

The National Imagination in New Granada

Margarita Serje

On January the first in 1887, an extensive article devoted to Alexander von Humboldt appeared on the *Papel Periodico Ilustrado*, a well known journal published in Nueva Granada. It was one of the many chronicles that appeared throughout the century complaining about “the ingratitude of foreigners who forget to acknowledge the merits of people” in their work. In this particular case the author refers to the fact that,

Humboldt called Santafé [the City we know nowadays as Bogotá] ‘the Athens of South America,’ no doubt because this city seemed to him the most cultivated among those he had visited this far in America, and although he certainly thought that this country was still in a very primitive state, he must have been surprised when he found more than a dozen notably instructed men in this capital, forged in a spirit similar to his and devoted as he was to the study of the Natural Sciences. But in spite of the fact that such a title honoured and favoured them, he never mentioned in his writings the names of these men, even when he took great advantage of their local and practical knowledge as they provided him generously and gracefully with an enormous amount of information and data about the country, its topography, mines, production, climates, etc.

The author proceeds to recall two important theses by Francisco Jose de Caldas, a *criollo*¹ scientist and politician, who was known as *El sabio Caldas*: “a method for measuring altitude through boiling water, without the use of a barometer, and the *Geography of Plants*, two concepts, which were first and exclusively invented by Caldas. Humboldt took advantage of these inventions, without acknowledging or citing this fact in his works.

1. I will use Spanish term, since the English word *creole* refers to the cultural outcome of a race mixture, while in Latin America, *criollo* refers to the white pure blooded descendants of the Spanish colonists.

Apart from the obvious reflections about the politics of knowledge, especially when it is produced at the frontiers of the empire in a language not recognized as legitimate for the production of knowledge, as was the case for Castilian already in the nineteenth century; what I would like point out is the link between the aesthetic and scientific representation of Nature and of the American landscape developed by Humboldt and the set of political representations which inscribed the consciousness of the new nations. I will argue that Humboldt's dramatic depiction of the tropical American landscapes more than a "reinvention of America" (Pratt 1992), was actually a re-enactment of the notions the *criollos* had developed about their "new world" and about the way they had occupied its territory. This re-enactment was performed by disembedding landscapes and peoples from their own historical and geographical continuity to place them in the context of modern natural (Universal) history.

By the nineteenth century, a new sensibility emerged in Europe celebrating all that seemed remote in space and time. The colonial frontier was then displaced: it was moved to the confines where capital had not yet arrived. From then on the forests, deserts and mountains – *les pays affreux* – which came to represent the archetype of pristine wilderness, became an object of desire: they became the privileged place for the experience of nature (Roger 1997). Perhaps one of the cornerstones of this new sensibility was Humboldt's American experience. Based upon his vision, a new understanding of nature was born which founded a particular way of imagining the nature and the nature of things in the "equinoctial regions of America."

Several authors have pointed out the influence and the sequels that Humboldt's passage had on the forging of an image of America right at the moment when the struggles for the independence were soaring and new nations were being imagined and created. One of the most suggestive arguments has been proposed by Marie Louise Pratt: "Alexander von Humboldt reinvented South America first and foremost as nature. Not the accessible, collectible, categorizable nature of the Linneans, however, but a dramatic, extraordinary nature, a spectacle capable of overwhelming human knowledge and understanding" (op. cit. 120). In this process of reinvention, she argues, "three images in particular (...) combined to form the standard metonymic representation of the 'new continent': superabundant tropical forests (the Amazon and the Orinoco), snow-capped mountains (the Andean Cordilleras and the volcanoes of Mexico), and vast interior plains (the Venezuelan *llanos* and the Argentine pampas)." (op. cit. 125)

It is important to stress how, in this process of "reinventing" America, Humboldt inscribed on the scenic images of the American tropics a set of colonial notions about landscape, culture, and history, granting them scien-

tific and aesthetic legitimacy. One of his most important developments was indeed the *Geography of Plants* (which he apparently developed based on Caldas' previous work). This thesis gave him celebrity and an important place in the field of natural sciences. In it he proposes his well known law according to which it is possible to homologate the distribution of vegetable associations according to latitude with its distribution according to altitude in the tropics. In this apparently simple law "a very complex explicative system is put in motion, since the physical parameters (temperature, humidity, etc.), themselves determined by their spatial situation (altitude or latitude), determine the character of vegetation, which in turn exerts an influence upon animals and humans beings" (Drouin 1993, 69). The diagram illustrating the distribution of plant associations by altitudinal strata was abundantly reproduced and it has become both an icon and a model of mountain ecology. (see figure 1)

