

The “Racialized” Construction of the Colombian Nation

Written by Jesús David Quintero Aleans

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

The “Racialized” Construction of the Colombian Nation

<https://www.e-ir.info/2014/03/13/the-racialized-construction-of-the-colombian-nation/>

JESÚS DAVID QUINTERO ALEANS, MAR 13 2014

The social role of history as a discipline of humanities has been the terrain of an ideological and theoretical quarrel since the professionalization of that field of study during the second half of the 19th century.[1] Still, within the Colombian context, the production of historical accounts remained as the dominion of an intellectual elite that, as the result of the particular circumstances of that community, was comprised of the same individuals who integrated the economic, political, and social hegemon. As a consequence, and due to the monopoly of “high culture” and education flaunted by those elitist sectors, the writing of the national history was guided by a combination of eurocentrism[2] and racialism[3] that worked as parameters for the production of a collective identity that allowed the elites to legitimize their supremacy within the “imagined community”, differentiating themselves from the *others* who inhabited the “national territory” and, at the same time, permitting the establishment of a sort of partial homogenization[4] that tolerated certain degree of equality among the individuals who were recognized as members of the “Colombian homeland”, in a procedure concerned with the differentiation of the national community from the *others* located at the outskirts of the republic.

The result of such an ideological operation was the production of “national ideal types” that represented the character, lifestyle and virtues of those subjects typified as “Colombians”, whilst the racial and moral differences among the constituents of the imagined nation – the elites and the people – were emphasized in order to assure the social, economic, and political prerogatives and privileges of those whose ethnic-racial origin and intellectual superiority (that is, the *criollos*) conferred the natural right to rule the country and guide their inferior fellows through the path of “progress” and “civilization”.

This essay presents the arguments devised by the social elites who ruled the Republic of New Granada (later known as the Republic of Colombia) from 1830 to 1886. It seeks to explain and to understand the resources used in this sectorial effort to build and expand an elitist hegemonic power over the broad majority of subjects who belonged to clearly differentiable social groups. These heterogenic collectives were gathered into a homogenizing project of “national community”, which maintained the most convenient specificities of the subaltern groups in a strategic move to enforce the hierarchical distribution of social wealth and power in clear benefit of the most favored sectors of the constituency. At this point, it is relevant to stipulate that the ideological process that will be presented in the next pages was embodied by means of the enforcement of certain governmental initiatives, such as the *Constitution of 1886*, the legal dispositions that complemented it (as was the case of the *Concordat of 1887*), and the configuration of the *National Museum* constituted the “materialization” of that racialized construction of history. From those governmental productions, this text will offer an analysis of the conformation of the National Museum.

The attempt to form a Colombian Nation during the 19th century was not the product of the patriotic feelings that arose as the “objective” or “natural” result of the independency war and the subsequent events the population faced in the ongoing republican life. It was instead a deliberate construction imagined and pursued by the most privileged sectors of the once colonial society of the New Kingdom of Granada, namely the *criollos*. This ideological process of *architecting* the nation was perceived by those elites as a requirement to legitimize their particular social status and privileges, and their right to lead and shape the country according to what they (the *criollos*) considered to be the best and most convenient way of being for “la Patria”. [5]

The conflictive process of independence that started in 1810 also signified for the *criollo*[6] elites of the New

The “Racialized” Construction of the Colombian Nation

Written by Jesús David Quintero Aleans

Kingdom of Granada the beginning of a sort of identity crisis that disembogued in the ensuing efforts to constitute a new sectorial distinctiveness that could provide a secure place for them in the emerging independent republican society and in the modified international scenario. Historically, the elites of the rebel colony identified themselves as “American Spaniards”, [7] as the direct descendants and, culturally and racially, the heirs of the original Spanish conquerors who arrived to the “new world” and founded the cities, ports and towns that ensured the Spanish regency over the explored and “civilized” [8] territories that later integrated the New Kingdom of Granada. In reason of their racial provenance and cultural heritage, these “overseas Europeans” [9] considered themselves to be in social and political parity with their European counterparts, claiming for them the right and the recognition to occupy administrative positions within the colonial governmental scaffolding. [10]

