

# THE COLOMBIA READER

HISTORY, CULTURE, POLITICS



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## The Colombia Reader



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*Ann Farnsworth-Alvear, Marco Palacios,  
and Ana María Gómez López, editors*

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# Introduction

Colombians struggle to describe their nation in ways that will be true to a kaleidoscopic reality. Multiple generations have despaired of fratricidal cycles of violence. Criminal impunity and corruption are endemic. Deep divisions persist. Yet the country is modern, with a well-functioning financial sector, a good urban infrastructure, and a sophisticated, if unequal, health system. Colombian jurists have a reputation for thoughtfulness and innovation. The nation's libraries and museums are beacons of culture and of optimism about the nation's future. Through recent decades marked by war, Colombian artists, musicians, and writers have produced enduring works and gained an international audience.

This emphasis on multiplicity and contradiction will be familiar to many who know Colombia. The country is very regionally distinct, and our aim in part I is to introduce readers to the mental map Colombians have in their minds when they project their own lives onto the canvas of nationhood. Just as educated New Yorkers imagine themselves as living within a nation that includes the history of New England's fisheries, Mark Twain's stories about the Mississippi River, and Wyoming's wide expanses, so residents of Bogotá look eastward and know that on the other side of the mountains lie broad plains, home to a tradition analogous to that of the Argentine pampa, or the ranching land of northern Mexico, and similarly described in song and story. Bogotanos also think themselves westward, across Andean peaks sometimes visible from the city itself, still snow-topped in the present but likely to lose their snow in coming generations. Their "West" extends first toward the ports of the Magdalena River, the country's transport artery and a symbol of layered cultural forms in music and dance, and second to the Cauca River Valley and the rainforest regions of the country's Pacific lowlands. Well-read city dwellers have in their minds images created by famous writers such as José Eustacio Rivera, Jorge Isaacs, and Candelario Obeso. Similarly, families in cities such as Medellín and Cali understand their nation as including Caribbean traditions that they might experience by taking a long bus trip northward, or perhaps by reading a novel by Gabriel García Márquez, as well as an Amazonian expanse that they are more likely to see





Map of Colombia

on television or in the 2015 Oscar-nominated film by Ciro Guerra, *Embrace of the Serpent*, than to visit by flying to Colombia's southernmost region. Conversely, the geographic awareness that teachers communicate to schoolchildren in Buenaventura, a port city on the Pacific Coast, or Leticia, the regional capital of Amazonas department, is one that involves a view from the periphery toward the cities of the nation's interior—vastly different in their built environment than what people in faraway provinces or departments would find familiar.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, in the present a palpable sense of nation links Colombians to one another. Knit together by a thriving media industry and by mandated school curricula, people know that they live in a large and diverse nation.

Colombians also know that their country boasts stunning natural beauty and a system of national parks. The diversity of climates produced by the country's wide range of altitudes yields rich terrestrial, aquatic, and marine ecosystems: jungles, savannas, deserts, wetlands, and beaches, sometimes a few miles from each other, hold abundant natural resources and thousands of unique animal and plant species. Yet many of these areas have long been largely off-limits for Colombians—remote areas of the country have been sites of gruesome violence, where unmarked graves mark the extent of the country's bloodshed.

Generations of Colombians have lived with this sense that their country holds terrible dangers. For some, that has meant restrictions on their mobility; for others, it has meant that the direct threat of violence has made staying in their homes impossible. At present, more than 5.7 million Colombians—over 15 percent of the country—have been internally displaced by the country's long-standing violence, and almost four hundred thousand have been made refugees beyond the country's borders. The nation has perhaps only recently begun to recognize itself in talk of reparations for victims and for refugees, but conflict in Colombia extends far back into the country's shared memory. Like the United States and Mexico, Colombia experienced devastating mid-nineteenth-century wars, with political consequences that stretched into the twentieth century. Of these, the War of the Thousand Days (*La Guerra de los Mil Días*), fought between Liberals and Conservatives from 1899 to 1903, was by far the bloodiest. Twenty-five years later, a terrible labor massacre in 1928, in which soldiers sent from the interior opened fire on striking banana workers, generated long years of recriminations. The *Masacre de las Bananeras* serves as a symbolic historical milestone for many Colombians, and, as with the War of the Thousand Days, diverging interpretations of 1928 colored political life for decades afterward.

The 1940s and 1950s are known by the term “*La Violencia*,” which is used

to describe what amounted to an undeclared war between Liberals and Conservatives. The human cost of La Violencia was enormous, with over 250,000 dead and scores of displaced families. Scholars tend to take the assassination of Liberal presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán on April 9, 1948, as the event that triggered twenty years of extreme bipartisan carnage. The two political parties were heterogeneous in their makeup: Conservatives included Catholics sympathetic to a Falangist view of the world as well as those closer to a nineteenth-century kind of aristocratic authoritarianism, while Liberals ranged from anticommunist anglophiles and admirers of the United States' New Deal to socialists of various stripes.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Colombian politics were thoroughly permeated by the divisions of the Cold War, although the country avoided the outright dictatorship seen in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. Colombia remained formally democratic, with Liberals and Conservatives trading power in a famous pact called the National Front (el Frente Nacional). La Violencia did not so much end as transform itself. Large sectors of the Colombian population found themselves excluded from formal politics. For some historians, that exclusion is part of why the National Front years saw the formation of the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) and the smaller ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional), along with a set of still-smaller leftist armies, such as the M-19 (Movimiento 19 de Abril) and the EPL (Ejército Popular de Liberación), who together became what Colombians raised in the 1980s and 1990s simply called *la guerrilla*.

But by the beginning of the twenty-first century, the ideological divisions of earlier generations no longer provided much ground for understanding why so much blood was being spilled in Colombia. During the 1980s, it became clear that the violence Colombians lived with was about the drug trade as much as anything else. Paramilitary groups proliferated; later, a set of these right-wing groups joined to become the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia or Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC). Financed by mafia leaders and often working in concert with the Colombian military, the *paras*, as they came to be known, declared war on guerrilla groups and their perceived supporters. By the end of the twentieth century, all sides were getting their war chests from the United States, whether as "dirty money" earned in the drug trade or as direct military and police aid, which added up to nearly \$7 billion from the US government between 2000 and 2010. Reformists hailing from many different political positions often agreed with an idea expressed by García Márquez: "The Colombian drama is such that, to be exact, it is not possible to imagine that an end will be put to drug-trafficking, without consumption being legalized." Yet international politics

meant that decriminalizing drugs was not something the country could attempt on its own. Only after 2000 did a coalition of Latin American governments emerge to challenge the so-called war on drugs, with Colombian policy makers (and peace negotiators) taking a leading role.

Today, Colombians from different political backgrounds tend to agree that the high profits generated by illegal drugs made the violence of the last three decades exponentially worse. The flow of cocaine northward was met by a flow of arms southward, including pistols and assault rifles made in the United States and smuggled illegally into Colombia. Through the worst years, homicides averaged nine per day, giving Colombia the highest per capita murder rate in the world, in a context where murders were underreported. As evidence has emerged of clandestine cemeteries, especially in rural areas, the scale of such atrocities has become clearer. In Colombia, killings that occurred within the frame of guerrilla and counterinsurgency warfare have included scores of civilians, murdered by military, paramilitary, and guerrilla forces alike. In one egregious set of scandals, signaled by the phrase “false positives,” hundreds of young men were killed and their corpses presented by military commanders as evidence that guerrillas had been killed in combat. Yet many deaths continue to be linked in some way to the ongoing competition among drug trafficking organizations—all of them with ties to criminal networks in the cocaine-importing economies of the United States, Europe, and Brazil.

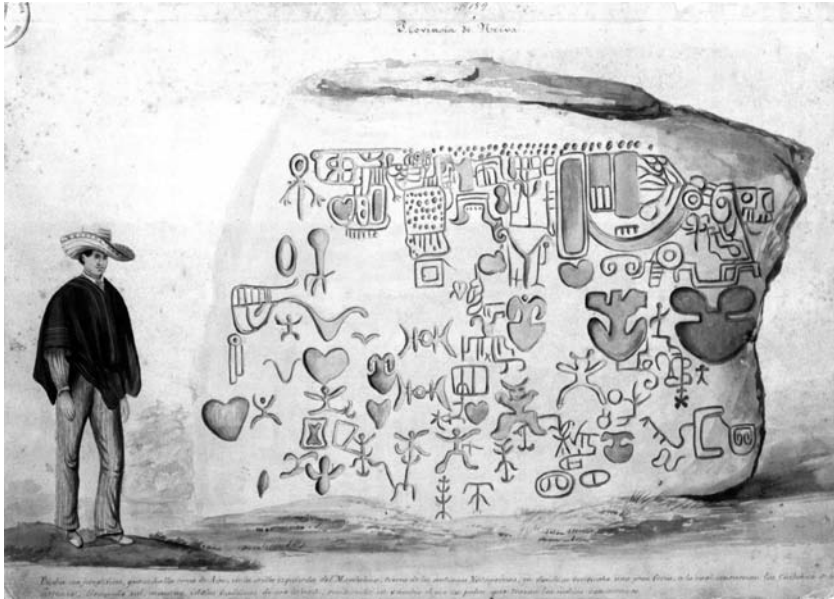
As was true in the nineteenth century and through the 1960s, the conflicts of recent memory have hit the rural poor hardest. Most displaced Colombians are poor, as are most of those conscripted into military service—and the national army depends very heavily on conscription. Paramilitary and guerrilla organizations, too, have long depended on forced recruitment, often of minors. Families in the countryside have been torn apart by paramilitary, military, and guerrilla violence. They have supplied a disproportionate share of the rank-and-file soldiers on all sides of the war—there are few educational opportunities and few jobs in the Colombian countryside. Nor was going to the cities an option that would necessarily benefit campesinos: those who fled to urban areas often lost effective title to their land in the process—decades of war have meant decades of dispossession. And hidden within the statistics on dispossession and displacement are estimates of destruction wrought by land mines: close to ten thousand wounded and two thousand killed over the past twenty-five years. Colombian smallholders who plant and harvest still exist, and wage labor remains a possibility on large ranches and farms that produce food (as well as coffee and flowers) both for the domestic market and for export. But rural earnings are low.

Even the minority of Colombian farmers who have planted coca have failed to find a path out of poverty. Producers of leaf garner none of the high profits that smugglers of the finished product can expect from cocaine.

Like people in the countryside, those in city neighborhoods have suffered from the long decades of violence. Apart from the criminal use of “false positives,” people in city neighborhoods have long been familiar with gang violence and the horrible Orwellian language of “social cleansing,” used to describe death squads’ attacks on homeless individuals, drug users, homosexuals, and prostitutes living in marginal neighborhoods. Colombian cities have also been the site of mafia-led violence: car bombs, explosions, and assassinations of public figures in broad daylight during the 1980s and 1990s have left memories that linger for those who live in Bogotá, Cali, and Medellín. Wealthy people and middling landowners living in these and smaller cities have also lived with the risk of kidnapping: for the better part of the last few decades, the country’s kidnapping rates have remained the highest in the world.

Colombia has seen multiple attempts at peace talks and judicial mechanisms for amnesty that have generally yielded disappointing results. In 1999–2002, Colombian president Andrés Pastrana Arango attempted formal negotiations with the FARC. The failure of that process created a high level of disillusion, which helped give Pastrana’s successor, Álvaro Uribe Vélez, an electoral mandate for the hardline approach that became his trademark. Praising the sacrifices made by military personnel and their families, Uribe convinced a majority of voters that an uncompromising approach toward defeating the FARC would improve their lives. The army went on the offensive, and several FARC leaders were killed in military raids that severely weakened the guerrillas. Parallel to that military push, and embracing slogans such as “Colombia Es Pasión” (Colombia Is Passion), Uribe and his government worked to increase domestic vacationing, international tourism, and foreign investment. Winning the war was conceived as a package that included state services, productivity, and leisure. Uribe’s supporters praise his passion and his emphasis on security, and they credit him with “retaking” large swaths of the country.