The homology upon which this law is based, actually systematizes and gives scientific legitimacy to the vision the *criollos* had about the nature and geography of the viceroyalty. Colonial order had been imposed in America through cartographical knowledge. The map represented both the point of departure and the model for the appropriation of the new territories. Maps, and their superior point of view, imposed the logic of an urban order and a strictly hierarchical organization of space (consecrated in the *Ordenanzas* by Felipe II in 1573) based on a new classification of landscapes. This classification responds to the way in which the abrupt Andean territory, when reduced to a two dimensional surface, is represented as a stratified sequence of planes. This type of visualization implied that slopes were not considered relevant spaces; they were looked upon rather as residual areas. In fact the topographical locations for settlement that were privileged by Europeans were the high plateaus in the cordilleras, where both the flatlands and temperate climates prescribed by the *Ordenanzas* could be found. Slopes and their gradients represented for the colonizers a huge obstacle, not only to occupy them but also to escalate them. Castilian technology had no experience or precedents for the management of abrupt slopes, which made for them the construction of roads and paths, and needless to say of settlements or of agricultural plots, nearly impossible.

This fact was particularly important in the area of what constitutes today Colombia, since the cordillera divides into three ranges where only a few temperate climate – a plateau areas can be found. The colonial occupation was concentrated on those few flat spots, and it is there where the main cities are situated. The colonization of slopes did not take place until the last decades of the nineteenth century, and they present up the present serious obstacles for the construction of roads and highways (Carrizosa 2001).

The Andean landscape was thus classified and segmented according to a horizontal logic. The hierarchy of the stratified horizontal planes had a very strong religious and eschatological significance in European tradition. It represented the hierarchical order of the Chain of Being, expressed by “the three regions of air. Above the lower air that we breathe is the middle air, a region of intense cold from which storms and tempests emerge (...). This deadly region could not have existed before the Fall: it marks the limit of Satan’s conquest in the order of nature and his present headquarters in human life (...) above this was the region of the upper air, a temperate domain of ‘perpetual spring’, the traditional locale of the earthly paradise (...) thought of as on a mountain, above all hills ...” (Frye 1965, 44-45).

Each one of these strata was considered to have its own temperament according to a specific combination of the four principles: heat, cold, humidity and dryness. The idea of temperament synthesizes both the physical and the moral properties of each one of them, and constituted the basis of the qualification which was given to the different altitudinal levels. The notion of the Andean topography segmented in altitudinal strata was the foundation of both Caldas’ work on the *Levelling of the species of Quinchona* and Humboldt’s *Geography of Plants* (see figures 2-3).

Based on this temperament theory, virtual barriers were established between *tierras calientes* – the hot, humid and unhealthy tropical lowlands, and the *altiplanos*, the high plateaus, which were cool, temperate and healthy, as described in a well known classification of the parishes in New Granada (de Oviedo, 1771). This opposition between the lowlands and the highlands became a basic assumption and almost a paradigm for the scientific knowledge of the region.

This vision is radically different from the vertical way in which Andean aboriginal societies conceive their territories. Ethnographical and archaeological evidences have documented their settlement pattern which has been conceptualized as “vertical control model,” or as “strategy of vertical management” (Murra 1975, Langebarck, 1985). Besides the fact that the words management, control, or model, are not quite accurate to describe the experience and the relationship indigenous groups in the Andes have historically established with their environments, it is possible to generalize that indigenous settlement patterns were in pre-colonial times, and in many cases still are, based in the simultaneous use of several altitudinal levels.