The main identity issue for the continental elite began with the Spanish banning of their access to any governmental post in the colonial administration, a gesture that was interpreted as the positioning of the *criollos* in a lower social stratum in comparison with their European counterpart. This governmental disposition was regarded by the colonial elites not only as a denial of the historic reality, but also as a detrimental policy that questioned the social primacy of the American whites over other segments of the colonial constituency (blacks, indigenous, and mixed groups) who traditionally had been treated as inferiors. [11] This was a practice that provided to the latter their allocation in the lower gradations of the social pyramid, organized in agreement with cast criterion, due to their racial and cultural non-European features. The reaction of the *criollo* elite to the “discriminatory” and “oppressive” measures enforced by the colonial administration was ultimately expressed in the ongoing struggle for independence conducted during the first decades of the 19th century, a conflict that demanded from the privileged sectors of the society the invention of a *proto-nationalist narrative* that depicted the colonial regime as a “tyranny”, and that recognized the existence and political authority of a rather ethereal, metaphorical and undefined social body denominated as “the people”, in whose name the revolution and the subsequent implantation of a republican order and institutional framework was legitimized. The proto-nationalist narrative, created and preached by the *criollos*’ representatives and leaders, was characterized by the strong condemnation of several features of the Spaniard heritage and history, primarily focusing on the peculiarities and consequences of the colonial rule. This leadership was an argumentative body that obliged the elite sectors to pursue their political ends with the symbolic attestation that the new governmental and social order that they were building would also work as an innovative collective reality totally divergent from anything that has been made by the European oppressors. [12]

The social scenery depicted by the post-war context was characterized by the lack of an “external” enemy to struggle against, and the assumption of the burdens and obligations the state imposed on the social elite, who were recently constituted as the bearers of the political power. This social climate led to the construction of a new nationalist narrative that would allow the legitimization of their primacy and control over the entire constituency, a type of validity that had to be based on the “civilized condition” that conferred superiority, in both racial [13] and cultural terms, to the members of the upper social stratum. The prior reasoning, which alluded to the social differentiation by means of the consolidation of a hierarchical order within the imagined community, had to ensure both the implementation of a given type of *homogenization* of all the members of the nation around the construction and sharing of certain degree of common cultural, historical and linguistic background that endorsed the existence of a *national people*, clearly differentiated from the (inside and outside) *others* that were seen as alien to the nation; in other words, the new dynamics imposed by the independent political situation and embodied by the realities of republicanism, dictated to the *criollos* the identitarian and practical imperative to pursue the confectioning of a comprehensive and convincing narration by means of which they were able to segregate themselves from the “different” and “inferior” sectors of the people that they intended to govern. At the same time, it allowed them to achieve some sort of communal identification and *homogeneity* (in terms of a *moral community*) among the extensive human body, as a basic requirement for the conformation of a nationwide society with shared (idyllic) history, cultural patterns, and values. For the construction of such a nationalist narrative, the social elites utilized several discursive and figurative resources that made it possible for the hegemonic social sectors to envisage a fiction in which such elements as language, history and religion played a determinant role. [14]

As paradoxical as it may seem, and because of the importance that the racialist ideology had in the *criollos*’ mental universe, the elite sectors of the new republic appealed to their newly idealized history of notorious Spaniard ancestors as a resource to sustain their social primacy. This particular strategy was based upon the assumption that

The “Racialized” Construction of the Colombian Nation

Written by Jesús David Quintero Aleans

because the elites were the direct descendants of the Spaniard conquerors and colonizers, they also held the right to maintain their social and political prelacry over the *national people*, made up of mixed, indigenous, and black populations, as long as they also inherited the most relevant cultural patterns that characterized the civilized modern western societies, among which it was compulsory to find the Catholic religion and the Spanish language.[15]

In accordance with some of the most notorious elitist proponents, the *criollo* elites were the more propitious sector for the administration and guidance of the national constituency through the path of spiritual realization and material progress as far as they, the white peoples of the country, were direct heirs of the European character and virtues. This argument is particularly illustrative of the complex ideological operation purported by the *hegemon* as far as, through it, the elites were able to establish ideological *communicating vessels* that tolerated the manifestation of a *dual identity* in terms of association and disruption with both the people and the outsiders. This *criollo* identity was of an *associative* kind as far as, by means of it, the social elites entangled their history and legitimacy to the Spaniard and, extensively, to the European white civilization that had *discovered* and *cultured* the once “unexplored” territories and “primitive” subjects of the American continent. For the “American Spaniards”, they, as representatives of the civilized white peoples, were the most appropriate administrators and guardians of those elements that had made possible for the western civilization the achievement of the intellectual and material evolution that have enshrined them on a superior position in the path of progress; namely, the true religion and the language.[16]

