Carl Henrik Langebaek

Heirs *of the* Past

Thinking about the Indians in Colombia and Venezuela

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Nombre: Langebaek Rueda, Carl Henrik, autor. | Weiskopf, Jimmy, traductor.

Título: Heirs of the past : thinking about the Indians in Colombia and Venezuela / Carl Henrik Langebaek Rueda ; translation Jimmy Weiskopf.

Descripción: Bogotá : Universidad de los Andes, Ediciones Uniandes, 2026. | 826 páginas : ilustraciones ; 17 x 24 cm.

Identificadores: ISBN 9786287903272 (rústica) | 9786287903258 (e-book) | 9786287903241 (e-pub)

Materias: Etnohistoria – Colombia | Etnohistoria – Venezuela | Criollos – Historia – Colombia | Criollos – Historia – Venezuela | Indígenas de Colombia | Indígenas de Venezuela | Identidad nacional – Colombia | Identidad nacional – Venezuela | Representaciones sociales – Colombia | Representaciones sociales – Venezuela

Clasificación: CDD 986.1063–dc23 SBUA

This first English edition: October 2026

Second edition in Spanish: *Los herederos del pasado. Indígenas y pensamiento criollo en Colombia y Venezuela*, published by Ediciones Uniandes, February 2021

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Ediciones Uniandes
Carrera 1.ª n.° 18A-12, bloque Tm
Bogotá, D. C., Colombia
Telephone: 57 601 3394949, ext. 2133
https://ediciones.uniandes.edu.co
ediciones@uniandes.edu.co

ISBN: 978-628-7903-27-2
ISBN *e-book*: 978-628-7903-25-8
ISBN epub: 978-628-7903-24-1
DOI: https://doi.org/10.51573/Andes.9786287903272.9786287903258

Copy-editing: Manuel de Zubiría
Typesetting: Vicky Mora
Cover desing: Boga Visual
Cover image: "Alma indígena camino del cielo" ("Indigenous Soul on the Path to Heaven"), detail from *Allegory of the Salvation of the Souls in Purgatory*, a work attributed to Antonio Acero de la Cruz. Courtesy of Universidad del Rosario.

Printing
Imageprinting
Carrera 27 n.° 76-38
Telephone: 601 6311350
Bogotá, D. C., Colombia

Printed in Colombia

This book has been endorsed by the Faculty of Social Sciences and was peer-reviewed.

Universidad de los Andes | Supervised by the Ministry of Education. Recognition as a university: Decree 1297 of May 30, 1964. Legal status recognized by Resolution 28 of February 23, 1949, Ministry of Justice. Institutional High-Quality Accreditation for 10 years: Resolution 000194 of January 16, 2025, Ministry of Education.

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Editor's Note

For the reader's convenience, all images and photographs are collected in a dedicated gallery at the end of this volume. To facilitate cross-referencing, corresponding photo numbers appear in the margins, allowing for easy consultation of the visual aids relevant to the discussion.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Heirs of the Past was written soon after I came back from my doctoral studies at the University of Pittsburgh to Bogotá, my native city. Although an archaeologist, I soon became aware that my discipline has a long history, closely related to political, sociological, and anthropological issues in Colombia and Venezuela. Therefore, it became clear to me that the ideas about the pre-Hispanic past in these two countries are key to understand not only the kind of archaeology that we have today, but also the way we understand who we are and our place in the World.

In 2009, the Spanish version of this book was awarded the *Angel Escobar Prize in Social Sciences*, which was quite an honor, specially because I was beginning my academic career. This book is the result of a research project funded by the Carolina Foundation in Spain, that allowed me to visit archives in Spain, Colombia and Venezuela. The support of dozens of people, including students, was key to finishing the job. Among those that contributed I specially want to mention Robert Drennan, my advisor at Pitt, Álvaro Camacho, and Francisco Zarur, three of the most valuable persons I have met. Additionally, I want to acknowledge the support of Rudolf Hommes, Carlos Angulo and Pablo Navas, presidents of Universidad de los Andes, friends and accomplices.

Juan González, Adriana Delgado, Manuel de Zubiría and Vicky Mora helped with the publication of this English edition. They were great companions during the process. Finally, I am in debt with Mauricio Nieto and Hugo Fazio, former deans of the School of Social Sciences, for promoting this publication. Also, with Jimmy Weiskopf for the translation.