This vertical use grants these groups access to the enormous variety of ecological niches which results from the variations in altitude, the exposure to winds and rain and the different types of soils found in the slopes of the cordilleras. J. Murra (op.cit.) shows how each social group in the Andes, whether it was a small political unit as the *Chuyapo* in Guanaco, or a huge

and powerful kingdom, as the *Lupaca* in Lake Titicaca, would secure access to as many altitudinal levels and ecological niches as possible. In this way, the domestication of the most important products for the Andean economies implied an adaptation to the different altitudinal levels: such is case of products like maize, coca, beans, or chillies which can be harvested in all climates from sea level up to almost 9,000 feet above sea level; potatoes, between 3,000 feet and 9,000 feet, or maniocs, tomatoes and cacao, up to 6,000 feet.

In what constitutes today Colombian territory, pre colonial societies occupied the slopes intensively with an implantation logic completely different to the European one. Spanish colonists privileged the use of whatever flat space they could find for their settlements, both for cities and food production, rejecting the slopes. To multiply them they invested huge amounts of resources in drying lakes, marshes, water meadows and alluvial soils. The occupation of the Andes by the Indians responded to a different logic: they used slopes extensively with varying intensiveness according to gradients, with a very strong vertical continuity linking the highlands with the lowlands. This type of occupation is practiced today by several Andean societies inhabiting the cordilleras in Colombia. Such is the case of the *Kogui*, *Ijka*, *Wiwa* and *Kankuamo* groups in *La Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta*, or the *Uwa*, *Inga*, *Kamentsá* groups in the slopes of the oriental cordillera facing the Amazon (Reichel-Dolamtoff 1985, Langebaeck op.cit, Osborn 1995, Ramírez 1996). Ethnography has shown how the vertical organization of the land for these societies is expressed in the fact that the basin of the rivers which flow down from the snow peaks to the lowlands and plains is a distinctive element of identification for these groups. The vertical system of basins and micro-basins is the central referent for both their social and spatial organization. In the case of the *Uwa*, for instance, every clan or social group is named and identified with the basin of one of the main rivers of the cordillera, and it constitutes the territory granted to this group for the use of certain forest products. (see figure 4)

In his introduction to *Vues des Cordillères et Mouments Indigènes*, Humboldt expresses explicitly not only a “natural” distinction between the biogeographical strata: the highlands, *tierra fría*, with cold and temperate climates and the lowlands, the hot lands – *tierras calientes* – but also a cultural distinction between the two which has survived almost intact to our days, and has become paradigmatic for the ethnographical and social knowledge of the region:

Lors de la découverte du Nouveau Monde, ou, pour mieux dire, lors de la première invasion des Espagnols, les peuples américains, les plus avancés dans la culture, étoient des peuples montagnards (...) Les facultés se développent plus facilement partout où l’homme, fixé sur un sol moins fertile et force de

lutter contre les obstacles qui lui oppose la nature, ne succombe pas a cette lutte prolongée (...) Dans la partie équinoxiale de l'Amérique où des savanes toujours vertes sont suspendues au-dessus de la région des nuages, on n'a trouvé des peuples policés qu'au sein des cordillères: leurs premiers progrès dans les arts y étoient aussi anciens que la forme bizarre de leurs gouvernements qui ne favorisent pas la liberté individuelle. (Von Humboldt 1816, 32-33)

The cultural distinction between highlands and lowlands is based on the assumption that civilization may only be developed in regions with temperate climates. In the introduction to *Cosmos*, Humboldt states that: "it is to the inhabitants of a small section of the temperate zone that the rest of mankind owe the earliest revelation of an intimate and rational acquaintance with the forces governing the rational world. Moreover, it is from the same zone (which is apparently more favourable to the progress of reason, the softening of manners and the security of public liberty) that the germs of civilization have been carried to the regions of the tropics" (Von Humboldt 1997, 36). Thus, in the equinoctial regions of America, civilization may only be found in the highlands, propitiated by its cold and temperate climates. This paradoxical deterministic limit that Humboldt imposes to his otherwise possibilistic vision is what turns the natural homology he presents in his *Geography of Plants* into a cultural one. The hot and feverish climates of the plains and rainforests determine a sort of incapacity inherent to the societies in the lowlands to "ascend" to civilization. The proof of this lack of civilization is evident in the fact that these groups have no agriculture, and as Humboldt affirms, they simply "surround their huts with bananas, *jatrophas* and a few other edible plants" (Von Humboldt 1816, 36).