This is the point in which the *dissociative* element is introduced because, as religion and language are recognized as the seals of western superiority – that is, the Catholic dogma and the Spanish language vis-à-vis the indigenous pagan beliefs and (usually, non-written) languages – the *criollo* ideologists specified that, in accordance with their Iberian cultural and racial heritage, the Christian Catholic faith and the Spanish language might have been regarded as the essential features that would secure the integration of the various human groups that inhabited the republic into a community populated by a national people, *homogenized* in its inner self and totally different from other human gatherings. This operation, as contradictory as it appears to be, was performed as follows: the *criollo* thinkers conceived themselves, the social sector they represented, and the national people they were trying to particularize, as members of a broader “Latin Race”, characterized by their usage of Romance languages and their confession of the Catholic faith. The preceding elements entangled the new-Grenadian constituency to any European Catholic people that spoke a Latin language, establishing a clear cleavage among them and the protestant peoples speaking a Germanic language, but also separating them from any constituency that had adopted the modern liberal ideology, atheism and materialism. As a consequence, this *belief-language axis* made possible the distinction between the *criollos*, inheritors of the Spanish conquerors and therefore heirs and holders of the language and religion brought by the latter; the national people, whose members were in a process of amalgamation based on ideal types built upon the foundation laid by Catholicism and the Spanish language; and the individuals and groups, either inside or outside the national borders, who could not fit within the general parameters proposed by the national elites because they were not Catholics or did not speak a Romance language, for example.[17]

This ideological procedure for the specification of the wide-ranging principles upon which the national identity must rest was complemented by the conception of certain communal particularities that would sustain the national specificity in front of other Latin American nations that clearly shared the religious beliefs and language criteria with the new-Grenadine country. In this regard, the *criollos* determined that, in order to differentiate their national people with their neighboring equivalents, the former should fit with the particular character of the inhabitants of the “altiplano cundiboyacense” (the highland plateau located on the eastern cordillera of the Colombian Andes).[18] This was not a random choice since the national elites, who were devoted to the endeavor of *composing* the nation and its people, selected as models the zones of the country they (the *criollos*) inhabited, which also were the regions with the largest *whitened*[19] population: the highland plateau, the “Santanderes” (located at the northeastern part of the country), and cities such as Popayan or Cartagena.[20] The typology constructed for this whitened populations was idyllic and contradictory because the people were regarded as possessors of a calmed and pacific character; it was a particular demeanor that was opposed, for instance, to the bellicose mentality of the Venezuelan people. Yet, the same grenadine people were also depicted as disorganized, inebriate (particularly with “chicha”[21]), and violent. This vicious and conflictive behavior constituted the main difference between the populace (“los de ruana”), that was also represented as traditionally inhabiting the countryside, and the national urban elites (“los de levita”), self-represented as the embodiment of agreeable manners and sober character.[22]

The “Racialized” Construction of the Colombian Nation

Written by Jesús David Quintero Aleans

The previous discourse contains several racist stipulations because, as it was said before, the adoption of the behavioral model for the entire nation was mediated by the geographic location and idealized demeanor of the whitened peoples of the country, in an operation that implied the extolment of the *racial mixture* within the lower layers of the population. This favored the predominance of the white element[23], and included the racialization of clothing, occupations, geographic spaces, and values. The elites considered the whitened subjects as the more appropriate ideal types, while the national people were placed in the specific locations previously mentioned, behaved in the particular manners already referred, but also dressed in a singular style (“ruana”),[24] and performed determined occupations (rural labor).[25]

This narrative of the national people and its national elite was compatible with the establishment of a particular antagonistic relationship between the *criollos* and the territories and communities that could not fit within the ideological scheme crafted by the former or, as the elite sectors referred to them, the uncivilized parts of the country.[26] This category of “uncivilized” was defined as antithetical to “civilization”, which in turn was conceptualized in terms of whiteness, Catholicism, writing capabilities, sedentary lifestyle, and agricultural activities. In consequence, the uncivilized territories were those in which the “hand of men” was conspicuous by its absence; thus, the jungle landscape was predominant and its inhabitants were nomads. The dwellers of those untamed areas were portrayed as mobile crowds totally oblivious to any civilized customs or practices, as far as any of them had neither the technology to domesticate the land in which they transited on a regular basis (a lack that could explain their nomadic habits), nor the language skills needed to produce complex knowledge, particularly writing. The wild “reality” evidenced in the outskirts of the republic clinched a hierarchical relationship among the territories and inhabitants of the country between those already civilized (the elite) or in the path of being civilized (the national people) whose most distinctive mark was their language and their confession of faith, and those *others* depicted as barbaric and desperately in need of *civilization*.