Uribe remained popular even as evidence mounted that the Colombian Army was colluding with death squads and that he had authorized illegal surveillance and wiretapping by Colombia’s DAS, or Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad (then Colombia’s counterpart to the FBI). Scandals involving politicians from his administration and from political parties that supported Uribe pointed to paramilitary influence in local, regional, and national political offices. Because Uribe’s opponents alleged that the presi-



Manuel María Paz, *Piedra del Aipe*, 1857. Watercolor. In the 1850s, Colombia's first geographic commission, the Comisión Corográfica, was charged with describing the nation's natural history, geography, and regional culture. Led initially by Italian cartographer Agustín Codazzi (see part VI), this group of military officers, engineers, scientists, artists, and researchers covered twelve thousand kilometers of difficult terrain, largely aided by anonymous assistants and local guides. Manuel María Paz produced this sketch of petroglyphs in southwestern Colombia, near the headwaters of the Magdalena River. These watercolors represent some of the first efforts to document pre-Columbian petroglyphs. Many such petroglyphs are visible in the present; others have been defaced or are severely deteriorated. In Agustín Codazzi, *Obras completas de la Comisión Corográfica*, vol. 2 (COAMA-Unión Europea, 2005), 218.

dent and those close to him benefited from tight links to paramilitary commanders, the way his administration managed what Colombians called the Law of Justice and Peace (Ley de Justicia y Paz)—a demobilization process that disbanded paramilitary units and allowed their “reinsertion” into Colombian society—was deeply divisive. A legal struggle ensued over whether or not paramilitary actors who had participated in massacres and crimes against humanity would face prosecution in Colombian courts.

Uribe's successor, Juan Manuel Santos Calderón, who had been Uribe's defense minister, took attempts at peace in a new direction. Breaking with his former boss, Santos put political capital into negotiating with the FARC and thus pushed Colombia toward the path traced by those countries that

have produced truth commissions, official human rights reports, and systems by which those victimized by all armed groups receive reparations. One important by-product of the negotiations undertaken by the Santos administration was that Colombians as a whole were reminded of the human cost produced by generations of war. Victims' families gained a platform from which to address perpetrators of violence, although what they have come forward to say still tends to fall along the political fault lines that separate Colombians from one another. There is more recognition extended and more participation by victims in public debates, yet assassinations, forced displacement, and death threats against activists pushing for social change remain frequent.

Just how deep the political divide remains was clear in 2016. On September 26, in the port city of Cartagena, the Santos administration and the FARC signed a peace accord, rooted in the 2012 text excerpted in part VII. It had taken six years to negotiate, and the final text was almost three hundred pages long. To go forward, the 2016 accord had to be approved by Colombia's 34 million voters in a historic plebiscite. On October 2 the "yes" option lost by a very slim margin, with former president Uribe positioning himself as a leader for the "no" option. Nevertheless, President Santos was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize only days afterward. What remained unclear after the vote, however, was what the 63 percent of voters who simply did not cast ballots thought about the peace process, the accords, or the plebiscite.

But the Colombian story is not only one of war or of failed attempts at peace. As in past generations, Colombians often insist on this and demand that outsiders focus on the good. Nineteenth-century travelers who wrote about trips to Colombia emphasized the country's backwardness and its supposed lack of entrepreneurial spirit. They bemoaned the discomforts of the river steamers and mule trains that connected Colombian cities. Nevertheless, their writings also demonstrate that local people took them to see colorful markets, beautiful waterfalls, town plazas, and valuable colonial paintings. At the turn of the twentieth century, local boosters were taking better-off travelers to see carefully designed villas, new coffee plantings, perhaps a recently built electrical plant. "Don't show only the bad" became an injunction that would result in a visiting scientist, student, investor, or family member being escorted to view the good. By the 1950s, a well-connected guest might be taken to a fully outfitted country club or an efficient new factory employing thousands of neatly clad workers. In the present, local landscapes of modernity—experienced in terms of "the good"—include gleaming new supermarkets and malls, as well as city-specific markers. Medellín's centrally located Barefoot Park, for example,



served by the city's above-ground Metro, symbolizes the city's comeback, allowing a wide cross-section of rich and poor to splash together in carefully policed abandon. When rich families host travelers, they have recourse to the pricey, landscaped *fincas* that ring Colombia's biggest cities. Those with less money may take visitors along on bus trips to water-based family theme parks or to provincial music festivals. Across the lines that divide them (lines of class, rural vs. urban experience, or whether or not recent violence has resulted in family tragedy), Colombians cherish whatever opportunities they have to enjoy the country's beauty and their own capacity for wholesome fun—both unequivocally components of “the good.”

Thus Colombians recognize themselves in images of violence and narratives of victimization, but they also recognize themselves in the modern, consumer-centered world of the nation's cities—a world of art galleries, entertainment events, and well-stocked department stores. Representing Colombia effectively means pushing past the drug-fueled conflicts that have dominated international media reports in recent decades. In assembling a volume that traces five centuries, we have attempted to offer both breadth and depth. Each thematic part includes texts that provide a glimpse of the social structures that shaped the colonial period and the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Readers have the opportunity to hear voices from different generations describe culture and politics in the spaces they recognized as Colombia. These include the mule paths of the Andean highlands, the platinum-rich tributaries of the San Juan, the lowlands of the Pacific Coast, the rubber-producing Amazon, and soccer stadiums all over the world. We have included conquistadors, friars, and ex-slaves who freed themselves by running away—and who revealed little about themselves when recaptured—as well as politicians, entrepreneurs, trade unionists, soldiers, poets, and activists for indigenous rights. Throughout, we have tried to pay tribute to the creativity with which Colombians have endeavored to describe what they see before them in the layered human world of a beautiful country.

#### Note

1. What were at different times called “provinces” and sometimes “states” in Colombia are now departments. Designations such as “territories,” “intendancies,” or *comisarias* have also been used at different times for subregions that did not have the political level of departments. Additionally, the city now known as Bogotá was originally called Santa Fe, then Santafé. Because this anthology includes texts from across the centuries, readers can expect to see a variety of terms.





## *Human Geography*

Boasting Andean peaks, a port on the Amazon River, and coasts along both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, Colombia's unique interrelation of climate, elevation, and topography creates sharply distinct regional and cultural differentiation. One way to sketch a simplified map of regions and subregions is to trace five broad areas:

1. Colombia's Caribbean: This is bisected by the Magdalena River; it extends westward to Panama and eastward to the Guajira peninsula and Venezuela.
2. The Eastern Cordillera: Known in the colonial period as El Reino (The Kingdom), this refers to a large region that coheres in cultural terms and includes Cundinamarca, Boyacá, the Santanderes, Huila, and Tolima—even though the last two are not part of the eastern mountains.
3. Oriente: The eastern grasslands, known as los Llanos, transition to the South into the Colombian Amazon. The grasslands and Amazonia are very different, but together they form a borderlands region that connects Colombia to Venezuela and the Orinoco watershed, as well as to northwestern Brazil.
4. Occidente: This complex area must be understood as a set of subregions: first, what Colombians will refer to as Greater Cauca, which includes the political departments of Cauca and Valle de Cauca and is often understood in reference to the cities of Popayán and Cali; second, a broad zone culturally bound by its having been an agricultural frontier in the late nineteenth century, including most of what are now the political departments of Antioquia, Caldas, Risaralda, and Quindío; third, the southernmost mountains, culturally rooted in an Andean indigenous experience that cuts across Colombia's borders with Ecuador and Peru.

5. The Pacific Lowlands: Colombia's long Pacific coast, from Panama to the Ecuadorian border and from the westernmost foothills of the Andes down to the sea, is associated with riches, in the form of enormous biodiversity and huge quantities of exported gold and platinum, as well as with immense poverty.

Texts in this introductory part provide glimpses of the historical, cultural, and political patterns that tie Colombian regions to a shared idea of "nation." We include extracts of well-known pieces, such as Jiménez de Quesada's chronicle of his conquest of what he named "New Granada," and José Eustasio Rivera's famous descriptions of the Colombian Amazon. Yet our geographic overview cuts in unusual directions as well—toward a cultural imaginary that stretches from attempts to recover pre-Columbian mythic spaces to New York City and the World Cup, myths in themselves.

## Ahpikondía

Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff

*Indigenous peoples' knowledge of the rich biodiversity of Colombia's ecosystems has long enabled their cultural survival. Communities survived against violent colonial systems of control and then against development projects and natural resource exploitation in the national period. Today, eighty-five indigenous communities make up approximately 1.5 percent of the population and live in arid deserts, littoral mangrove swamps, tropical rainforests, and high-altitude grasslands. Their survival has depended on organized projects of self-affirmation and resistance, such as the political struggle that resulted in Colombia's 1991 Constitution, which officially recognizes cultural and ethnic diversity and cedes 25 percent of the country's national territory to indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. Although its implementation is riddled with complications, this legal achievement provided official acknowledgment of land as a foundational principle for indigenous and Afro-Colombian worldviews—something activists insisted on as the Constitution was drafted.*

*The compilation, transcription, and publication of indigenous oral tradition began as a colonial project and has been continued by local and foreign anthropologists since the early twentieth century, and Austro-Colombian Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff (1912–94) has been a key figure. He became a Colombian citizen in 1942 and with his wife, Alicia Dussán, conducted pioneering ethnographic fieldwork among several indigenous groups, as well as archaeological excavations of pre-Columbian artifacts nationwide. Later generations of anthropologists have debated his legacy and his understandings. For example, his version of a Tukano narration about Ahpikondía, which some take as an underworld paradise and others understand as the Milky Way, may reflect the interest Reichel-Dolmatoff and his generation took in creation myths more than it describes a deep cosmovision for indigenous people living along the Vaupés River. Reichel-Dolmatoff often worked in contexts where indigenous people exercised little power, as in the Vaupés, and the narrations he collected reflect cultural influences that were more diverse than he let on, given that he wrote about indigenous communities that had been targeted by missionaries and military recruiters. Ahpikondía and other invisible geographies are by now products of modern Colombia—a nation that has an anthropological*

*sense of itself and that increasingly recognizes an inheritance that includes multiple creation stories.*

The Sun had created the earth with its animals and plants, but there were still no people. Now he decided to people the earth, and for this he made a man of each tribe of the Vaupés; he made a Desana and a Pira-Tapuya, a Uanano, a Tuyuka, and others, one from each tribe. Then, to send the people to the earth, the Sun made use of a being called *Pamurí-mahsë*. He was a man, a creator of people, whom the Sun sent to people the earth. *Pamurí-mahsë* was in *Ahpikondia*, and he set forth from there in a large canoe. It was a live canoe, in reality a large snake that swam on the bottom of the river. This Snake-Canoe was called *pamurí-gahsírú*, and its skin was painted yellow and had stripes with black diamonds. On the inside, which was red, sat the people: a Desana, a Pira-Tapuya, a Uanano, one from each tribe. Together with the Snake-Canoe came the fish; but they were not in the inside but outside, in the gills; the crabs also came, attached to the rear. It was a very long journey, and the Snake-Canoe was going up the river because *Pamurí-mahsë* was going to establish mankind at the headwaters. Whenever they arrived at a large rapids, the Snake-Canoe made the waters rise in order to pass by and caused the torrent to be calm. Thus they went on for a long time, and the people became very tired.