From the European point of view, even before the American Encounter, savages living in the forests represented the first and most primitive era of Human History: that of the state of Nature, which may also be understood as the first stage of economic and productive organization: the natural economy which characterizes the groups known as "hunter-gatherers." According to this classification, the hunter-gatherer's activities are limited to taking advantage of the natural abundance offered by the environment. This is particularly so in the rain forests, where all these groups have to do is simply harvest the enormous profusion of resources the jungle has to offer. That is why, in words of Rousseau, "the body of the savage, which is the only instrument he possesses" (Rousseau 1996, 82) gives him the right to own only the product of his work, that is, they can only own what they hunt, fish or gather. By the same token, no property of the land is acknowledged to them. This is why America (the whole continent) was considered a huge area of wastelands,

lands which nobody owned because they had never been exploited or cultivated.

The right to claim property of the land can only be recognized according to the amount of work invested to achieve its technical transformation. This transformation is obviously understood in terms of the European farming tradition: the plough and the geometrical organization of fences and divisions for the beds, plots and patches. These were necessary for a type of exploitation of the land oriented towards the production for the modern market, that is, a price regulated system whose central objective is to maximize gain and profit (Polanyi 2001), which may not be considered as the sole universal, natural form of market. Besides, agricultural development in Europe was adapted to the sunlight conditions of high latitudes. This is why it is based on monocultures extended in horizontal surfaces that act like a panel to capture the oblique sun rays.

Tropical Amerindian agriculture, on the other hand, has been invisible until recently to the western eye because it is based on different principles. Production here is not necessarily oriented towards modern markets, but to market systems guided by other principles such as reciprocity or redistribution. It is adapted to the perpendicular sunrays in the equatorial zone. That is why indigenous agricultural plots present a vertical organization which reproduces the multi-strata structure of the tropical rainforest. (see figure 5). They are often organized by creating a series of diverse plant association spots that resemble a spiral staircase - to maximise sunlight - which in many cases reflect the structure of the social relations existing between human and non-human beings (Descola 1986). This kind of agriculture “has a strong structural similarity with the rain forest, which allows for the protection of soils from erosion, facilitates photosynthetic efficiency and significantly diminishes the possibility of plagues and diseases” (Van der Hammen 1992, 16). Its efficiency is also noteworthy: “Having a high productivity level, requiring a low labour investment, it offers an enormous variety of products perfectly adapted to the variations of soils and climates, protected from all sorts of epidemics and parasites” (Descola op.cit., 237). But, since its configuration presents a chaotic image, which María Clara Van der Hammen describes as an “organized chaos,” this agricultural system has been misread as *monte*: wilderness.

Besides, the rainforests themselves are a product of the societies which inhabit them. Ethnology and archaeology in the Amazon have illustrated the process of its production as an environment, showing how biodiversity is in great measure a result of indigenous intervention. The “jungle” is the result of a series of social practices which determine which species are valued and favoured and are thus reproduced, selected, and preserved, while others are

ignored. Indigenous groups in Amazonia, both the horticulturalist groups who live in *malocas* by the rivers, and the nomadic hunter-gatherers living in the interior, have developed several distinctions and classifications of spaces in the rain forest which reflect the relationship they establish with those areas and the type of intervention they perform on them. This constitutes a type of land management which Laura Rival has come to describe as “wild gardens and cultivated forests” (Rival, 1998). The nomadic groups for instance, the so-called hunter-gatherers who are usually considered the most primitive amongst the primitives, have developed a series of techniques, documented by ethnography (Cabrera, Mahecha and Franky 1999, Politis 1996) that reveal their complex approach to the different areas in which they classify their territory. These techniques include selective pruning and clearing, care and replanting of seeds, sprouts and young plants, and the concentration of particular species in certain areas in order to attract prey or animals whose presence will in turn help reproduce specific trees or plants. Their intervention fosters complex chains of relationships which are an active factor of the forest’s diversity. Besides, these nomadic groups create “wild gardens” near their fishing or hunting areas with a complex multistrata structure. According to Philippe Descola, “the sophistication of their techniques is hardly discernible to a nonchalant observer, incapable of measuring the amount of knowledge and experience required for the creation of a forest plot” (Descola op.cit., 233) and, I would add, the extent of the decisions that have to be made to achieve it. All these practices go far beyond the passive taking advantage of the natural abundance of the rainforest which is how the concept of hunter-gathering is understood in common sense.