The “civilizing” enterprise of the untamed territories was performed by means of an evangelization campaign undertaken by the Catholic church in the frontier territories of the nation, an initiative that was sponsored by the national state. As a way to legitimize this endeavor, the *criollo* elites of the republic devised a national history that established the *birth of the nation* at the moment of the conquest and colonial periods. For the intellectuals who wrote the national narrative of *past glories and heroes*, the indigenous peoples who inhabited the territories of the contemporary republic were *others* clearly differentiable from the rest of the national constituency; *others* whose history ended up with the advent of the exploratory enterprises carried out by the Iberian entrepreneurs in *hitherto-be-discovered* territories, and the foundation of urban settlements by the subjects of the Kingdoms of Castile and León.[27] Corresponding with the *criollo*’s nationalist literature, the indigenous communities who occupied the land before the arrival of the Spaniards were either reduced by the European rule or evaded the civilization attempts started by the *western* settlers, as might have been the case with those nomadic “savages” who inhabited the periphery of the civilized nation. In any case, the latter peoples, represented as out of both the national history and the national present, were connoted as *needed* for a disciplinary rule that allowed them to be integrated into the broader scaffolding of the nation, within the extensive framework of the homogenization process of all the subjects who inhabited the country, a goal that appeared realizable thanks to the missionary initiative purported by the Catholic church, among those territories that escaped from the control of the central state.[28]

This civilizing effort of the church and the duties that the representatives of the state expected the clergy to exert in the *missionary zones* within which they were supposed to operate, demanded an advantageous legal groundwork that authorized the ecclesiastics to bring to bear the duties of any public official who was earmarked for service in the outskirt spaces. This could have been the exercise of national sovereignty over the disputed borders, particularly on the border with Peru, or the regulation of the public education system, which was established and administered by the priests but financed by the state. This matter was remedied after 1886, with the publication and enforcement of the new conservative Constitution and the signature of several treaties with the Holy See (as the *Concordat* of 1887, the *Conventions* of 1888 and 1898, and the *Resolution on Missions and Agricultural Colonies for the Indigenous Peoples* of 1889).[29] Those documents recognized to the church the necessary prerogatives to intervene in the administrative dynamics and implementation of policy in extensive zones of the country considered by the central state’s appointees as “uncivilized”, in an attempt to introduce the “undomesticated” spaces and peoples who inhabited them into the nation-building process that was taking place, by the end of the century, under the command

The “Racialized” Construction of the Colombian Nation

Written by Jesús David Quintero Aleans

of the conservative Catholic and *Hispanists*[30] sectors of the Colombian elites. In order to achieve such transcendental objectives, the representatives and members of the church, supported by the official discourse produced by the elites who held the monopoly of both the intellectual production and the political power, favored the practices of evangelization and alphabetization as the main devices by means of which the nomadic and savage indigenous communities were going to be normalized, making them fit in the mold of what was considered to be a “good and patriotic” Colombian citizen fully initiated in the advancements and habits of the civilized society: a settled lifestyle, work ethics (because the indigenous peoples were “inherently lazy”), reading and writing skills, and profession of the Catholic faith.[31]

The National Museum was inaugurated, under the name of “Museum of National History”, on the 4th July, 1824.[32] Like other Latin American museums founded during the 19th century, the Colombian institution was configured in a way that allowed the classification of spaces, resources and communities that compounded the nation in a hierarchical manner, following the racial criteria presented in previous pages. This taxonomic rationale aspired as its ultimate goal to create and shape a *national people* with an image and likeness of the national community envisaged by the *criollo* elites. In pursuance of such a patriotic end, and following the historical script written by the national *intelligentsia*, the objects contained in the museum were staged in a way that corresponded with the official national history that was being written, locating the birth of the nation in the conquest and colonial periods, and paying special attention to the portrayal of the republican post-independence war history, starred by heroes and notable men. Because of this correspondence between the national narrative and the “museum script”, it is not a surprise that the indigenous objects contained in the public institution were classified without any temporal criteria. This established a clear-cut differentiation between archeological and ethnographic objects, and they were labeled as the *exotic* objects belonging to those *others* who weren’t a constitutive part of the nation.[33]

In regards to the assignment of a hierarchical order for the territories of the republic, it is interesting how the administrators of the museum established, through the allocation of the objects contained in this institution, a sort of *center-periphery* relationship in which the urban agglomerations and territories controlled by the state were deemed “civilized”. As a consequence, their objects were classified as “industry”, whereas the objects delivered from the outskirts of the country known as the “national territories” were labeled as “curiosities”, in a clear manifestation of the institutional intention to provide visibility and some degree of comprehensibility to those “uncivilized” lands.[34]

Last but not least, it is relevant to point out how the collections of the National Museum were amalgamated by the contributions of several provincial notables and local-regional elite members, who manifested their interest in contributing to the visibility of their regions and of their persons in the Sanctuary and enactment of the nation, a gesture by means of which the contributors pursued their portrayal as heirs of the founding fathers, builders of the history, and enlightened patriots who collaborated with the enrichment of the assemblage of the “shrine of the homeland”. Those actions can be interpreted as a sort of evidence of the degree of exteriorization of the national myth achieved by the members of the peripheral elites, who cannot be regarded as representatives of the peoples of their regions, but can be useful as a measure of the scope attained by those narratives.[35]