At that time night did not yet exist, and so they traveled in the light, always under the yellow light of the Sun. When the first men set forth, the Sun had given each one something, some object, for him to carry carefully. To one of them he had given a small, black purse, closed tightly, and now, with the journey being so long, the man looked inside the purse. He did not know what was inside. He opened it, and suddenly a multitude of black ants came out of the purse, so many that they covered the light, making everything dark. This was the First Night. *Pamurí-mahsë* gave to each man a firefly in order to light his way, but the light was very weak. The ants multiplied, and the men tried to invoke them to return to the purse, but at that time they did not know about invocations. Then the Sun Father himself descended and with a stick beat the purse and made the ants enter it again. But those which did not obey remained in the forest and made their anthills. From that time on there have been ants. Once the ants were inside the purse, the light returned; but since then night has come into existence. This was the First Night, *nyamí mengá*, the Night of the Ant, and the man who had opened the purse was called *nyamíri mahsë*, Man of Night.

So they continued on in the Snake-Canoe, but when they arrived at *Ipanoré*, on the Vaupés River, they struck against a large rock near the bank.

The people went ashore because they were tired of the long journey and thought that they had already reached their destination. They left by way of an opening at the prow of the canoe. *Pamurí-mahsë* did not want them to disembark there because he was thinking of taking them to the headwaters of the rivers, and therefore he stopped up the opening with his foot. But the people had already got out, having rushed from the Snake-Canoe; they were dispersing throughout the rivers and the forests. But before they got away, *Pamurí-mahsë* gave each one of them the objects they had brought from *Ahpikondιά* and that, from then on, were going to indicate the future activities of each tribe. He gave a bow and arrow to the Desana; to the Tukano, the Pira-Tapuya, Vaiyára, and the Neéroa he gave a fishing rod; to the Kuripáko he gave the manioc grater; he gave a blowgun and a basket to the Makú and a mask of barkcloth to the Cubeo. He gave a loincloth to each one, but to the Desana he gave only a piece of string. He pointed out the places where each tribe should live, but when he was about to indicate the future home of the Desana, this one had fled to seek refuge at the headwaters. The Uanano had also gone and went up to the clouds in the sky. Then *Pamurí-mahsë* entered the Snake-Canoe again and returned to *Ahpikondιά*.

The Sun created the various beings so that they would represent him and serve as intermediaries between him and the earth. To these beings he gave the duty of caring for and protecting his Creation and of promoting the fertility of life.

First the Sun created *Emëkóri-mahsë* and *Diroá-mahsë* and put them in the sky and in the rivers so that, from there, they could protect the world. *Emëkóri-mahsë* is the Being of Day, and his job is to set down all the norms, the rules, and the laws according to which the spiritual life of human beings should develop. *Diroá-mahsë*, who is the Being of Blood, is in charge of all that is corporeal, all that is connected with health and the good life. Then he created *Vihó-mahsë*, the Being of *Vihó*, the hallucinogenic powder, and ordered him to serve as an intermediary so that through hallucinations people could put themselves in contact with all the other supernatural beings. The powder of *vihó* itself had belonged to the Sun who had kept it hidden in his navel, but the Daughter of the Sun had scratched his navel and had found the powder. While *Emëkóri-mahsë* and *Diroá-mahsë* always represent the principle of good, the Sun gave *Vihó-mahsë* the power of being good and evil and put him in the Milky Way as the owner of sickness and witchcraft.

Then the Sun created *Vai-mahsë*, the Master of Animals. There are two beings called *Vai-mahsë*, one for the animals of the forest and the other for the fish. The Sun assigned to each one the places where he ought to live; one was given a large maloca inside the rocky hills of the forest, and the other a

large maloca at the bottom of the waters of the rapids. He put them there so that they could watch over the animals and their multiplication. Together with the *Vai-mahsë* of the waters, the Sun put *Vai-bogó*, the Mother of Fish. The Sun also created *Wuá*, the Owner of Thatch, the owner of the palm leaves that are used to make the roofs of the malocas.

Then the Sun created *Nyamikëri-mahsë*, the Night People, and put them in the Dark Region to the west of *Ahpikondiá*. To them he gave the job of serving as intermediaries for witchcraft and sorcery, because the Sun did not create only the principle of good but also of evil, to punish mankind when it did not follow the customs of tradition.

Then the Sun created the jaguar so that he would represent him in this world. He gave him the color of his power and gave him the voice of thunder that is the voice of the Sun; he entrusted him to watch over his Creation and to protect it and take care of it, especially of the malocas. The Sun created all these beings so that there would be life in this world.

# Photographs of Indigenous People

Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff

*An important part of Reichel-Dolmatoff's legacy is found in his published photographs of indigenous people. For communities in the present, grandparents or great-grandparents are sometimes recognizable in such images, and activists today have a complicated relationship with the visual record left by anthropologists. On the one hand, a beautiful and enduring image may be one way to document the skills and autonomy of previous generations. On the other, these are photographs that testify to the power of the outsider. An indigenous person might or might not have given permission for an image to be circulated, and they might or might not have been credited by name in any given publication.*

*In the current generation, indigenous activists in Colombia are sophisticated about the political implications of self-representation. They mobilize resources to produce photography, television segments, and documentaries that would have been impossible to create a generation ago. A minority group of professionally trained indigenous people work as anthropologists, writers, photographers, videographers, and documentary filmmakers. They struggle to create representations that respond to a community's sense of itself, but they are aware that heterogeneous viewpoints within their own communities make that a complex project. One example among various is the work of the Zigoneshi Communications Collective in the region of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, which has produced work addressing political autonomy, guerrilla violence, and the threat that global warming poses to the snowy peaks of their home region, the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta—some of it available via the Internet. Much has changed since Reichel-Dolmatoff took the pictures reproduced here, but much has not. Finding ways to convey the political urgency of indigenous people's struggles to retain autonomy remains a challenge, even if it is now taken up in new ways.*

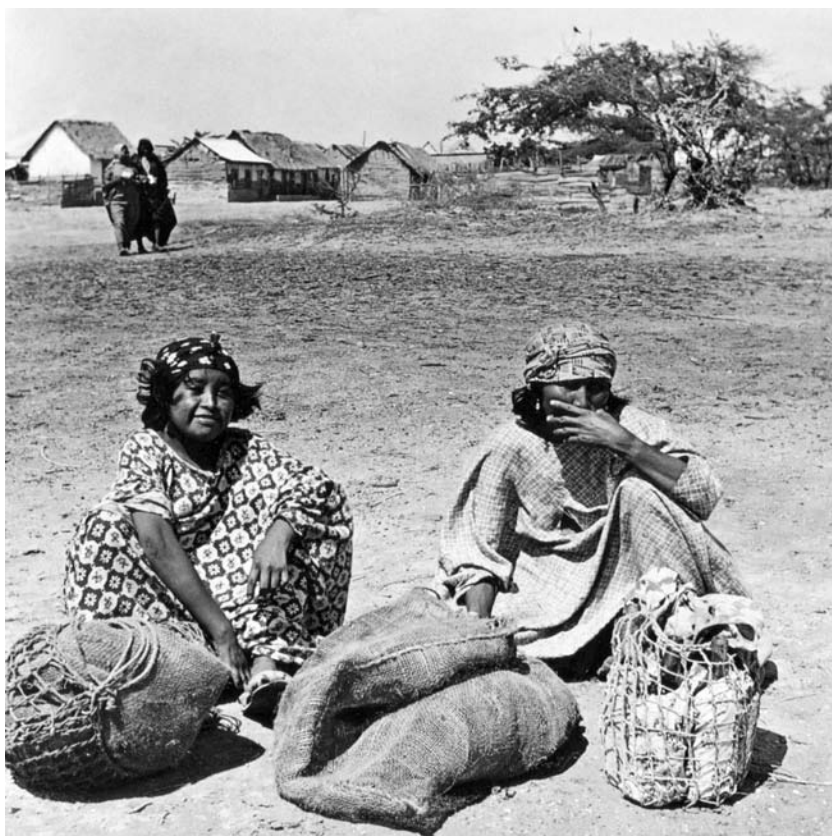
*Reichel-Dolmatoff's photographs can be taken as tokens both of anthropological understanding and of misunderstanding, especially in the way that images he published alongside his written descriptions of indigenous life have circulated to a broad international audience. People around the world know more about indigenous cultures because of his anthropological work, but sometimes the way a scrap of knowl-*



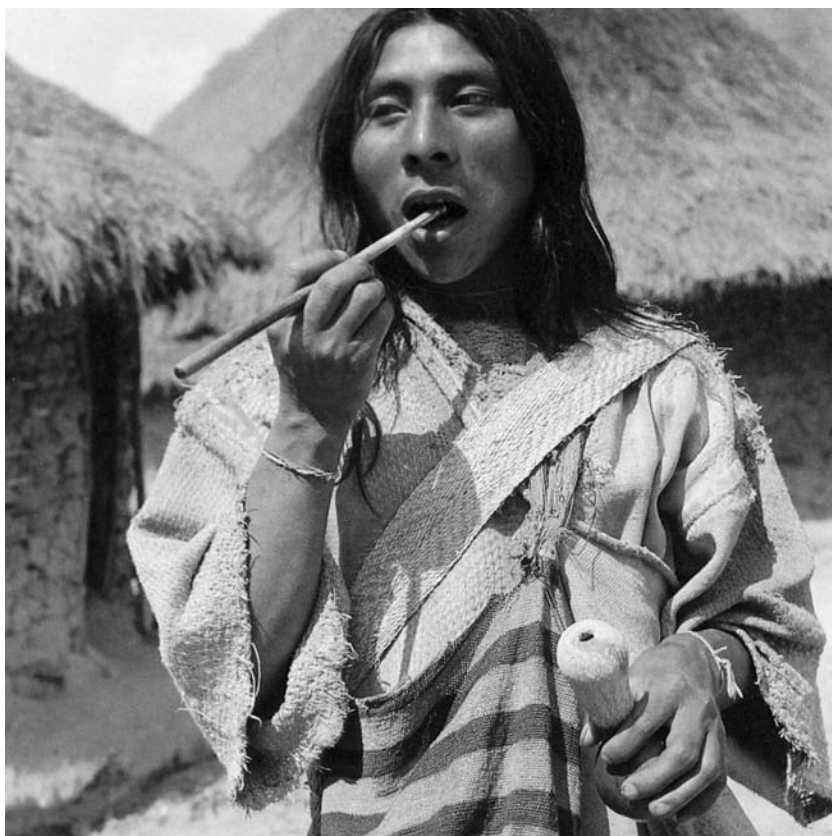
edge is framed means that outsiders feel they understand more than perhaps they do. For example, when urbanites read a description of the use an indigenous group makes of a psychoactive plant, whether *Erythroxylum novogranatense* (a species of coca) or *Banisteriopsis caapi* (used to prepare the hallucinogenic tea known as ayahuasca or yagé), they may jump to unwarranted conclusions. Similarly, when a photograph's caption describes a person as "Tukano," the viewer may imagine that as a clearly demarcated ethnicity within the geographic space of the Colombian Amazon, which would be an error. In this region, language exogamy structured traditional social life: that is, for generations people took marriage partners from communities that spoke a language different from their paternal one (and children grew up in multilingual family contexts). Tukano was thus a language spoken in contexts where multilingualism was more the norm than an ethnic label as such. In Reichel-Dolmatoff's photograph of women he identifies as "Guajiro," and for whom others would use the term "Wayúu," there is also a slipperiness as to what viewers learn from the image and from his caption. The anthropologist was on the Guajira peninsula, part of Colombia's northernmost coastline, in the context of research done not only by him but also by his wife, Alicia Dussán de Reichel, a researcher in her own right, and by Virginia Gutiérrez de Pineda. Reichel's inclusion of a gender perspective in his caption for the image included here may owe a lot to the work done by Dussán, Gutiérrez, and a select group of other women researchers who traveled to the peninsula in the 1940s and 1950s and carefully collected data to demonstrate the relative egalitarianism of Wayúu groups. Did the presence of women fieldworkers shape the way the seated women appear in the photograph? Scholars and cultural critics are only beginning to understand the complexity involved in mid-twentieth-century representations of indigenous life.