INTRODUCTION

Only some years ago, on Saturday the 9th of September, 2006, an editorial in the Colombia's most widely read newspaper, *El Tiempo*, announced the visit of some *mamos* (indigenous spiritual guides) from the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta to the Inter-American Development Bank. The newspaper explained that those indigenous leaders sought to restore the ecological balance of the Sierra, acting as representatives of a culture "which has lived in harmony with Nature for centuries". In the opinion of the writer of the editorial, there was no better testimony to the truth of that claim than the Ciudad Perdida (Lost City), an extraordinary pre-Columbian settlement from which scholars were learning "lessons about ecology". The item appeared a few weeks before a column in the same newspaper which proposed that the Minister of the Environment should be a native because the indigenous people had, "in the course of thousands of years", shown that "they know how to coexist with Nature" and they were "better equipped than anyone [to decide] where highways and dams should be built" (*El Tiempo*, March 18, 2007). A few days before the editorial in *El Tiempo* came out, a happy news item was published in *UN Periódico,* the periodical of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia: 25 elders from a variety of indigenous tribes were going to Bacatá, "the ancient name of the capital of Colombia" and "one of the most important centers of spiritual ceremonies for the indigenous peoples of America, along with Machu Picchu in Peru and Teotihuacán in Mexico". At long last, it went on, there would be a reunion whose aim was to spread ideas about protecting Nature and there was no doubt that it would help in the quest for peace and act against the *mestizo* individualism which led to the destruction of Mother Nature.

There were few public denials of the assertions in *El Tiempo* or *UN Periódico*. Either out of goodwill or ignorance—or simply a genuine conviction—most of the readers skipped over the fact that the indigenous settlement which gave its name to

Bogotá was not located in the present capital of Colombia and thus it could hardly have been a "sacred site". By the same token, they chose to forget that there is no archaeological information which confirms the environmental wisdom of the Taironas who built the Lost City, nor has the work done there over the past twenty years shown anything remarkable about the environmental management of its ancient inhabitants. Many of those readers would go farther and regard those two articles as examples of the intellectual emancipation of the West. They would celebrate the diversity and emergence of a multicultural society which is genuinely beginning to respect and strongly admire the "other".

Of course, the idea that the indigenous people are characterized by their ancestral environmental wisdom and search for peace forms part of a play of images about what human cultures are and do which always surrounds us. There is nothing surprising about it. However, the ingenuous generalizations about cultural values made in *El Tiempo* and *UN Periódico* are not what strike one's attention. The really surprising aspect of those articles is that the *indio* is stereotyped, but that it is done in a positive way. Of course, that does not mean that it is always like that: witness the full color article which appeared on the page of *El Tiempo* on the same day (March 18, 2007) as the proposal for an indigenous Minister of Environment, which stated that the Yupka indigenous group belonged to a people whose "warrior spirit" led them to "fight amongst themselves". Nevertheless, a scrutiny of the press, independently of the publication's ideological orientation, shows that it seems to tend to an openly positive attitude towards the native.

This book wishes to go into an opposite direction to the idea which is formed by the readers of *El Tiempo* or *UN Periódico*. Its aim is to point out that the images which are reproduced in those media are positive because they are not genuine reflections on the stranger (in the sense of Krot, 2002: 12). We need to explain this point more fully: societies create a knowledge of other societies, which amounts to an "anthropology" which gives an evaluative meaning to the latter. It is well known that the anthropological thought of the West and a good part of its scientific heritage are based on a pejorative view of the "other". Now, in the case of the *criollo*, culturally descendant of the Spanish *conquistadores*, a large part of his thought about the *indio* is not really a reflection on the "other", on the savage or primitive, but merely the result of a preoccupation with himself, which is joined to a set of images which positively reaffirm it, like living in a country which is the best place in the world and has the most vital and promising people or the planet's most outstanding cultural and natural diversity, just as the foreigner who knows nothing of its geography and its orphaned nature makes a judgment that is negative, when it is not loaded with dark intentions. This book is based on the argument of Myriam Jimeno (2005: 46) insofar as the "other", in this case the *indio*, forms a "constituent