This essay showed how the social elites who inherited the power of the colonial authorities in New Granada (which would be renamed as the Republic of Colombia in the subsequent years) crafted a complicated and, sometimes contradictory, ideological endeavor in order to apprehend and organize the peoples and territories to whom they aspired to be the rulers. In this abstract and imaginative mixture of historical accounts, racist conceptions, and pedagogic initiatives (such as the Museum), the *criollo* elites pursued the conformation of a *national people*, whose members should have been diverted from the traditional popular defects and vices (such as analphabetism, laziness, and violence) by means of the integration of the lower layers of the society into the dynamics of the market, the performance of productive activities and the adoption of work ethics, all of those characteristics only achievable by means of the “whitening” of the race and the instruction of the populace in the norms and values that the members of a virtuous national community were supposed to obey, such as the catholic dogma. The indigenous and black communities were the most affected by this project of a conformation of a national people because their cultural traits and daily practices were discarded as “inferior”, “defective”, and “uncivilized”, and as a consequence, were “incompatible” with the civilizing project that was taking place under the leadership of the republican elites.

The “Racialized” Construction of the Colombian Nation

Written by Jesús David Quintero Aleans

Bibliography

Arias Vanegas, Julio (2005): Nación y diferencia en el siglo XIX colombiano. Orden nacional, racialismo y taxonomías poblacionales. 1st ed. Bogotá, D.C., Colombia: Universidad de Los Andes, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Departamento de Antropología; Centro de Estudios Socioculturales e Internacionales (Colección Prometeo).

Figuroa, Helwar (2009): Tradicionalismo, hispanismo y corporativismo. Una aproximación a las relaciones non sanctas entre religión y política en Colombia (1930-1952). 1st ed. Bogotá: Editorial Bonaventuriana, Universidad de San Buenaventura (Religión, sociedad y política, 4).

Hering Torres, Max-Sebastián; Pérez Benavides, Amada Carolina (Eds.) (2012): Historia cultural desde Colombia. Categorías y debates. Bogotá, D.C: Pontificia Universidad Javeriana; Universidad de los Andes; Universidad Nacional de Colombia.

Ortega, Francisco A.; Chicangana-Bayona, Yobenj Aucardo (Eds.) (2012): Conceptos fundamentales de la cultura política de la Independencia. 1st ed. Bogotá, Colombia, [Medellín, Colombia], [Helsinki, Finland?]: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Sede Bogotá, Facultad de Ciencias Humanas, Centro de Estudios Sociales (CES); Sede Medellín, Facultad de Ciencias Humanas y Económicas; University of Helsinki, The Research Project Europe 1815-1914 (Colección Lecturas CES).

Pérez Benavides, Amada Carolina (2005): El pasado como objeto de colección y la historia como ciencia moral. Una aproximación historiográfica a la revista El Museo Mexicano. In Tzintzun. Revista de Estudios Históricos (41), pp. 53-56. Available online at <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=89804103>.

Pérez Benavides, Amada Carolina (2008): Los conceptos de raza, civilización e historia en la obra de Miguel Antonio Caro. In Antolín Sánchez Cuervo (Ed.): Algunas facetas del pensamiento de Miguel Antonio Caro. [Bogota]: Biblioteca Virtual del Pensamiento en Colombia, BVPFC (Colección estudios filosóficos. Serie II: Periodo moderno 1821-1935).

Pérez Benavides, Amada Carolina (2010): Hacer visible, hacerse visibles. la nación representada en las colecciones del museo. Colombia, 1880-1912. In Memoria y Sociedad 14 (28), pp. 85-106. Available online at <http://memoriaysociedad.javeriana.edu.co/articulo.php?id=32>.

Pérez Benavides, Amada Carolina (2012): Representaciones y prácticas en las zonas de misión. los informes de los frailes capuchinos. In Max-Sebastián Hering Torres, Amada Carolina Pérez Benavides (Eds.): Historia cultural desde Colombia. Categorías y debates. Bogotá, D.C: Pontificia Universidad Javeriana; Universidad de los Andes; Universidad Nacional de Colombia, pp. 287-316.