Tukano artisan from Vaupés, in the Colombian Amazon, ca. 1968. Photograph by Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff. Available at ICANH, Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango. Courtesy of Banco de la República.



Women from Wayúu communities (northeastern Colombia, Atlantic Coast region), ca. 1953. Photograph by Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff. Reichel-Dolmatoff included this photograph in a 1991 collection with a caption that identified these communities as matrilineal groups of herders and described the “Guajiros,” a term used for the Wayúu, as among the most numerous and dynamic indigenous groups in Colombia. Available at ICANH, Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango. Courtesy of Banco de la República.



A Kogi man in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta (northwestern Colombia, Atlantic Coast region), ca. 1977. Photograph by Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff. With this image, Reichel-Dolmatoff included the explanation that the man is chewing coca leaves and is placing in his mouth a small quantity of powdered lime to extract stimulant from the leaf. This way of consuming coca stretches back millennia. It produces a mild effect, reducing hunger and fatigue. It is not cocaine (see part VI). Available at ICANH, Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango. Courtesy of Banco de la República.

“One after the Other, They All  
Fell under Your Majesty’s Rule”:  
Lands Loyal to the Bogotá Become  
New Granada

*Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada and Anonymous*

In 1536 Colombia’s most important river, the Magdalena, may have been known as the Yuma, Guacahayo, Manúkaka, or Kariguañá, among other names, by people living at different points along its banks. But for the conquistador Jiménez de Quesada, setting off upriver in search of treasure and the chance to claim land for the Spanish Crown, the region’s massive artery was the Río Grande, as it was called by Spanish soldiers living in the garrison town of Santa Marta, a precarious coastal settlement founded eleven years previously as a stopping-off place for Spanish ships.

Jiménez arrived as part of an expedition, organized by Pedro Fernández de Lugo, that included at least ten ships and more than a thousand people (including European men, some European women, a small number of enslaved African men, and perhaps a few enslaved African women as well). After some initial excursions near Santa Marta itself brought back gold—often obtained by pillaging and burning Indian settlements and then sorting through the ashes—and after Lugo’s son had departed for Spain with an initial cargo of loot, Jiménez was sent on a military expedition that resulted in the subjugation of the Muisca people and spectacular gains for the Europeans involved. Historians’ estimates suggest that the gold and emeralds Jiménez’s troops looted from the highland areas of central Colombia made this perhaps the second most profitable expedition of the sixteenth century, after Francisco Pizarro’s exploits in Peru.

The documents translated here include some of the best descriptions historians have of these highland towns—which owed allegiance to the caciques of Tunja, Sogamoso, Chía, and, principally, Bogotá. The man Jiménez encountered as “the Bogotá” was killed under mysterious circumstances—perhaps by Spaniards unaware

of his status. The Europeans thought his successor, identified in the documents as Sagipa, was holding back gold: Jiménez had him tortured and killed.

*Excerpts from the "Epítome del Nuevo Reino de Granada"*

Between the provinces of Santa Marta and Cartagena flows a river that divides the two provinces; they call it the Magdalena River. However, it is more commonly referred to as the Río Grande, because in truth, this river is very grand indeed. The fury and violence with which it crashes into the sea is so great that it pushes fresh water one league into the sea. . . .

In the month of April of the year 1536, Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada, who at present is Mariscal [Marshall] of this New Kingdom, departed from the coastal city of Santa Marta to explore the Río Grande. He took with him six hundred soldiers, divided into eight infantry companies, as well as one hundred horsemen. Furthermore, certain brigs were dispatched to pursue Jiménez and his men upriver, and to offer assistance to those traveling overland along the river's edge. . . . The brigs returned to the sea. However, most of the crew, and the brigs' captains remained with Jiménez, as partial replacements for the large numbers of Jiménez's men who had died on the expedition. Jiménez spent many days in the discovery of the Opón Mountains, which extend fifty leagues, across rough, mountainous terrain, sparsely populated by Indians. It was with enormous difficulty that Jiménez crossed them. . . .

One might say with some certainty that this New Kingdom of Granada, which begins just beyond the Opón Mountains, is completely flat and densely populated. Its inhabitants are settled in valleys, with each valley supporting its own population. These plains and the entire New Kingdom are surrounded and enclosed by mountains and hills, which are inhabited by a certain group of Indians, called Panches. These Panches consume human flesh, and they are different from those in the New Kingdom, who do not. The climate in Panche territory also is different; it is a torrid zone, whereas the New Kingdom boasts a frigid climate, or at least a temperate one. And just as that group of Indians carries the name Panches, the Indians from the New Kingdom are a different people and thus have a different name; they are called Moxcas [Muiscas]. This New Kingdom is 130 leagues in length more or less, and perhaps 30 wide; however, in some places it narrows to just 20 or even less. Most of the region is found five degrees from the Equinoctial line, although some of it falls at four, and still other parts are at three. This New Kingdom is divided into two parts, or rather, two



92 CRVDELITATES HISPANORVM  
 nator, quod ille, qui nouo Granatæ regno deprædabatur, cum  
 deprædationum, & cædium socium admittere nollet, inquisiti-  
 ones & probationes, multis testibus confirmatas confecit, qui-  
 bus probat cædes, & homicidia, quæ ille commisit, & in quibus  
 committendis vsq; in præsentem diem perseverat, quæ in Con-  
 silio Indiæ lectæ sunt, & hodie adhuc asseruantur.  
 In dicta inquisitione testes deponunt, cum omnia hæc re-



Theodor de Bry, *Torture of Bogotá*, from a drawing by Joost van de Wighe. Engraving to accompany a 1598 edition of Bartolomé de las Casas's *Short Description of the Destruction of the Indies*. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library.

provinces. One is called Bogotá, while the other is called Tunja; and the lords of [these respective provinces] adopt these titles as their surnames. Both lords are extremely powerful, and each one rules over other great lords and caciques. The province of Bogotá is larger, and its lord more powerful than Tunja; in my opinion, the lord of Bogotá is capable of sending sixty thousand men, more or less, into battle. And here I offer a conservative estimate; others would suggest a much higher number. The lord Tunja is able to send forty thousand; but again, this figure likely is conservative and it does not conform to the opinion of others. These lords and the people of both provinces always have had their differences. Thus, from time immemorial the Indians from Bogotá and those from Tunja have been engaged in constant warfare, especially those from Bogotá. The reason for that is because they also fight against the Panches, who are much closer to Bogotá than they are to Tunja. As we already have mentioned, the Panches have the province of Bogotá surrounded.

The soil in Tunja is richer than the land in Bogotá, although the latter also is highly productive. And the best gold and precious emerald stones are always found in Tunja. . . . As far as emeralds are concerned, far greater quantities were found in this New Kingdom than were discovered during the conquest of Peru; not only that, but it has been said that never, since the creation of the world, have so many been found in one place. When it came time to divide the shares among the soldiers after the Conquest was completed, they distributed among themselves more than seven thousand emeralds, including some very rich stones of great value. And this is one of the reasons why the discovery of this New Kingdom must be considered the greatest thing to have happened in all the Indies; we know of no other Christian Prince, nor infidel, who possesses what has been discovered in this New Kingdom, and this in spite of the fact that for so long the Indians tried to keep the location of the mines a secret. . . .

As far as the conquest itself is concerned, when the Christians entered that New Kingdom, the native people received them with great fear; in fact, so great was their fear that they believed that the Christians were children of the sun and the moon whom these Indians worshipped. The Indians claim that, as man and wife, the sun and the moon have sexual relations and that the Christians were their offspring, whom the sun and moon sent from the sky in order to punish the Indians for their sins. For that reason, they called the Spaniards *uchies*, a term composed from the word *usa*, which in their language means "sun," and the word *chia*, which means "moon." Put together, the term means "children of the sun and moon." Thus, when the Christians entered into the first towns of the New Kingdom, the inhab-



itants abandoned their settlements, and climbed to the top of the nearby mountains. From there, they cast their newborn children over the edge for the Spaniards to eat, thinking that this act would appease the anger of the men whom they believed had come from the sky.

But more than anything else, the Indians feared horses; so great was this fear that it is difficult even to imagine. Nevertheless, as best they possibly could, the Spaniards behaved in a most friendly manner, trying to make the Indians understand their peaceful intentions; and thus, little by little their fears began to subside. And when the Indians realized that the Christians were just men, like them, they decided to test their fortune against them, which they did when the Christians were in the province of Bogotá, deep inside the New Kingdom. There, the Indians came out to meet them in battle, marching forward with great order and discipline. However, despite their numbers, which we mentioned above, they were easily defeated. When they saw the horses galloping toward them, so great was their fright that they all turned their backs and ran. The same thing occurred in the province of Tunja. For that reason, it is not necessary to provide specific accounts of each military encounter or skirmish that the Christians have had with those barbarians. Suffice it to say that most of the year 1537 and part of 1538 was spent in subjugating them, some through peaceful methods, and others through necessary force. In the end, the two provinces of Tunja and Bogotá were left well subjugated, and the Indians firmly under the just obedience that is owed to Your Majesty.

The nation and province of the Panches was left equally subjugated, in spite of the fact that the Panches are a more indomitable and tougher people than the Moxcas. And not only are they more valiant, but they also are aided by the difficult terrain in which they reside, which consists of densely forested and rough mountains, where it was not possible take advantage of the horses. For those reasons, the Panches believed that they would not suffer the same fate as that which had befallen their neighbors; however, they thought wrong. What happened to them was precisely the same; and one after the other, they all fell under Your Majesty's rule. . . .

As previously mentioned, this territory boasts a frigid climate; however, it is such a mild cold that it is not a great bother or discomfort; nor does it take anything away from the marvelous splendor of this land when one first enters into it. . . .

In spite of the fact that their houses and buildings are made from wood and are covered in the long thatch that is native to that region, they still reflect the most marvelous workmanship and design ever seen. This is especially true of the private residences of the caciques and principal men, which

are like palaces, encircled by many walls. These palaces look similar to the manner in which the Labyrinth of Troy is portrayed in paintings here in Spain. The houses boast great patios, with very tall relief figurative carvings throughout; and they are also filled with paintings. . . .

These Indians divide time into months and years, and do so with very specific intent. During the first ten days of each month they consume a certain herb, which the Indians along the northern coast call *haya* [coca leaf]. They devote the following ten days to their crops and to domestic tasks. The final ten days that remain in each month are spent inside their houses, where they converse with their wives and take their pleasure with them. Men and women do not share the same room; rather, the women all share one room while the man sleeps in the other. The manner in which the months are divided is done differently in some parts of the New Kingdom, where the Indians increase the time and the number of days they dedicate to each one [of the above-mentioned activities]. . . .

In terms of the religion of these Indians, I say that in their false and mistaken ways, they are deeply religious. In addition to each town having its own temples, which the Spaniards there call sanctuaries, they also have a great many temples outside their towns; and they have built numerous roads and paths that extend from their towns and lead directly to those very temples. Furthermore, they have an infinite number of hermitages in the mountains, along the roads and in different parts of the kingdom. And all of these houses of worship contain great quantities of gold and emeralds. . . .