part of oneself" for the *criollo* who makes a representation of him. Nevertheless, it limits itself to the fact that it is not so much the *indio* who forms part of the *criollo* identity as the image the *criollo* has of him, as Earle (2007) suggests. To that extent, this book seeks to show that indigenism, understood as a positive assessment of the *indio*, is rooted in the process which gives rise to the idea of the *criollo* and its logic also forms part of the exclusion and denial which accompanies it. Perhaps there are no two concepts which are more frequently repeated when the colonial relations with the *indio* are spoken of: exclusion and invisibility (Pineda, 1984). It is assumed that the colonial system was based on ignoring the *indio*, of doing without the *indios* and their past in the manufacture of *criollo* narrations of history. In this book there is a different perspective: without ignoring the subject of exclusion of course, it insists that the indio and his past have not been invisible and that, on the contrary, the *criollo* narration of his identity and past is impossible without that positive rhetorical assessment of the *indio*.

The abovementioned statements imply a vast and complex subject, as well as a disproportionate chronological profundity. But before the reader calls this book ambitious, it is convenient to clarify its scope and hope that he or she regards the task as less impossible. The easiest way is to explain what this book is not. In no way does it refer to the manner in which the *indio* has been exploited and discriminated against, because, among other reasons, the *indio* is not the subject of this book, nor is it an attempt to define the identity of the national character of Colombia or Venezuela on the basis of a denial or reaffirmation of its native ancestors. Similarly, it is not a history of the disciplines involved in the study of the *indio*. Even more important, this book does not set out to offer an interpretation of the past of the *indio*. It does not even want to correct historical errors nor point out the limitations of the way in which the past has been understood. It aspires to something much more modest: it wishes to inquire into the form in which the *indio* and his past have been imagined, in order to analyze the impact of that imagination on the way in which the Colombian and Venezuelan *criollos* have come up with ideas about themselves and others.

Criollismo and indigenism

An initial temptation when one is trying to understand the appropriation of the *indio* and his past is do it from the point of view of *mestizaje, here understood as the biological or cultural* interbreeding of *indios* and *conquistadores*. At the time that this book is being written, the discourse on the hybrid and porous frontiers predominates. The category of *mestizaje* is based on the idea that the confrontation between indigenous and European cultures has produced a coherent system

of ideas which are a fertile subject of study (Gruzinski, 2002). There is no doubt that cultural and biological *mestizaje* has not only been a process evident since the discovery of America but also that it increasingly forms part of the daily life of its present inhabitants. In addition, *mestizaje* reveals the uselessness of continuing to think of societies in terms of pure and closed units, as if one wanted to imitate the colonial attempt to distinguish the innumerable castes which arose in the American world with more precision and less success. However, the idea of *mestizaje* does not satisfactorily take into account the headlines in *El Tiempo* or *UN Periódico*. Over and above the question of mixtures, *mestizaje* is an ideology (Earle, 2007: 204) which does not help us to understand texts in which a difference with the "other" is upheld, even though it is ambiguous. In that regard, we prefer a different category, that of *criollismo*, which offers the advantage of not hiding cultural elements whose origin is clearly discernible. In any case, our argument is that *criollo* thought encloses a series of oppositions which are never resolved through a hybrid thought. *Criollismo* does not deny the juxtapositions, but insists on the existence of dominant ideologies which maintain the idea of hierarchization. In addition, *criollismo* does not and cannot ignore mixtures, and it often effectively includes them in its discourse, but it always reminds about distinct origins. More than a rhetorical idealization of the *indio*, its origin clearly pertains to a non-indigenous tradition which is perfectly discernible.

The term *criollo* has a number of meanings. In its historic meaning it refers to the identity of the descendants of the Spaniards in the New World (Lavallé, 1990, 2002; Brading, 1998) but it can be used to describe broader processes. In fact, its meaning, as Anne-Marie Losonczy points out, is polyvalent. From the linguistic point of view, it identifies the situation in which two different languages, each with native speakers, give rise to ad hoc languages which serve for communication between them, on the basis of the grammar of one language and the lexicon of the other, until they finally wind up having native speakers. With that as a starting point, it may refer to an artistic movement which results from the colonial contact, specifically a literary one, which seeks to have a cultural equivalent, as happens with the *Créolité* movement of the writers of the Antilles. But the most interesting use here is that which it has from the sociological point of view, with reference to the way how communities represent themselves on the basis of stereotypes imposed from without. In the words of Frank Salomon (1993), *criollismo* refers to the situation in which colonial pressure produces trends from below which lead people to "nativize" the external finger-pointing, as if it were their own. Based on that notion, this book argues that the *criollo* vision of the *indio* and his past may be understood as a culture which has interiorized, as if they were authentic, traits of the *indio* originally developed as function of the colonial context. In Salomon's study, *criollización* refers