Pérez Benavides, Amada Carolina; Yie Garzón, Soraya Maite (2012): Cultura Política y Conmemoración en Colombia. Primer Siglo de vida Republicana. In Francisco A. Ortega, Yobenj Aucardo Chicangana-Bayona (Eds.): Conceptos fundamentales de la cultura política de la Independencia. 1st ed. Bogotá, Colombia, [Medellín, Colombia], [Helsinki, Finland?]: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Sede Bogotá, Facultad de Ciencias Humanas, Centro de Estudios Sociales (CES); Sede Medellín, Facultad de Ciencias Humanas y Económicas; University of Helsinki, The Research Project Europe 1815-1914 (Colección Lecturas CES), pp. 417-448.

Quijano, Anibal (2000): Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America. In Nepantla: Views from South 1 (3), pp. 533-580.

Real Academia Española: Diccionario de la Lengua Española. Available online at <http://lema.rae.es/drae/?val=criollo>.

Villar Borda, Leopoldo (30 June, 2002): La Agridulce Historia de la Chicha. In El Tiempo, 30 June, 2002. Available

The “Racialized” Construction of the Colombian Nation

Written by Jesús David Quintero Aleans

online at <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1339336>, checked on 14 January, 2014.

[1] In relation to this, it is interesting to observe the debate held by a couple of representatives of the *criollo* Mexican elite, the Comte de La Cortina and José María Lacunza, who discussed the relevance of teaching to college students about the methodologies employed by the historians in the performance of their profession, as was argued by the Comte, or to limit the teaching of history to a pedagogic activity by means of which a polymath provided to the youngsters moral and prominent examples from the past, focusing on the deeds of great men and nations, since these were the main characters of human history. This was done to supply the new generations with valuable examples of how to behave and resolve present issues, as Lacunza sustained. Pérez Benavides, Amada Carolina (2005): El pasado como objeto de colección y la historia como ciencia moral. Una aproximación historiográfica a la revista El Museo Mexicano. In Tzintzun. Revista de Estudios Históricos (41), pp. 43-47.

[2] According to Quijano, Eurocentrism can be defined as “... a perspective of knowledge whose systematic formation began in Western Europe... this perspective was made globally hegemonic, traveling the same course as the dominion of the European bourgeois class... It is instead a specific rationality or perspective of knowledge that was made globally hegemonic, colonizing and overcoming other previous or different conceptual formations and their respective concrete knowledges, as much in Europe as in the rest of the world”. Quijano, Anibal (2000): Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America. In Nepantla: Views from South 1 (3), pp. 549.

[3] In this document, I will appeal to a concept of “racialism”, which is composed of three central aspects, as follows: (1) the racist ideology recognizes the existence of easily distinguishable human races; (2) a sort of continuity between the physical and moral aspects is recognized by this scientificist ideology, which means that the division of the world among races corresponds to a division of cultural types; (3) those who believe in the racist conception of the world defend not only the existence and cultural differences of human races, but also the reality of a hierarchy amongst them or, in other words, the manifestation of a clear relationship, measured in terms of superiority and inferiority, between the human races. Arias Vanegas, Julio (2005): Nación y diferencia en el siglo XIX colombiano. Orden nacional, racismo y taxonomías poblacionales. 1st ed. Bogotá, D.C., Colombia: Universidad de Los Andes, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Departamento de Antropología; Centro de Estudios Socioculturales e Internacionales (Colección Prometeo), p. XVIII.

[4] The concept of “partial homogenization” alludes to a unification enterprise, attempted by the emerging national elites, in which an “image of homogeneity” among the people is created, whereas certain hierarchical patterns of differentiation are introduced within the constituency. In other words, the idea is to frame the population within the same *national vision* while, at the same time, the social privileged sectors fasten the community to a “vertical linearity” in which the values of the elites generate the differentiation patterns that separate them (the elites) from the commons. Ibid, p. 4.

[5] Ibid, pp. 4-6.

[6] In broad terms, the *Criollos* could be defined as the descendants of the Spaniard conquerors who arrived to the American continent in the ongoing of the conquest and colonial periods that have taken place between the 16th and the 18th century. Real Academia Española: Diccionario de la Lengua Española. Available online at <http://lema.rae.es/drae/?val=criollo>.

[7] Pérez Benavides, Amada Carolina (2008): Los conceptos de raza, civilización e historia en la obra de Miguel Antonio Caro. In Antolín Sánchez Cuervo (Ed.): Algunas facetas del pensamiento de Miguel Antonio Caro. [Bogotá]: Biblioteca Virtual del Pensamiento en Colombia, BVPFC (Colección estudios filosóficos. Serie II: Periodo moderno 1821-1935), p. 21.