In their false religion, they have many consecrated forests and lakes, where they would not dare to cut a tree or take a drop of water for anything in the world. They go into these forests to perform their sacrifices, and they bury gold and emeralds in them. And they are most certain that no person would touch their offerings because they all believe that anyone who tampers with such offerings would then fall dead. The same can be said of the lakes that they have dedicated for their sacrifices: they go and toss in great quantities of gold and precious stones, which remain lost forever. These Indians consider the sun and the moon as the creators of all things, and they believe that the two united as husband and wife, and that they engage in sexual relations. In addition to that belief, they also possess a great number of idols, which they worship in the same way that we worship our saints here [in Spain]. They pray to these idols, asking them to intercede on their behalf before the sun and the moon. And thus, each one of their sanctuaries or temples is dedicated to the name of one of these idols. In addition to the idols in the temples, every Indian, no matter how poor, has his own idol, or two, or three, or more. These idols are exactly the same as the ones pos-

sessed by the Gentiles in their time, which were called lares. These household idols are made from very fine gold; and in a hole in the idol's belly they place many emeralds, in accordance with the wealth of the idol's owner. If the Indian is too poor to have a gold idol in his house, he has one made out of wood; he also places as much gold and as many emeralds as he is able into the hole in the idol's belly. These domestic idols are small in size; the largest ones are roughly the same length as the distance between the hand and the elbow. And their devotion to these idols is so strong that they do not go anywhere, whether it is to work their fields, or to any other place, at any time, without them. They carry their idols in a small basket, which hangs from their arms. And what is most alarming is that they even carry them to war as well; with one arm they fight and with the other they hold their idol. This is especially true in the province of Tunja, where the Indians are deeply religious.

In terms of burial practices, the Indians inter the dead in two different ways. They bind the corpses tightly in cloth, having first removed the intestines and the rest of their insides. Then they fill the empty stomachs with gold and emeralds. They also place much gold around the corpse and on top of it, before tightly wrapping the entire corpse in cloth. They build a type of large bed, which sits just above the ground inside certain sanctuaries, which are used only for that purpose, and are dedicated to the deceased. They then place the corpses there and leave them on top of those beds, without ever burying them; this practice later proved to be of no small benefit to the Spaniards. . . .

In the land and nation of the Panche, which surrounds this New Kingdom, there is very little about their religion and moral life that is worth relating because they are such a bestial people that they do not worship or believe in anything but their own wicked acts and vices. Nor do they respect any rules or norms whatsoever. The Panches are a people who refuse to exchange their gold, or anything else for that matter, unless it is for something they can eat and from which they can take pleasure; they are especially willing to trade if it allows them to acquire human flesh to eat, which is their greatest vice. . . .

*Excerpt from the Anonymous "Relación de Santa Marta" (ca. 1545)*

From the emerald mines, Captain Valenzuela returned to camp bringing with him three or four valuable stones that the Indians had presented him. The camp was located at Turmequé, and while there, Jiménez sent some captains, led by Captain Cardoso, to launch an assault. They captured a

number of Indians, two of whom promised Cardoso that they would take him to the great cacique Tunja. They claimed that Tunja possessed three houses filled with gold, and that the support posts on the houses were all made of gold. Therefore, the Christians decided to go there. The Indian guides led them through many towns, and a journey that should have taken no more than one day turned into a fourteen-day expedition. When they approached Tunja, they marched forward at great speed. At sunset, they arrived to where the lord Tunja lived, and they took the cacique captive. The lieutenant Jiménez dismounted, followed by Captain Céspedes and several other captains. Captain Cardoso remained on horseback, apprehensive of all the people they saw gathering. Those who dismounted from their horses rushed the cacique, and all the gold and emerald stones they found, out of harm's way. In the meantime, Captain Cardoso and his men patrolled around the lord Tunja's fenced houses. It took until the early hours of the morning to gather all the gold, emerald stones, beads, and fine mantas. The Christians seized a great quantity of everything, especially clothing, which was of very fine quality. During the entire night, they heard great murmurs and mutterings that the Indians were about to riot. A scuffle ensued shortly before daybreak, and some Indian allies perished while defending lord Tunja and Captain Cardoso. Exhausted, and frightened by the sight of the Indians they had killed, the Spaniards stopped fighting. Captain Cardoso dismounted, and placed guards on sentry duty in order to prevent the Indians from attacking again.

That night the Christians seized close to 180,000 pesos of fine and low-grade gold, as well as a great number of emeralds. The sun had not been up for three hours when another group of Indians attacked; however, having placed sentries on duty, and being well rested from the night before, the Christians quickly mounted their horses and rode against the Indians, forcing their retreat. With the fighting ended, the Christians began to negotiate with the cacique Tunja, informing him that they had heard reports that he possessed a great quantity of gold. And the Christians promised that they would release him and be his friend and ally if the cacique gave them the gold. Tunja promised to deliver it, but he brought only false promises. At times he would say that certain Indians had taken the gold and had hidden it in the mountains. At other times, he claimed that he had buried it himself, making the Christians dig holes around many of his residences; but they never found a thing. Seeing this, the Christians decided to move against another cacique, who resided eight or nine leagues away from Tunja. His name was Sogamoso, and it was rumored that he possessed a great quantity of gold. However, Sogamoso did not await their arrival and instead fled. In

Sogamoso's sanctuaries, the Christians discovered upward of thirty thousand pesos of gold in precious objects, fashioned in the shapes of eagles and crowns which Sogamoso had offered to his *tunxos*, or gods. They found other jewels of various kinds, gold *texuelos*, and some gold leaf worth about ten marcs. And they found some emeralds, some beads, and some fine mantas. At a nearby mountain, they had a brief skirmish with some Indians. From there the Christians returned to Tunja, where they remained for several days. While in Tunja, a neighboring cacique, himself a great lord and valiant warrior, sent some of his Indians to warn the Christians that he intended to kill them all, and make shields from the skins of their horses, and use their teeth to make necklaces for his women. And when the Christians least expected it, a large number of his Indians launched a surprise attack. A battle ensued, and the Indians were routed; a great number of Indians died there.

For weapons, the Indians carried very strong palm spears, some thirty and thirty-five hands in length. And they wielded *macanas*, which are like swords. They also used arrows from the same palm, and some carried shields. With great order and discipline they arrived and waited in the open battlefield; but they all fled at the first sight of the carnage inflicted upon them by the Christians.

Several days after the battle occurred, and in order to convince the Christians to leave their territory, the Indians told stories of a land called Neiva, located toward Quito, in which there was a great quantity of gold. The Indians spoke of a house that was filled with gold trinkets, and the same house had support posts made entirely from gold. The reports filled the Christians with a great desire to go there. Jiménez thus appointed Captain San Martín, Captain Céspedes, Captain Cardoso, Captain Lebrija, Captain Albarrazín, Captain Suárez, and several other Spaniards to accompany him to Neiva.

Jiménez left his brother Hernán Pérez de Quesada, as well as Captain Juan del Junco, in charge to guard the camp and all the gold, and he departed with the abovementioned people toward Neiva. They arrived in the land of Bogotá and from there they made their way to the town of Pasca. There the Indians from Pasca showed them which path to take, which they knew well because they carry salt to Neiva, which they exchange for gold. The Christians also learned in Pasca that the road to Neiva crossed through vast, uninhabited lands, and that there would be no place to procure foodstuffs except for one small village, which stored nothing but potatoes. Therefore, the Christians gathered their provisions in Pasca, with supplies of bread, dried meat, and maize; they also brought four hundred Indian men and women carriers, each loaded with food and provisions. They endured many

hardships on this expedition. At long last they arrived in Neiva, where they found absolutely nothing of which the Indians had spoken. . . .

This land is very unhealthy; in the little time that the Christians roamed around in its heat, not a single man remained who had not fallen ill. One soldier died, and many others would have if they had lingered any longer. Thus they all returned to Bogotá, and from there they journeyed to Tunja, where they remained for several days, trying to make peace with the local caciques. From there, the entire camp returned to Bogotá, where they began to establish friendships with certain caciques.

The cacique Suba Usaque came to the Christians as a great friend and ally, and his loyalty never wavered. The reason for this friendship was: Suba Usaque's son-in-law, the cacique Bogotá, learned that Suba Usaque earlier had gone to see the Christians and had given them food and other things. And because Bogotá was a more powerful lord than his father-in-law, he had Suba Usaque arrested, many of his houses burned, and large numbers of his Indians executed. He also stole some of his gold. For that reason, Suba Usaque later became a close ally to the Christians, and he has remained a loyal friend.

With matters thus, the Christians learned where Bogotá was hiding, which was high in a mountain where the cacique had built some houses, protected by surrounding walls. The Christians decided one night to go out to capture him. They left the camp where it was, and they approached to within three leagues of Bogotá's location. From there, the Christians dispatched messengers in order to assure Bogotá that they did not want to wage war against him; rather, they wanted to make peace. And they requested that the cacique issue a response by the following day because they could wait no longer. Bogotá sent neither messenger nor message of any kind. Thus, on the following day, the Christians seized all of the Indian men and women who served Bogotá. They left these Indians in their lodgings, with their hands and feet tied. There they remained until past nightfall, tightly bound so that none of them could escape to warn Bogotá or anyone else for that matter. The Christians departed at 10:00 in the evening, silently, so as not to be heard. One or two hours before sunrise they arrived at Bogotá's enclosure. There they placed soldiers and horsemen around the outside walls so that no one could escape without being captured. Lieutenant Jiménez and many others rushed inside and seized some Indians. Many others escaped. It was learned later that Bogotá managed to flee through a trap door. As fortune would have it, two horsemen and two foot soldiers happened to be guarding Bogotá's escape route. In their great lust to steal the rich manta that Bogotá was wearing, the soldiers stabbed the cacique

with a knife. And after taking his manta, they let the injured Bogotá go free; later, the soldiers falsely claimed that not a single Indian had passed through the area where they had stood guard.

And that was how the cacique was injured, there on the mountain, very close to where he died. No one knew until his body was discovered by some birds, called *gallinas* [presumably *gallinazos*, or turkey vultures], which eat human flesh. The Indians watched as those birds gathered in that place to feast; and because they could not locate Bogotá, they followed the birds, suspecting what they would find. There they discovered his corpse. However, the Christians did not learn of his death for another year, and they thought he was still alive.

From there, the Christians returned to where they had left the Indians bound, but they had all escaped, having been untied by other Indians from the area. From there, they sent a message back to camp to have the others join them. After several months, they learned of Bogotá's death. They also discovered that one of Bogotá's great captains, called Sagipa, had risen up and usurped control of the land. With all kinds of flattery and affection, the Christians endeavored to lure Sagipa to come forward and make peace; and after a few months he came to them. He told them that he was at war with the Panches, a fierce people who eat human flesh, and he requested Jiménez's assistance to go to Panche territory to kill them. If the Christians agreed to help, then he would be their friend, and he would accompany them. Lieutenant Jiménez accepted, and the Christians joined Sagipa. Together, they engaged the Panches in battle and killed many of them. They all then returned to where they had camped. Sagipa proceeded to flee from the Christians, moving stealthily about the region. The Christians therefore decided to take matters into their own hands, and they had Sagipa arrested. They marched over to where he was and, somewhat against his will, they brought the cacique back to camp. On his arrival, Lieutenant Jiménez spoke to him on behalf of the entire camp, telling him that Bogotá was an enemy of the Christians, and as their enemy he had died. Therefore, all of Bogotá's gold, as it was enemy property, belonged to the king and to the Christians. Jiménez ordered Sagipa to hand the gold over, because they knew for certain that he had it. The lieutenant added that he was not asking Sagipa to relinquish any of his own possessions; instead, the Christians only wanted what had belonged to Bogotá. Sagipa responded that he would, with great pleasure, give them the gold. He asked them to extend him a reasonable deadline in order to do so, promising that he would fill a small house with Bogotá's gold; but he needed a few days in order to gather all the gold. They granted the time that Sagipa had requested; and they kept him under guard

in order to prevent him from escaping. During that time, Indian messengers came and went, but when the deadline expired Sagipa had not complied. He handed over three or four thousand pesos of fine and low-grade gold, and nothing more. Seeing this, the Christians began to plead with Lieutenant Jiménez to place Sagipa in irons and have him tortured. The lieutenant chose not to do that, which sparked many grumblings that Jiménez had reached some accord with the cacique. Thus, the Christians all came together and renewed their pleas, granting legal authority to Jerónimo de Ayusa to argue their case. Seeing this, Jiménez appointed his brother, Hernán Pérez de Quesada, who was administered the oath as Sagipa's defender. Both Ayusa and Pérez de Quesada argued their cases as best they possibly could, after which point the Christians proceeded to torture Sagipa in order to compel him to hand over Bogotá's gold and confess where he had hidden it; in the end, Sagipa died.