to simplifications, proposed by the colonizer, which are adopted by the colonized, as if they were native to the colonized, and thus, displayed as proofs of authenticity. In the case of this book, the process refers to those who, without being natives, take possession of colonial narratives about the *indios*, representing themselves as the objects, but rarely the subjects, of those narratives (Rabasa, 1993). Thus, *criollización* would come to be understood as the process by which the *criollo* accepts, as his own, traits which are regarded as authentic in the indio and uses them in the colonial relations in which he, or she, is immersed.

To explain this point, it is easier to think in terms of images. It is well known that the expansion of European colonialism implied the shaping of new territorial representations. Before that expansion, each of the great civilizations of the world—including the American ones—assumed its own culture to be the *axis mundi* or center of the world. In the case of Europe, medieval cartography represented the Earth in the form of a Jesus Christ whose umbilicus, which was also the center of the world, was Jerusalem. The Chinese, in turn, imagined themselves to be the axis of the universe, surrounded by a periphery of savages lacking culture, and other world civilizations did the same. European colonialism allowed something which was unheard of until then: to admit that the center of the world could shift, not in relation to a periphery truly thought of as "barbarian", but to what it consciously accepted as centers of civilization, each of which imagined itself to be the center of the world. Mignolo (1994) reminds us of an anecdote which illustrates this point: when, at the end of the 17th century, Father Mateo Ricci showed the European world map to the court of China, where it was not shown as the center of the universe, he deeply offended his hosts, so that, with the aim of imposing his cartographic vision, he decided to move China to the center and placed Europe and America on the margins. The story is evocative because it paradoxically means that, thanks to the expansion of Europe, the center of the world was able to shift, although no longer as an ethno-centric strategy but a truly colonial one. Ricci was willing to move the center of the world in order to achieve his aim and did not do it in the name of his identity but in the name of his intentions.

In fact, before the 17th century, the notions of an ethnic center and a geometrical center coincided. In line with Santiago Castro, colonial expansion enabled scientific representation to abstract the place of observation and produce a universal way of looking (Castro, 2005: 60). Of course, this marks a fundamental difference from the *criollo,* because the latter does have the capacity to imaginatively assume his autochthonous condition. The point is that in order to effectively compete in the colonial world, the *criollo* not only assumes a native identity, but he must also naturalize his relation to the remote past of the land he inhabits. To a certain extent, the *criollo* is a naturalized Mateo Ricci.

A cautionary note would not be superfluous here. In this study, *criollo* is not reduced to a racial expression. We have already mentioned that the current definition of the term refers to the descendant of the colonizer, although it is worth recalling that, to start with, it was used to denominate the descendants of African slaves. In fact, the racial meaning is not satisfying, for two reasons. First, because from a very early stage, the son of a conquistador could be and often was *mestizo.* Second, because one of the characteristics of *criollo* thought is that it deeply penetrates the fibers of the society, until it is even incorporated as an ideology by the part of the population which can hardly regard themselves as descendants of the conquistadores, or to even belong to the dominant sector. A striking example of this is the testimony of an old Black man, Tomás Zapata, in Michael Taussig's outstanding narration, *El antropólogo como Colón* (1993). This short essay shows how the descendant of slaves in western Colombia appropriates the learned canon of the West and even is complicit with it. He does not reject the set of attributes which are imposed on the Black man and the tropics from afar, but at the same time he uses them to confront the dominant power. In that regard, the very person who is exploited may often have a "creolized" thought, even though it does not turn him into the exploiter. What happens is that it is an ideology which involves anyone who, without being an "authentic" *indio*, uses strategies to represent the indigenous past as his own.