Rainforests are not, therefore, “virgin” or “pristine”, as many conservation environmentalists would have it, but rather, they are social products. They constitute the landscapes developed by indigenous societies and their modes of production. However, the culture of jungle peoples, both in the sense of the care of the land and in the sense of social organization, has been ignored and systematically rendered invisible. They have been classified as groups situated in the realm of nature as opposed to culture. In the European tradition since Greek times, the nomadic management of space has been invisible. According to its view, occupied and appropriated space can only be space ordered by geometry and discipline. François Hartog describes in *Le Miroir d’Herodote* how, for this Greek historian, civilized space could only be “delimited, measured and surveyed, distributed and controlled” (Hartog 1991, 77). In this way, the jungles and forests, the plains and savannas occupied by primitive in-state-of-nature peoples, can only be barren wastelands: vast, empty wildlands. The cultural corollaries of Humboldt’s *Geography of Plants* naturalize one of the cornerstones of the colonial order of things: its

geopolitical imagination. The natural/cultural homology it introduced, in its altitudinal version, condemns the hot feverish lowlands to the state of perennial barbarism; while it claims that ascending to civilization is only possible in the highlands. In its latitudinal version, this same homology implies that civilization is natural to the “temperate zone” (which generally coincides with what we call today “the North”), and the tropical regions of the planet are forever destined to backwardness and savagery. This natural/cultural homology, which was both aesthetized and legitimated scientifically by Humboldt’s work, was re-appropriated by the eminent *criollos* of the New Granada, and it became the basis for the foundational myths upon which the new nations and their consciousness was forged. These myths, as I intend to argue, after a long historical continuity, are still based on Humboldt’s esthetical dramatization of nature.

Some of the most influential politicians in nineteenth century New Granada were also noted geographers (Sanchez, 1999). The academic propositions made from this double viewpoint, were crucial for the creation of a foundational image that was to guide both the National Project in Colombia, and its constitution as a national State. The vision they proposed was, and in many aspects still is, the basis for the construction of the official National Geography, and most importantly, it constituted a paradigmatic model that shaped the modern conception of the national territory, its populations and its nature. This model has had a long lasting historical continuity, and it constitutes one of the myths of the Nation.

The central notion of this geographical narrative is that of the prodigious and exuberant nature with which the Nation has been endowed: The extreme profusion of natural and mineral resources, where a continuous re-elaboration of the myth of America as land of plenty, as a promising frontier, may be found. Caldas, who was both a man of science and one of the leaders of the movement for the liberation from Spanish rule, proposed an idealized representation of the wealth and exuberance of Nature in New Granada. He highlights its privileged position in between the two oceans, with three branches of cordilleras and their tropical position resulting in an enormous variety of soils and climates, the existence of vast and extended plains (*los Llanos*) and forests and mountains covered by snow peaks, crossed by huge rivers suited for navigation, and filled with immense natural and mineral resources still to be discovered and exploited.

This great diversity situates this nation in a privileged position to “observe, and even to touch, the influence of climate and food upon the physical constitution of men, and upon its vices and virtues” (Caldas 1849, 7). In spite of its aura of innocence, this aesthetized and romanticized vision of the nature of the country was far from it. It constituted the stage for a human

geography based on Humboldt's homology of the "Geography of Plants". One of the main preoccupations for the *criollo* elites was how to make sense and establish order and hierarchy among the various social groups that colonial domination had produced: the different "castes" resulting from the multiple race mixtures. It was no longer the Indian, the African and the Spanish (themselves already representing their three constitutive cultures), but a large population that came to be known the *libres de todos los colores* (free peoples of all colours): mulattoes, *mestizos*, *cuarterones*, *zambos* among others (see figure 6). This was a rebellious growing social group, showing great independence from the ruling classes. The question of how to place them in the new social order was a crucial one.

Based on the fact that in Nueva Granada "latitude has no rule" since in the tropics it is the "inches in the barometer" that account for variations both in vegetation and in the human condition, Caldas postulates a theory of social order. This order, "the expression of a higher principle", is based on the opposition between the highlands and the lowlands: "Indians and mulattoes in the hot zones under the abrasive sun, live almost naked, having only a hammock and some banana trees which require no cultivation...while the castes that live in the cordillera are whiter and have better manners" (Caldas op.cit., 132).