## A City in the African Diaspora

*Anonymous and Álvaro José Arroyo*

*For centuries, enslaved Africans were sold at auction in the port city of Cartagena. Some arrived there directly, having been taken on board at slaving ports along the African coast after sale or capture near Senegambia or the Bight of Benin or Luanda. Others entered Cartagena as survivors of a second slaver voyage: having been sold in one port, they were now “pieces” to be resold to Colombian buyers.*

*The following two texts present strikingly different perspectives on the colonial history of Cartagena. The first is a document recording the sale of a thirteen-year-old girl on January 26, 1736. Its power lies in the banality it evinces. By 1736, notaries in Cartagena were using preprinted forms, with spaces left blank for buyers’ and sellers’ names to be written in, and with a large space in the left margin for the notary to sketch the shape of the brands that appeared on a given person’s body—even the locations of the brands applied, the right breast and left shoulder, were preprinted to save a notary time. The second text is a 1983 hit by salsa great Álvaro José “Joe” Arroyo (1955–2011), iconic in Colombia for his musicianship and for his politicized lyrics. The lyrics to “Rebelión” conjured history in Arroyo’s present—Africans arrive in Cartagena to “perpetual slavery.” The song’s chorus, “No le pegue a la negra,” “Don’t hit that black woman,” became a touchstone of racial identity for Colombians.*

*Arroyo’s lyrics reference local oral tradition, something that a girl sold at auction even as far back as 1736 would have encountered for herself as she became a part of colonial Cartagena’s multiple black communities. By the time of her arrival, Africans and their descendants in Cartagena already told stories about the Spanish Jesuits Alonso de Sandoval, who baptized slaves in the early 1600s, and Pedro Claver, trained by Sandoval, who would be declared a Catholic saint in 1888. Enslaved people likely described Claver’s famous slave-ship baptisms to one another (see part II). Other stories, or many conflicting stories, would have circulated about a man known as Benkos Biohó, who led the longest-lived of the many palenques, or communities of escaped slaves, near Cartagena (see part IV).*



Facsimile, Bill of Sale, 1736. Tomo 8, Folio 505R, Colonial Folio, Archivo General de la Nación.  
<http://negrosyesclavos.archivogeneral.gov.co/portal/resources/files/archivos/f505r.jpg>. Courtesy  
 of Archivo General de la Nación de Colombia.

The Principal Factor of the Royal Company of the Asiento of Great Britain sells a black girl, fifteen years old, for 215 pesos to Don Domingo Romero.<sup>1</sup>

From the vessel named the Saint George, on its first voyage, Don Domingo Romero received from the hand of Juan Diaz de Ortega, 1 black girl for 215 pesos.

On January 26, 1736, I, Jorge Crove, Principal Factor, and I, Don Diego Ord, Factors and Administrators of the Royal Company of the Asiento of Great Britain, established to introduce Black Slaves to this America, do Lawfully and with immediate effect Sell to Don Domingo Romero, from the hand of Don Juan Díaz de Ortega, a black girl Brought by the vessel called the Saint George, of Caste \_\_\_\_\_, Age \_\_\_\_\_, and markings referred to below: bearing the Royal Mark on her right breast and the Mark of this Asiento on the left side of her back, as shown in the Margin; for the price and quantity of two hundred and fifteen pesos of eight reales.

Said sum will be paid in full by the aforesaid Don Domingo Romero, to us, Aforesaid *factores* \_\_\_\_\_, who sell the aforesaid black girl with all of her qualities, bad or good, Soul in mouth, Bag of bones; with all her Illnesses, hidden and Manifest, with the sole exception of *Gota Coral*, or by another name heart disease.<sup>2</sup> In order to validate a Slave Warranty for slaves that have this illness, it is a Condition that official notice and documentation be Provided within two months from the date agreed in this instrument, and it is in this stated manner that I, Don Domingo Romero, accept the sale, and receive the aforementioned black girl, and in proof and confirmation of this possession I have signed a duplicate of this instrument, which will remain in the Royal *Factoría*. And in order for the aforesaid Don Domingo Romero to dispose of said black girl as he sees fit, we the aforesaid *factores* concede to and sign this document, the *Factor* having received the amount for the import of the slave mentioned herein, held in this *Factoría* of Cartagena of Indies on January 26, 1736, being the black girl included in this deed of sale, of Mondongo caste, thirteen years of age,<sup>3</sup> with three incisions running parallel along the skin on her stomach,

[Signed]  
 Jorge Crove  
 Diego Ord

I received from Don Domingo Romero and from the hand of Don Juan Díaz de Ortega two hundred and fifteen pesos for the little black girl, and have signed in confirmation of this on January 26, 1736.

[Signed]  
 Jorge Crove

*Translated by Ana María Gómez López*

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*Joe Arroyo's "Rebelión"*

Brother, I want to sing you a little piece of black history,  
 Of our history,  
 Sir, it goes like this:  
 In the 1600s, when the tyrant ruled,  
 Cartagena's streets lived this history.  
 When the slave-ships arrived,  
 Africans in chains,  
 They kissed my land—perpetual slavery

Perpetual slavery  
Perpetual slavery  
Salomé can tell you,  
She can . . .

An African husband and wife, slaves of a Spaniard,  
Who treated them, so badly  
And hit his black woman  
And it was there he rebelled, the brave and handsome black man  
He avenged his love,  
And you can still hear him at the gates,  
Don't hit my black woman!  
Don't you hit her!  
*¡No le pegue a la negra!*  
You heard me, man.

Don't hit that black woman!  
Don't you hit her!  
*¡No le pegue a la negra!*  
Oh no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no . . .

Don't hit that black woman,  
You're gonna respect her!  
*¡No le pegue a la negra!*  
Yeah, you can hear him at the gates  
Don't hit that black woman . . .  
No, no, no, no, no  
    No, no, no, no, no  
Black woman who says to me . . .  
Dark-souled Spaniard,  
*¡No le pegue a la negra!*  
Don't hit her, don't hit her, don't hit her, don't hit another's  
Don't hit that black woman!  
Listen, my black is coming,  
*¡No le pegue a la negra!*  
*Chapetón* [Spaniard] with your dark soul,  
*Chapetón* with your perverse mind,  
*¡No le pegue a la negra!*  
No, no, no, no, don't hit her . . .

Don't you hit her!

Don't hit that black woman.

You're gonna respect her . . .

Abuser who hits another's,

Don't hit that black woman.

'Cause, 'cause, 'cause, my soul it explodes inside me,

Don't hit my black woman.

*¡No le pegue a la negra!* . . .

No, no, no,

Don't hit that black woman.

Because my soul, it throbs within me, my woman,

*¡No le pegue a la negra!*

You saw it on the beach, girl—

On the beach at Cartagena . . .

No, no, no, no, no, no, no,

Don't hit that black woman.

The beaches of Marbella . . .

The black soul that sings and that weeps,

Don't hit that black woman, don't, don't . . .

Because my soul throbs, girl,

*¡No le pegue a la negra!*

*Chombo* knows it,

And you do too!<sup>4</sup>

*Translated by Ann Farnsworth-Alvear and Ana María Gómez López*

### Notes

Personal and place names have been reproduced from the original document, with omitted accent marks and inconsistencies.

1. *Factors* were appointed by the Spanish Crown as part of royal involvement in the slave trade. The *asiento* was a concession granted by the Spanish Crown allowing the monopoly privilege of supplying African slaves to Spanish colonies in the Americas.

2. *Gota Coral* was used to refer to epilepsy, yet the printed text on this document links it to heart disease.

3. The inconsistency in ages is reproduced from the original document.
4. Several clarifications are in order. First: multiple versions of the song circulate, as video recordings of Arroyo's performances include lyrics that vary. We have not attempted to identify a definitive version; rather, we have used some of the phrases Arroyo added during live performances, viewable on the Internet (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXXI8xqHvXU> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1TwEHliSEpA>, among others) and have drawn on websites that host lyrics, particularly <http://planetadeletras.com/index.php?m=s&lid=196419>, with a transcription attributed to Oscar Campuzano, and <http://lyricstranslate.com/en/rebeli%C3%B3n-no-le-pegue-la-negra-rebellion-dont-hit-black-woman.html>, with a translation attributed to "Bellavoz," both accessed July 1, 2015. Second: the song may have first been recorded not by Joe Arroyo but by Roberto Urquijo Fonseca, with authorship attributed to Adela Martelo de Arroyo. This seems to have been a legal nicety, given that Arroyo was under contract with a competing label when his friend recorded the song. Third: translating "No le pegue a la negra" is a complex undertaking. In the context of this song, which makes references to distinctly black Cartagena slang, a reader of Harlem Renaissance playwrights or African American writing through the 1980s might plausibly render Arroyo's phrasing as "Don't hit mah 'oman!" or that of his backup singers as "Don't hit dat sistah!" We have opted to leave the ambiguity of the Spanish alongside a more literal translation. Liliana Angulo, Jakia Bell, Rui DaSilva, Evelyne Laurent-Perrault, and Tukufu Zuberi offered advice on the translation; errors are our own.

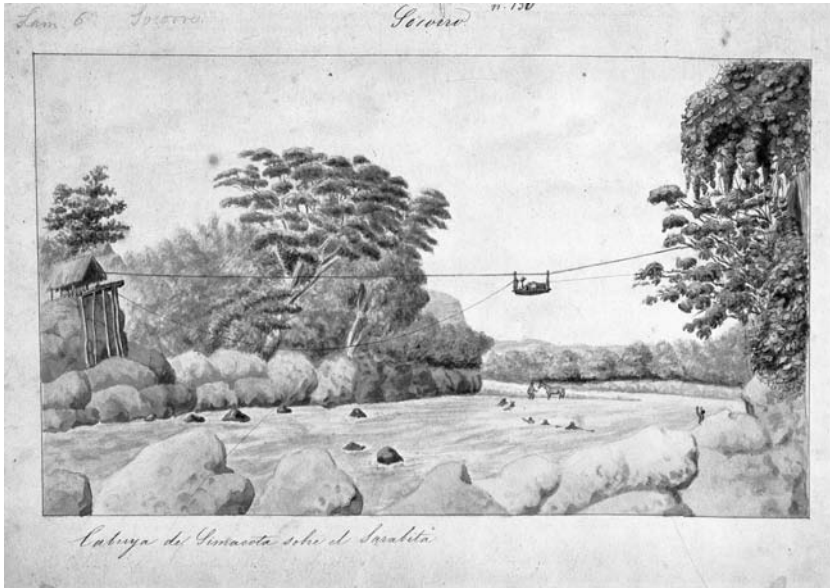
# Crossing to Nationhood across a Cabuya Bridge in the Eastern Andes

Manuel Ancízar

Manuel Esteban Ancízar (1812–82) called himself “el Alpha,” or “the Beginning.” In 1853 he published a two-volume travel narrative, *Alpha’s Pilgrimage*, which undertook to familiarize Colombians with their new republic. With other members of a state-appointed Chorographic Commission, he had traversed the Eastern Andes mountains, from Bogotá to Pamplona, in what is now the department of Norte de Santander. Educated men and women (such as Ancízar’s wife, Agripina Acosta, also a writer) now had a mass of new information about the country: its rivers and mountains, climate zones, trails, and available or potentially available resources—beginning with human resources. The commission’s statistical overview included data on population density, transport networks, ethnic groupings, and agricultural production.