[8] A territory was considered to be “civilized” when, after being explored, the colonizers were in the capacity to take possession of the land by means of their work and struggle against the autochthonous environment, a process whose result should have been the modification of the space by recourse to the introduction of crops and cattle, both of which constituted the physical evidence that a civilized human group has settled and had taken possession of the

The “Racialized” Construction of the Colombian Nation

Written by Jesús David Quintero Aleans

land. Arias Vanegas, Julio (2005): Nación y diferencia en el siglo XIX colombiano... óp. Cit., p. 7.

Pérez Benavides, Amada Carolina (2012): Representaciones y prácticas en las zonas de misión. los informes de los frailes capuchinos. In Max-Sebastián Hering Torres, Amada Carolina Pérez Benavides (Eds.): Historia cultural desde Colombia. Categorías y debates. Bogotá, D.C: Pontificia Universidad Javeriana; Universidad de los Andes; Universidad Nacional de Colombia, pp. 295-296.

[9] Arias Vanegas, Julio (2005): Nación y diferencia en el siglo XIX colombiano... óp. Cit., p. 20

[10] Pérez Benavides, Amada Carolina (2008): Los conceptos de raza, civilización e historia... óp. Cit., pp. 16-21.

[11] Regarding this idea of the intrinsic “inferiority” of races other than white, Quijano argues that “From the Eurocentric perspective, certain races are condemned as inferior for not being rational subjects. They are objects of study, consequently bodies closer to nature. In a sense, they became dominable and exploitable. According to the myth of the *state of nature* and the chain of the civilizing process that culminates in European civilization, some races – blacks, American Indians, or yellows – are closer to nature than whites. It was only within this peculiar perspective that non-European peoples were considered as an object of knowledge and domination/exploitation by Europeans virtually to the end of World War II”. Quijano, Anibal (2000): Coloniality of Power... óp. Cit., p. 555.

[12] Here, it is relevant to mention that, during the 19th century, the process of writing the national history was turned by the *criollo* elites into an *ideological battlefield* between the advocates of the Liberal party and their Conservative counterpart. For the former, the Colonial period was characterized by the tyrannical rule of the European metropolis whereas, for the latter, the past monarchical rule represented a glorious period in which the Spanish institutional framework, that included the Catholic church, successfully led the process of civilization of the wild territories and inhabitants of the American continent. Arias Vanegas, Julio (2005): Nación y diferencia en el siglo XIX colombiano... óp. Cit., pp. 5-6, 12.

[13] The concept of “race” used by the *criollo* elites of the South American republic was problematic because, through it, the racist emphasized the inner inferiority of the black and indigenous populations in reason of their cultural patterns, even though they never discarded the argument of the inferior character of those social groups based on their biological characteristics. Pérez Benavides, Amada Carolina (2008): Los conceptos de raza, civilización e historia... óp. Cit., pp. 6-11.

[14] Arias Vanegas, Julio (2005): Nación y diferencia en el siglo XIX colombiano... óp. Cit., pp. XVI-XVII, 4.

[15] Concerning this particular issue, the local elites established cleavages between the ‘true’ civilization, that was constructed by the “Latin race” characterized by its catholic faith, its romance language, and its creative-literary capabilities, and the “false” civilization, fomented among the Germanic, materialist and protestant societies, which was particularly prolific in scientific thinking, but was unquestionably condemned to fail. Pérez Benavides, Amada Carolina (2008): Los conceptos de raza, civilización e historia... óp. Cit., pp. 12-13.

[16] Arias Vanegas, Julio (2005): Nación y diferencia en el siglo XIX colombiano... óp. Cit., pp. 13-14.

[17] Pérez Benavides, Amada Carolina (2008): Los conceptos de raza, civilización e historia... óp. Cit., pp. 2-3, 12-13.

[18] *Ibíd.*, p. 24.

[19] This process of “whitening” (“blanqueamiento” in Spanish) reminds us to the more problematic issue of race and phenotypic characteristics as charged with political significance. According to Quijano, the “invention” of “race” as a criterion for social classification was fundamental for the organization of the colonial society in a hierarchical manner. In this sense, the allocation of an individual within a particular racial type also determined his role as a political actor – that is, it was necessary to be considered as “white” in order to be legitimized as a member of the Hegemon,

The “Racialized” Construction of the Colombian Nation

Written by Jesús David Quintero Aleans

whereas being included among the black, Indian or mixed groups condemned the affected subject to occupy the social position of *submitted*. Quijano, Anibal (2000): *Coloniality of Power...* op. Cit., p. 534-535.

[20] Arias Vanegas, Julio (2005): *Nación y diferencia en el siglo XIX colombiano...* óp. Cit., p. 9.