The homology between the temperate latitudes and the highlands in the cordilleras, which is the central premise of the *Geography of Plants*, acquires in his work an important new dimension: it becomes the basis to homologate the groups inhabiting the cordilleras with Europeans; giving in this way a scientific basis to the superiority of the Andean *criollos*. Based on this geographical categorization, he distinguishes three hierarchical social castes related to the altitudinal strata: the wild lands, jungles and savannas inhabited by "hordes of barbarians", the hot lowlands populated by the free peoples of all colours, who are subdued by the harmful influence of a torrid morbid climate, and the elevated peoples in the cool temperate Andean high – plateaus. The bio-geographic stratigraphy is thus transformed into caste stratification. This constitutes the first corollary of the prodigious and exuberant tropical nature.

A second corollary was the fact that at the same time, the diversity of natural resources and the potential of the bio-geographic stratigraphy represented the "Most Important Theatre for the development of vapour, commerce, mining and immigration in order to transform this desert into a powerful and opulent Nation" as was expressed by an editorial in the journal *El Pasatiempo*, 12 October 1853. Natural profusion awaits to be penetrated and exploited.

In order to make this vision possible the colonial division of labour had to be preserved. The bio-geographic stratification gave institutional and scientific legitimacy to a new reading of the social hierarchy: “the white population living in the haut plateaus” had the vision and the industrious capacities, “the blacks, and the *mestizos* and mulattoes, disseminated in the coasts and the bottom of the ardent valleys” were meant for work in the plantations, in the mines and in navigation, jobs which “demand strong and vigorous races.” As for the “hordes of savages,” they were considered just as the jungles and marshes, an obstacle of nature to be surmounted in order to achieve progress (Samper 1859). It is not specifically the phenotypical variations in skin colour (which were probably difficult to pin down among the “free peoples of all colours”) that are transformed here into social stratification, it is a geographical characterization, that is both natural and cultural, which accounts for the assumed labour (and capital) potential of the different regional groups. It underlies the conception of diversity in Colombia and the “character” of the different geographical units which configure the country as *país de regiones* (land of regions). National identity in Colombia – and this constitutes the third corollary of this foundational myth – is based upon the existence of multiple regional identities. The principal marker of these regional identities is given indeed by the position each region occupies in the social and bio-geographical stratigraphy.

This vision, which is deeply embedded in common sense, has had multiple concrete political consequences throughout history. One of them was the fact that it legitimized the central position the Andean white elites acquired in the new republic. A passionate conflict between the regional *criollo* elites arose by the time of the Independence wars with Spain. It started as a confrontation among the land owners and merchants of Andes and the Caribbean. In most analyses of this conflict, it has been argued that the problem resided in the fact that when the time came to build a new republic there was not one single united *criollo* elite endowed with a national vision, but a group of regional elites with different projects and identities (Múnera 1996). What I suggest is that the issue was not the lack of national vision, but the quite the contrary, the imposition of this singular vision of the nature of the country and its geopolitical imagination.

Cartagena, in the Caribbean coast, wanted independence not just from Spain but from Santa Fe, the capital of the Viceroyalty. A huge movement of blacks, *zambos*, mulattoes and in general the “free peoples of all colours” was ignited there, radicalizing the demands for autonomy. An Andean state was created to face what was seen as the disorder and anarchy of the *negros de tierra caliente* (blacks in the hot lowlands), within the horizon of the recent revolts of the “blacks” in Haiti. It was legitimized by a national discourse

based on the positive image of the Andean *criollos* opposed to the negative image of the Caribbean identity, and in general to the negative image of the inhabitants of the lowlands: “free peoples of all colours” and savages. In a similar way, in Venezuela, the National Project was for the *criollos* the means to “contain the blacks” and to give continuity to “the peaceful colonial concert” (Carrera Damas 1983). The conflict of interests between the regional criollo elites in Venezuela was resolved, as it was in Colombia, by a consensus about “the removal of the masses of free peoples of all colours from the scene.” The project put forward by the *criollos* to reinstate and re-found the colonial structure of internal domination, was based upon the set of notions about the nature of the country and the nature of its inhabitants, which in turn were based on this bio-geographical and social stratigraphy.