In contrast to the rigorous empiricism of Chorographic Commission scientists, *Alpha’s Pilgrimage* borders on fiction and journalism. The extract below takes us to the town of Socorro, site of the legendary Comunero revolt of 1781 (see part III) and thus a symbol of nationhood. In the extract included here Ancízar described the precariousness of transport in an adverse topography. Modernity, he hoped, would bring a bridge to Simacota. In fact, within a generation, Geo von Lengerke, a German immigrant and entrepreneur (see part VII), contracted with an engineering firm in Bremen to build a suspension bridge there. Quite another kind of modernity is also part of Simacota’s legacy, as the ELN or Ejército de Liberación Nacional, one of Colombia’s twentieth-century rebel armies, used the town for its own initial proclamation of “revolutionary struggle” (see part V).

Ancízar’s note on the river’s name is fascinating in what it communicates about his relationship not only to the Comuneros and the symbolism of nationhood but also to the memory of the sixteenth century: “When Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada invaded the country of the Muiscas in 1537, the march from Chipatá to Moniquirá required crossing the swift waters of the Sarabita River. Captain Gonzalo Suárez’s horse came close to drowning, for which the Sarabita came to be known as the Suárez



Carmelo Fernández, *Cabuya de Simacota sobre el rio Saravita*, 1850. Simacota is a town in Santander, located on Colombia's Eastern Cordillera. The Saravita drains to the Magdalena River. This watercolor was produced for the Chorographic Commission by Carmelo Fernández, a soldier, draftsman, and artist who worked with Agustín Codazzi. In Gonzalo Hernández de Alba, ed., *En busca de un país: La Comisión Corográfica* (Bogotá: Carlos Valencia Editores, 1984). Prints from the Comisión Corográfica (*Cabuya de Simacota sobre el Sarabita*). Courtesy of Biblioteca Nacional, Bogotá.

*River, and we insist on this reference despite its ridiculous origins and the beauty of the indigenous name."*

The Suárez River measures 100 yards in width at the pass to Simacota, bel-  
lowing as it runs impetuously over the rough and broken rocks scattered on  
its bed. There is no bridge, yet native industry has overcome this obstacle  
by placing there a thick rope that they call *cabuya* [made from *fique*, a type of  
hemp], as has also been done in other similar passages. A robust tree from  
the river's edge is paired with another found on the opposite side of the river-  
bank; if this is not possible, thick forked poles are anchored in the ravine 20  
or more yards above the river waters. These trees or upright columns are  
called *morones*, and are surrounded by a platform with a light thatched roof.  
One *morón* is attached to another by a thick cable made up of 24 strips of  
twisted leather, that when crossing the river sags naturally at its middle,  
eight or ten yards over the current. This is the line of trajectory. Two sturdy



and sliding wooden clamp rings are placed above each cable. There are two ropes tied with solid knots to the bottom of each ring, which fasten a seat made up of a square of leather hide stitched to a fibrous stick frame. This contraption in the form of a flat-bottomed basket is called a *puerta*. Two long *cabuyas* are tied to each side of the *puerta*, for the purpose of pulling the machine from one side of the river to another by sliding the rings to which the seat is tied. A holdfast secures the *puerta* as it approaches each *morón*, without which it would slide back to the middle of the river given that the cable forms the aforementioned curve, where one half offers a rapid descent, and the other a slippery climb. Four passengers can be seated back to back, holding their balance with their legs in the air, or one passenger with two trunks of luggage and their horse trappings. Once the load is ready and secured, the *cabuyeros* on this side of the river signal to those on the other with a whistle: they release the holdfast that restrains the *puerta*, which sets off downward at high-speed due to its own weight, and quickly reaches the lowest point of the bowed rope. From there, the *cabuyeros* on the other side begin to pull on the rope to bring the *puerta* upward until it is firmly fixed to the *morón*, where passengers and their luggage disembark. When the person riding is a day-laboring *peón* or a miser, he requests not a *puerta* but a hook. This hook is even more of an indigenous invention than the *puerta*. Imagine a pothook made from wood of a guava-tree, with grooves or notches on each end: four lengthy rope bands are attached to the notch of the longer end, while a short band is affixed to the lesser. Our fellowman takes the pothook that best suits him and climbs up the tree until he reaches the cable, to which he fastens the pothook, harnessing its ends with the shorter band. He then fits his legs through two of the hoops and his arms through the remaining pair, so that he is hanging from the cable in the manner of a spider, his head facing the opposite end of the river. Once his hat is securely fastened, he lets go of the cable, and shoots head-forward like a rocket, oscillating over the ravine with rocks rugged by the turbulent river. But the involuntary momentum ends past the middle of the cable, and thus begins a series of grotesque maneuvers using all four limbs to climb the rope up to the high *morón*, a task done swiftly by veterans but not without much sweat and toil by recruits and novices.

It is not impossible for the cable's leather straps to break after being soaked by a storm, due to the intense friction of the pothooks or the *puerta*'s clamp rings. One can imagine the fate of those passengers who fall precipitously into the river. Thus the provincial courts have decreed special ordinances determining the number of straps that must make up each cable, which can be no less than 24, specifying precautions and safety measures

regarding the *puerta* and related devices that must be followed. Even in the best possible conditions, one will inevitably waste a great amount of time passing through the *cabuyas*, given that each round trip for one load takes 10 minutes. Livestock must swim across, guided by swimmers, with the evident risk of perishing when the river water is high, dragging them far out and pelting them against the jagged rocks. Greater knowledge and awareness about these dangers regarding the construction of suspension bridges will hopefully consign *cabuyas* to the archive of memories of our past industrial and social backwardness.

*Translated by Ana María Gómez López*

# A Gaping Mouth Swallowing Men

*José Eustasio Rivera*

*La Vorágine*, a novel by José Eustasio Rivera (1888–1928), has been translated as *The Vortex*. It is largely autobiographical; an introductory letter from Rivera represents the work as a memoir by Arturo Cova, a foil he reinforces by using pictures of himself for Cova. Allegedly, Cova is a poet who impulsively travels to the eastern plains with his pregnant wife Alicia to make his fortune. The memorable line “Jugué mi corazón al azar y me lo ganó la violencia”—“I gambled my heart in a game of chance and lost it to violence”—summarizes Cova’s ill luck. After his wife deserts him and he is accused of murder, Cova must skirt corrupt local bureaucrats, leave the plains, and escape to the rubber region of Yaguanarí. There, after being driven progressively insane, he is, in Rivera’s words, “devoured by the jungle.”

*La Vorágine* is divided into two sections: the plains and the jungle. Rivera’s novel is rich in describing both landscapes: he catalogs rivers and their tributaries, provides names for flora and fauna, and traces folkways. His knowledge was rooted in the months he spent as a member of an official commission sent to trace the 1,375-mile border shared by Colombia and Venezuela. Along with other Colombian, Venezuelan, and Swiss officials, engineers, and experts, Rivera had traveled to San Fernando de Atabapo, a Venezuelan town at the convergence of the Orinoco and Guaviare Rivers, in what is now the meeting point between the Colombian departments of Vichada and Guainía, and the Venezuelan department of Amazonas. From there the group’s experiences crossing rivers, swamps, and jungle areas were so overwhelmingly difficult that every member of the official commission resigned before the process of delineating the border had been completed. In writing, Rivera also drew on Walter Ernest Hardenburg’s *The Putumayo, the Devil’s Paradise* (1909), which described atrocities perpetrated against indigenous rubber-gatherers and was part of an international outcry against Casa Arana, a Peruvian rubber company. After *La Vorágine*’s publication, Rivera continued to denounce crimes committed against indigenous communities, and he undertook new excursions to little-known areas of the country, such as Caquetá. He also went to New York City, seeking to publish his novel in English and have it made into a film—plans that were cut short. He died in New York after suffering seizures and complications related to

*hemiplagia and possibly malaria. By the mid-1930s, La Vorágine had been translated into English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, and Russian.*

Oh, jungle, wedded to silence, mother of solitude and mists! What malignant fate imprisoned me within your green walls? Your foliage, like an immense vault, is between my hopes and the clear skies, of which I see only glimpses, when the twilight breeze stirs your lofty tops. Where is the loved star that walks the hills at evening? Where are those cloud-sweeps of gold and purple? . . .

You are a cathedral of sorrows. Unknown gods speak in hushed voices, whispering promises of long life to your majestic trees, trees that were the contemporaries of paradise, old when the first tribes appeared on the face of the earth, and which impassively await the sinking of future centuries. Your vegetation is a family that never betrays itself. The embrace your boughs cannot give is tarried by creepers and lianas. You share even in the pain of the leaf that falls. Your multisonous voices rise like a chorus bewailing the giants that crash to earth; and in, every breach that is made new germ cells hasten their gestation. . . .

Let me flee, oh jungle, from your sickly shadows, formed by the breath of beings who have died in the abandonment of your majesty. You yourself seem but an enormous cemetery, where you decay and are reborn. I want to return to the places where there are no secrets to frighten, where slavery is impossible, where the eye can reach out into the distance, where the spirit rises in light that is free! I want the heat of the sand dunes, the sparkle of stars, the vibrating air of the open pampas. Let me return to the land from which I came. Let me unwalk that path of tears and blood, which I entered on an evil day, when, on the trail of a woman, I plunged into jungle and wilderness, seeking Vengeance, the implacable goddess who smiles only over tombs! . . .

I have been a rubber worker, I am a rubber worker. I live in the miry swamps, in the solitude of the jungles, with my malarial squad of men, scoring the bark of trees, which, like gods, have white blood.

A thousand leagues from where I was born, I curse memory, because memories are all sad ones: of my parents, who grew old in poverty, hoping for help from the absent son; of my sisters, young and beautiful, who smile at disappointments without the brother to ease their cares, to take them the saving gold that transforms life. . . .

I have three hundred trees to take care of, and it takes me nine days to lacerate them. I have cleaned them of creepers and lianas. I have opened a path toward each of them. On trudging through this army of giants, to fell

the ones that don't shed latex, I often find tappers stealing my rubber. We tear each other with fists and machetes; and the disputed latex is splashed with red. But what does it matter if our veins increase the supply of sap? The overseer demands ten liters a day, and the lash is a usurer that never forgives.

And what if my neighbor dies of fever? I see him stretched out on the leafy mold, shaking himself, trying to rid himself of flies that will not let him die in peace. Tomorrow I shall move away, driven elsewhere by the stench. But I shall steal the latex he gathered. My work will be so much lighter. They'll do the same with me when I die. I who have never stolen, not even to help my parents, will steal when I can for my oppressors.

I have been a rubber worker, I am a rubber worker. And what my hand has done to trees, it can also do to men. . . .

For the first time I saw the inhuman jungle in all its horror, saw the pitiless struggle for existence. Deformed trees were held imprisoned by creepers. Lianas bound them together in a death grip. Stretched from tree to palm in long elastic curves, like carelessly hung nets, they caught falling leaves, branches, and fruits, held them for years until they sagged and burst like rotten bags, scattering blind reptiles, rusty salamanders, hairy spiders and decayed vegetable matter over the underbrush.