[21] The autochthonous beverage better known as “chicha” was an indigenous liquor made from corn. It was the most popular alcoholic drink during the entire colonial period, the 19th and the first decades of the 20th century. Due to its preparation process and the strong association that the elites made between this kind of “booze” and the populace’s behavioral and hygienic conditions (the commons were portrayed as dirty, drunk and violent), the “chicha” was systematically countered by the state. Villar Borda, Leopoldo (30 June, 2002): *La Agridulce Historia de la Chicha*. In *El Tiempo*, 30 June, 2002. Available online at <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1339336>, checked on 14 January, 2014.

[22] *Ibid.* p. 29-30, 37-38.

[23] Regarding the policy that encouraged the mixture of the population, the elites favored that practice only when it was performed in a way that favored the “whitening” of the national people, a principle in which it was implicit that the mixtures performed among sectors considered as “racially inferior” or inconvenient for the composition of the nation (as could have been the unions between indigenous and black subjects) was not encouraged and, as far as possible, banned. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

[24] The social manners and dress style were also one of the elements used by the *criollos* to build cleavages between them and the common people, as far as the elitists elements of the constituency thought up *acorporal grammar*, compounded of an specific way of speak, behave and interact in public. This corporal grammar implied that, for being recognized as a member of the upper social level, it wasn’t enough to be wealthy, but it was necessary to exhibit a particular kind of behavior that was unused by the popular sectors. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[25] This point was also problematic because, as one could infer, there was a broad layer of urban inhabitants that could hardly regard themselves as part of the elite sectors of the population, as was the case of the craftsmanship, whose members performed economic activities traditionally considered as “pertaining to the commons”, as was the case of any physical labor, because the elite sectors of European ancestry regarded their social role as limited to the intellectual and political realms. *Ibid.*, pp. 31,37.

[26] Pérez Benavides, Amada Carolina (2012): *Representaciones y prácticas en las zonas de misión...*, óp. Cit., pp. 287-288.

[27] Pérez Benavides, Amada Carolina; Yie Garzón, Soraya Maite (2012): *Cultura Política y Conmemoración en Colombia. Primer Siglo de vida Republicana*. In Francisco A. Ortega, Yobenj Aucardo Chicangana-Bayona (Eds.): *Conceptos fundamentales de la cultura política de la Independencia*. 1st ed. Bogotá, Colombia, [Medellín, Colombia], [Helsinki, Finland?]: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Sede Bogotá, Facultad de Ciencias Humanas, Centro de Estudios Sociales (CES); Sede Medellín, Facultad de Ciencias Humanas y Económicas; University of Helsinki, The Research Project Europe 1815-1914 (Colección Lecturas CES), pp. 423-424.

[28] Pérez Benavides, Amada Carolina (2012): *Representaciones y prácticas en las zonas de misión...*, óp. Cit., pp. 287-288.

[29] *Ibid.*, pp. 288-289.

[30] The term “Hispanism” refers to the exaltation, made by some of the most prominent *criollos*, of the cultural patterns and principles on which the Spanish Colonial Empire in America was established (as were the language, the race, and the religion). The *criollos* attempted to legitimize their hegemony over the rest of the constituency by means of taking recourse to this exaltation of the Spanish history, culture and character as features that they, the legitimate heir of the conquerors, also possessed. Figueroa, Helwar (2009): *Tradicionalismo, hispanismo y corporativismo. Una*

The “Racialized” Construction of the Colombian Nation

Written by Jesús David Quintero Aleans

aproximación a las relaciones non sanctas entre religión y política en Colombia (1930-1952). 1st ed. Bogotá: Editorial Bonaventuriana, Universidad de San Buenaventura (Religión, sociedad y política, 4). Pp. 105-146.

[31] Pérez Benavides, Amada Carolina (2008): Los conceptos de raza, civilización e historia... óp. Cit., pp. 25-27.

Pérez Benavides, Amada Carolina (2012): Representaciones y prácticas en las zonas de misión..., óp. Cit., pp. 290-300, 313-314.

[32] Pérez Benavides, Amada Carolina (2010): Hacer visible, hacerse visibles. la nación representada en las colecciones del museo. Colombia, 1880-1912. In *Memoria y Sociedad* 14 (28), p. 87.

[33] Ibid, pp. 91-96.

[34] Pérez Benavides, Amada Carolina; Yie Garzón, Soraya Maite (2012): Cultura Política y Conmemoración en Colombia... óp. Cit., pp. 427-430.

Pérez Benavides, Amada Carolina (2010): Hacer visible, hacerse visibles... óp. Cit., pp. 94-96.

[35] Ibid., p. 97.

—

Written by: Jesús David Quintero Aleans

Written at: University of Coimbra

Written for: Dr. Silvia Rodríguez Maeso

Date written: January 2014