The “fear of the people”, inspired by Indians, blacks, zambos, mulattoes and all the other colours, is at the base of the “democracy without people” that has characterized politics in the countries of the “Great Colombia” since the nineteenth century (Zambrano, 1989). The exclusion of the savages in the lowlands was explained by Simón Bolívar himself: “In the midst of primitive nature, crossed by mythological rivers whose banks are populated by a heterogeneous fauna of monsters and ferocious animals that dispute men the dominion of the jungles, one cannot in one day improvise the formation of proper citizens, that are conscious of the high functions of electing a government and of being elected as such, which is the basis of a true democracy” (Bolívar 1971, 102).

The political consequence of the ideas about the geography of civilization has also found an expression in the development, and the conflicts, of the two traditional parties in Colombia: the liberal and the conservative. By 1848, before these parties assumed their British inspired names, they were called respectively the Mountain and the Valley Parties. The first one identified itself with the topographic stratigraphy of castes proposed by Caldas, with the Andean centralism and with the moral and religious values of the Spanish tradition; it was the cradle of the conservative party. The party of the Valley identified itself with the illustrated, *laissez faire* project put forward by the pushing, autonomous mixed elites of the lowlands. They were allied with groups of emergent free artisans “of all colours” in the regions most involved with metropolitan trade.² The horizontal regional distinction implicit in these political parties was forged around the differences of race and class: the liberal party was associated with the blacks, the mulattoes and the free peoples of all colours (Rojas 2002). The colonial principles of the stratigraphic depiction of the landscape are present in this distinction.

2. Charles Cochrane, an officer of the British Navy, describes the composition of the two parties and their passionate debates in his *Journal of Residence and Travels in Colombia* (Cochrane 1825, 81-84).

The image of the rich and abundant nature depicted by Humboldt, and recreated as a theatre for commerce and civilization by the politician geographers of the New Granada is still relevant in the contemporary political arena in Colombia. In recent a special edition of Colombia's most read journal, *El Tiempo*, a supplement appeared showing Colombia's strengths and advantages for the Free Trade Agreement between the Andean Countries and the US. Some of the most renowned economists made an analysis of the aspects that permit an optimistic view of the economic future. They all reiterate the fact that the problems we have had to face "are not only public disorder, but an amazing and abrupt geography", and they don't fail to mention the abundant and exuberant wealth this geography conveys: "Our richest and most abundant resource is, no doubt, nature. We have got soils, and water, diverse sources of energy, lots of minerals, the second biodiversity in the planet and an excellent geographical location in the tropics, near the biggest market in the world". One wonders at the persistence of this representation which has been for two centuries the tip of an iceberg whose submerged portion is deeply embedded in the principles of the natural and social homology elaborated by Humboldt in his *Geography of Plants*.

Bibliography

- Bolívar, Simón. 1971. *Escritos Políticos*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial
- Cabrera, G. Mahecha, D. Franky, C. 1999. *Los Nukak: Nómadas de la Amazonia colombiana*. Bogotá: Universidad Nacional-Fundación GAIA
- Caldas, Francisco José de. 1849. *Estado de la Geografía del Virreinato de Santa Fé de Bogotá, con relación a la economía y al comercio y El influjo del clima sobre los seres organizados*. *Semanario del Nuevo Reino de Granada*, Miscelánea de Ciencias, Literatura, Artes e Industria publicada por una sociedad de patriotas Granadinos bajo la dirección de Francisco José de Caldas, Nueva Edición anotada y adornada con su retrato y con el cuadro original de la Geografía de las Plantas del Barón de Humboldt, Paris: Lasserre, 1-33 y 110-154. [orig. 1808]
- Carrerra Damas, Germán. 1983. *Sobre la cuestión regional y el proyecto nacional venezolano en la mitad del siglo XIX*. *La Unidad Nacional en América Latina: del regionalismo hacia la nacionalidad*. M. Palacios (comp.) México: Colegio de México, 11-19.
- Carrizosa, Julio. 2001. *Vías de comunicación y cobertura arbórea en la historia ambiental de Colombia*. *Naturaleza en Disputa: Ensayos de Historia Ambiental de Colombia 1850-1995*. G. Palacio (ed.) Bogotá: Universidad Nacional.
- Cochrane, Charles. 1825. *Journal of Residence and Travels in Colombia during the years of 1823 and 1824*, 2 vols. London: Colburn.
- De Oviedo, Vicente. 1990. *Cualidades y Riquezas del Nuevo Reino de Granada*. Bucaramanga: Colección Memoria Regional Gobernación de Santander [1761]
- Descola, Philippe. 1986. *La Nature Domestique*. Paris : MSH.

