of integrating economic concepts with the literature on rhetorical strategies from organisation studies for business historical studies of organisations with disproportionate influence in their countries' political economy.

Notes

1. Economists have shown how the study of narratives is useful to understand economic phenomena. For instance, McCloskey (2016) argues that the process of modern economic growth during the European Renaissance was partially the result of a new set of ethics backed by a particular rhetoric. Shiller (2019) maintains that narratives that diffuse widely in the society (or "go viral" in his words) shape the social understanding of major economic events such as market bubbles or crucial technological innovations.
2. Terrell (2016) shows that Wilson has been misquoted, because the wider context of this statement has been ignored.
3. Despite its publication date, for an excellent historiographical review on the Colombian coffee industry see Bejarano (1980). For a review of the works covering the following three decades see Ramírez-Bacca (2010).
4. Robles-Báez (2022) shows how the creation of a coffee market in the United States was the outcome of political negotiations between the American and Brazilian governments in the nineteenth century.
5. Since the nineteenth century, political subunits in Colombia are known as departments.
6. Mariano Ospina Pérez was elected president of Colombia for the 1946-1950 term.
7. FNCC, Congreso Nacional Cafetero, Acta No. 1 (Secret Session), November 25 1940; Acta No. 3, November 3, 1940. FNCC Archive.
8. FNCC, Comité Nacional, Actas, Acuerdos y Resoluciones, 1927-1928, Session of August 11 of 1927, FNCC Archive.
9. For challenges to this portrayal see Arango (1982), Machado (1988), and Palacios (2002). Posada-Carbó (2012) posits that even though the coffee regions were not as egalitarian as the *antioqueño* elite maintained, the coffee industry certainly helped to create a more "democratic" and egalitarian society in the coffee regions in contrast to the rest of Colombia.
10. The authors of two of these articles (Ospina Pérez, [1976] and Pastrana, [1997]) were elected president of Colombia for the 1946-1950 and 1998-2002 terms respectively.
11. FNCC, Comité Nacional: Actas, Acuerdos y Resoluciones (1927-1928). Various meetings.

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