Everywhere the *matapalo*—the pulpy creeper of the forests—sticks its tentacles on the tree trunks, twisting and strangling them, injecting itself into them, and fusing with them in a painful metempsychosis. . . . The *comején* grub gnaws at the trees like quick-spreading syphilis, boring unseen from within, rotting tissue and pulverizing bark, until the weight of branches that are still living brings the giant crashing to the ground.

Meanwhile the earth continues its successive renovations: at the foot of the colossus that falls, new germs are budding; pollen is flying in the midst of miasmas; everywhere is the reek of fermentation, steaming shadows, the sopor of death, the enervating process of procreation. Where is that solitude poets sing of? Where are those butterflies like translucent flowers, the magic birds, those singing streams? Poor phantasies of those who know only domesticated retreats!

No cooing nightingales here, no Versaillian gardens or sentimental vistas! Instead the croaking of dropsical frogs, the tangled misanthropic undergrowth, the stagnant backwaters and swamps. Here the aphrodisiac parasite that covers the ground with dead insects; the disgusting blooms that throb with sensual palpitations, their sticky smell intoxicating as a drug; the malignant liana, the hairs of which blind animals; the *pringamosa* that irritates

the skin; the berry of the *curujú*, a rainbow-hued globe that holds only a caustic ash; the purging grape; the bitter nut of the *corojo* palm. . . .

And yet it is civilized man who is the champion of destruction. There is something magnificent in the story of these pirates who enslave their peons, exploit the environment, and struggle with the jungle. Buffeted by misfortune, they leave the anonymity of cities to plunge into the wilderness, seeking a purpose for their sterile life. Delirious from malaria, they loose themselves of their conscience, and adapt themselves to the environment; and with no arms but the rifle and the machete, they suffer the most atrocious needs, while longing for pleasures and plenty. They live exposed to the elements, always ravenous, even naked, for here clothes rot on one's body.

Then some day, on the rock of some river, they build their thatched hut and appoint themselves "masters of the enterprise." Although the jungle is their enemy, they don't know whom to fight; so they fall upon one another and kill and subdue their own kind during intervals in their onslaught on the forests; and at times their trail is like that left by an avalanche. Every year the rubber workers in Colombia destroy millions of trees, while in Venezuela the balata rubber tree has disappeared. In this way they defraud the coming generations.

The story of El Cayeno symbolizes the fierce urge of these men. He escaped from a celebrated prison that has the ocean as its moat. Although he knew that the guards feed the sharks in order to keep them swimming near the walls, he threw himself into the water without removing his irons. He reached the banks of the Papunagua, attacked a settlement, and subdued the fugitive rubber tappers. He established a monopoly on the exploitation of rubber, and lived with his henchmen and his slaves on the Guaracú. The distant lights of his settlement twinkled through the heavy foliage one night when we finally drew close to it, and then waited till daybreak before advancing any further.

Who could have told us that we were to follow the same path of cruelty!

On the trip over this trail to the Guaracú, I had made a humiliating discovery: my physical well-being was only apparent. My body, wasted by fevers, tired very easily. On the other hand, my companions seemed immune to fatigue; and even old man Silva, despite his years and scars, was more vigorous on the marches. Every now and again they had to stop to wait for me; and even though they lightened me of my load, relieving me of my knapsack and carbine, I had to continue forcing myself on, my pride keeping me from falling to the ground and confessing my weakness. . . .

This physical inferiority of mine made me distrustful, irritable, testy. Old man Silva, of course, was practically in charge of us during the trip, and I began to feel jealous of him. I began to suspect that he had chosen this route purposely, so that he could convince me of my physical inability to handle El Cayeno. Don Clemente, too, lost no opportunity to make me conscious of the horrors of life in that settlement, and how remote was the possibility of escaping from there. Escape—that perennial dream of all rubber tappers, who see it always before their eyes and yet never attempt it, because they know that death closes all the exits of the jungle. . . .

As they seldom penetrated the jungle very far from the river banks, their sense of direction was not well-developed. This helped Don Clemente to acquire a reputation as guide. He would plunge deep into the jungle, sink his machete into a tree, and, days afterwards, guide them back to it, starting from any point the workers selected.

One morning at sunrise came unexpected disaster. The sick workers who had remained in the main hut to doctor their livers suddenly heard shouts from the river. They hastily gathered on the rocky ledge. Floating down the middle of the stream, like enormous black ducks, were the balls of rubber; and behind them came a peon in a small dugout, pushing with his pole the spheres that tarried in the eddies and backwaters. As he herded his black flock into the inlet of the little bay, he raised a cry more frightful than any war cry:

*"Tambochas! Tambochas! And the men are isolated!"*

*Tambochas!* That meant suspending work, leaving shelter, throwing barriers of fire across the trail, and seeking refuge elsewhere. An invasion of carnivorous ants, born who knows where, emigrating to die as winter comes, sweeping the hills for leagues and leagues with the rustle and crackle of a distant forest fire. Wingless wasps, with red heads and lemon-colored bodies, scattering terror in their path because of their venomous bite and swarming multitudes. Every cave, every crevice, every hole—trees, shrubs, nests, beehives—everything suffers from the overpowering flow of that heavy and fetid wave that devours young birds, rodents, reptiles, and puts to flight whole villages of men and beasts.

The news spread consternation. The peons of the camp scurried around madly, gathering tools and equipment.

"On which side is the swarm coming?" asked Manuel Cardoso.

"On both banks, it seems. The tapirs and peccaries are plunging into the river from this side, but the bees are swarming on the other side."

"Who are the workers who are isolated?"

"Five in El Silencio swamp—they don't even have a boat."

"What can we do? They'll have to shift for themselves! We can't help. Who'd risk losing himself in these swamps?"

"I," replied old man Clemente Silva.

And a young Brazilian youth named Lauro Coutinho joined him.

"I'll go too," he said. "My brother's there!"

Gathering together what provisions they could, and supplied with arms and matches, the two set out along a trail that plunged into the jungle toward the Marié River.

They traveled hastily over oozing mud and through tangled underbrush, eyes and ears on the alert. Of a sudden, as the old man was clearing a path before him, forcing a trail toward El Silencio marsh, Lauro Coutinho stopped him.

"Now's the time to escape!"

The same thought had already crossed Don Clemente's mind, but he gave no sign of his pleasure at the suggestion.

"We should consult the others . . ."

"I can assure you they'll agree—without hesitation."

And he was right. They found the five men the following day, in a rude shelter, shooting craps on a handkerchief spread on the earth, drunk from the *palmachonta* wine they were imbibing from a gourd that went its ceaseless rounds.

"Ants? to hell with the ants! We laugh at *tambochas*! To escape, escape! With a guide like you—even from hell you could lead us!"

And there they go through the jungles with the illusion of freedom before them, laughing, full of plans, praising their guide, promising him their friendship, their remembrance, their gratitude. Lauro Coutinho has cut a palm-leaf and carries it aloft like a banner. Souza Machado will not abandon his ball of crude rubber. It weighs ten pounds, but with its price he hopes to enjoy two nights of a woman's caresses, a white and fair woman, fragrant of roses and brandy. The Italian Peggi babbles of going to a city and getting a job as cook in a hotel where there is an abundance of leftovers and tips are generous. Coutinho, the elder, wants to marry a wench who boasts an income. The Indian Venancio wants to spend the rest of his days making dugouts. Pedro Fajardo aspires to buying a cottage that will shelter his old blind mother. Don Clemente dreams of finding the grave. It is a procession of unfortunates, a march from misery to death.

And which the route they sought? The Curí-curiarí River. From there they would go up the Río Negro, seventy leagues above Naranjal, passing to Umarituba to seek shelter. Señor Castanheira Fontes was a good man. He would help them. There a broad horizon would spread itself before them. In



case of capture, the explanation was obvious: they were fleeing before the *tambochas*. Let them ask the foreman.

On the fourth day through the jungles the crisis began; food was scarce and the swamps interminable. They stopped to rest. They took off their shirts, and tore them into strips to wrap around their legs, tortured by the leeches that lurked in the muddy waters. Souza Machado, made generous by fatigue, slashed his ball of rubber with a knife, and shared it with his companions. Fajardo would not receive his portion. Souza took it. It was black gold, and not to be despised.

A thoughtless one asked:

"Where now?"

And all replied, reproachful:

"Forward! of course."

But the guide was lost. He advanced doubtfully, feeling his way, yet without stopping or saying anything in order not to alarm the others. Three times within an hour he found himself back at the same swamp, but fortunately his companions did not recognize it. . . .

They grew nervous. Forebodings of misfortune pressed heavily upon them. A careless word and the repressed emotions might be released—in panic, rage, madness. Each struggled to resist. Forward!

Lauro Coutinho made a sorry effort to appear carefree. He bantered with Souza Machado, who had stopped to throw away the remains of his rubber ball. Machado attempted hilarity. They talked a while. Then someone, I don't know who, asked Don Clemente some questions.

"Silence!" growled the Italian. "Remember that pilots and guides must not be spoken to!"

But old man Silva, stopping short, raised his arms as one who surrenders to captors, and, facing his friends, sobbed: "We are lost!"

Instantly the unhappy group, with their eyes lifted to the lofty branches, howled like dogs, raising a chorus of blasphemy and prayer:

"Inhuman God! Save us, oh God! We are lost!"

"We are lost!" Simple and common words,—yet uttered in the jungles they strike terror in the heart. To the mind of the person who hears them comes the vision of a man-consuming hell, a gaping mouth swallowing men whom hunger and disappointment place in the jaws.

Neither vows, nor warnings, nor the tears of the guide, who promised to find his way again, could serve to calm the men's panic.

"This old fellow is to blame! He lost his way because he wanted to go to the Vaupés!"

"Wretch! Bandit! You were deceiving us. You were taking us to sell us, God knows where!"

"Yes, you criminal! But God blasted your schemes!"

Seeing that his crazed companions might kill him, old man Silva started to run, but the treacherous lianas of a tree caught his legs and tripped him. There they tied him up, while Peggi urged they rip him to shreds. Then it was that Don Clemente spoke the words that saved him.

"You want to kill me?" he said, "How can you do anything without me? I'm your only hope!"

The men stopped mechanically.

"Yes, yes, it's necessary that he live in order to save us."

"But without letting him loose, or he'll escape!"

And although they would not unfasten him, they knelt before him to beg him that he save them.

"Don't desert us!"

"Let's return to the hut!"

"If you abandon us, we'll starve!" . . .

Don Clemente, his head in his hands, searched his memory for some clarifying hint. Only the sky could help him. Let it only tell him where the light of dawn came. That would be enough to plan another route.

Through a clear space in the lofty ceiling of foil a skylight in the forest, he saw a fragment of blue, fractured by the riblike branches of a withered bough. He recalled his map again. To see the sun, to see the sun! That was the key. If those tall cones of green, which every day saw it pass over them, could only speak! Why should silent trees refuse to tell a man what to do that he might not die? And, thinking again on God, he began to pray to the jungle, a prayer that begged forgiveness for the injury done the forests through bantering talk.

To climb one of those giants was next to impossible: the enormous trunks, the remote branches, dizziness lurking in the foliage to overtake the one who dared. If Lauro Coutinho, dozing nervously, were to try. . . .

Silva was about to call him, when a noise, as of gnawing on fine wood, scratched across the stillness. It was the teeth of his companions, chewing on the hard seeds of the vegetable ivory tree.

Don Clemente felt a surge of compassion. He would console them, even though by lying.

"What is it?" they whispered, bringing their shadowed faces near.

And anxious hands felt the knots of the cords that bound him.

"We are saved!"