- Drouin, Jean-Marc. 1993. *L'Écologie et son histoire: Réinventer la nature*. Paris: Champs-Flammarion.
- Frye, Northrop. 1965. *The Return of Eden : Five essays on Milton's Epics*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Hartog, François. 1991. *Le miroir d'Hérodote : Essai sur la représentation de l'autre*. Paris : Gallimard.
- Langebaeck, Carl. 1985. Tres formas de acceso a productos en territorios de los cacicazgos sujetos al Cocuy siglo XVI. *Boletín del Museo del Oro*, 18: 29-45.
- Múnera, Alfonso. 1996. El Caribe Colombiano en la República Andina: Identidad y autonomía política en el siglo XIX. *Boletín Cultural y Bibliográfico*. No. 41.
- Murra, John. 1975. El control vertical de un máximo de pisos ecológicos en la economía de las sociedades andinas. *Formaciones Económicas y políticas del mundo andino*. Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos. 59-117.
- Osborn, Ann. 1995. *Las Cuatro Estaciones, Mitología y estructura social entre los U'wa*. Bogotá: Banco de la República.
- Polanyi, Karl. 2001. *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Boston: Beacon Press [1944].
- Politis, Gustavo. 1996. *Nukak*. Bogotá: Instituto Sinchi.
- Pratt, Marie Louise. 1992. *Imperial Eyes: Travel writing and transculturation*. London New York: Routledge.
- Ramírez, María Clemencia. 1996. *Frontera Fluida entre Andes, Piedemonte y Selva: El caso del Valle del Sibundoy, siglos XVI-XVII*. Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura Hispánica.
- Reichel Dolmatoff, Gerardo. 1985. *Los Kogi, Una tribu de la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia*. Bogotá: Procultura.
- Rival, Laura. 1998. Domestication as an historical and symbolic process: Wild gardens and cultivated forests in the Ecuadoran Amazon. *Advances in Historical Ecology*. W. Balée (ed.). NY: Columbia University Press. 232-252.
- Roger, Alain. 1997. *Court traité du paysage*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Rojas, Cristina. 2001. *Civilization and Violence: Regimes of representation in nineteenth century Colombia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 1996. *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*. Paris: La Découverte [1754]
- Samper, José María. 1859. *La Confederation Grenadine: Son territoire et sa population à la fin de 1858*, *Bulletin de la Société Géographique*, 4 ème série, Tome XVII, 207-211.
- Sánchez, Efraín. 1999. *Gobierno y Geografía, Agustín Codazzi y la Comisión corográfica en la Nueva Granada*. Bogotá: Banco de la República.
- Van der Hammen, María Clara. 1992. *El Manejo del Mundo: Naturaleza y sociedad entre los Yukuna de la Amazonia colombiana*. Bogotá: Tropenbos y Tercer Mundo Editores.
- Von Humboldt, Alexandre. 1805. *Essai sur la géographie des plantes: accompagné d'un tableau physique des régions équinoxiales, fondé sur de*

mesures exécutées depuis le dixième degré de latitude boréale jusqu'au dixième degré de latitude australe pendant les années 1799-1803, avec une grande planche en couleur ou en noir, grand in Quarto. Paris: F. Schoell

Von Humboldt, Alexandre. 1816. Vues des cordillères et Monuments des Peuples Indigènes de l'Amérique. Paris: Librairie Grecque-Latine-Allemande

Von Humboldt, Alexandre. 1997. Cosmos: A sketch of a physical description of the Universe. Vol.1 Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Zambrano, Fabio. 1989. El miedo al pueblo. Análisis: Conflicto social y violencia en Colombia, Documentos Ocasionales no 53. Bogotá: Cinep.