Now, going beyond the definitions, it is useful to advance some ideas of *criollización* as a process. First: it is highly idealist, in the sense that it assigns values to different groups—*indio*, for example—and on that basis, goes on to the *mestizo*, Colombian, Latin American, Black man, White man, European, Jew, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, Asian and so on and so forth, in accordance with sociological and moral contents which are assumed to be natural. This is even done when the explanation of diversity is rooted in material aspects or those of geography or race, which are quickly subjected to standards of behavior, and ultimately moral standards. The explanation lies, at least in part, in the fact that *criollismo* constructs images of the *indio* and his past through values which appeal to the emotions. As Elias argues (1989, 1998), the relations of interdependence and subordination pass through the emotions and it is impossible to separate the image of the *indio* from the feelings which surrounded the first contact between the *indio* and the European.

The emotive nature of *criollismo* requires a short reflection on science. As Castro states (2005: 17), the sciences, and especially the social sciences, found their "ultimate meaning" and their condition of being possible in the colonial experience of Europe and one can doubtlessly add that that pretense of science has to do with the way in which the indigenous past is imagined (Gnecco, 1999). But science collaborates by producing images of the native that form part of a much broader

context, which covers manifestations that are enormously more effective and have a wider audience than science itself, in that they are social practices: literature, the theater, poetry and every scenario where the indigenous past is evoked by the use of emotion. The critique of science as the system of power and exclusion par excellence forgets that the images of the native have the same stronghold in the verses of poets, the discourse of politics and the artistic zeal for empathy as in the self-proclaimed objectivity of modern science. It also ignores that, as a strategy of exclusion, its trajectory has been short and, in the context of the development of ideas, the division between poets and scientists has been no more than a recent formality. Graver still, it reduces science to a single discourse, forgetting that, like any human activity, it is a battlefield where antagonistic ideologies and social practices fight each other. In the case of *criollismo*, the indigenous past excites, seduces and thrills, but rarely gets people to resolve logical problems of reason, even among those who regard themselves as the tutors of objective science.

What was just said about science provides another clue to the characteristics of *criollismo* as a process: it is extraordinarily complex and rich. Part of its wealth is due to its factional nature, that is, it has nuances and at times divergences which serve to symbolically distinguish factions which represent diverse political, economic and social interests but it also lies in the fact that instead of some surpassing others in the course of time, the images of the past are superposed on each other, without the new ones wholly erasing the old ones, in the manner of a palimpsest, which always produces novel and intriguing combinations, not only from the point of view of its formal expression but also that of concrete social and political practices. In fact, we should point out the existence of ambits in which forms of understanding what is fancied as the pre-modern past exist and efficiently function in the modern ambit. One example is the Paleontological and Archaeological Museum of Guane, a small town situated in Santander, north of Bogotá, where the parish priests have patiently organized an exhibition which resembles the Cabinet **1 & 2** of Curiosities of the Renaissance, but is appreciated by those who visit it as a lively experience which appeals to their contemporary sentiments. The Renaissance cabinets exhibited a wide spectrum of objects, ranging from fossils, plants, antiquities and stuffed animals to paintings, arms and books, displayed in an apparent disorder (Thomas, 2004: 13–15).

There, the distinction between the natural world and history was rubbed out and there was a complete disregard for any lineal narrative. In the same manner, the museum in Guane displays, with justifiable pride and in a single space, the remains of extinct animals, machines to press tobacco, weapons, an old phonograph, colonial paintings and pre-Hispanic antiquities, duly preceded by pictures of famous indigenous caciques. The point is that it would be naïve to see in this

museum a simple residue of a past which has been surpassed: instead, it represents the continuing relevance of forms of appreciating the past which only become outdated from the standpoint of the knowledge of experts who regard it as a messy and outmoded display.

The modern vision does not completely erase other modes of understanding the past, but, on the contrary, establishes itself as a privileged place for understanding those other forms which surround it and up to a point, give it a sense of belonging. The above implies that the understanding of the indigenous past on the part of the *criollo* accumulates an enormous wealth in the interaction of "old" and "new" ideas which, instead of impoverishing the subject, diversify it and give it a true historic meaning. For the rest, insofar as the nature of that thought is not strictly vernacular, nor strictly alien, it has an enormous fertility: the Guane museum cannot be understood without its "antecedent" in the Old World, nor without the emotions it stirs in the people who visit it nowadays. There is no doubt that it is impossible to anchor the significances of the past in an original and authentic culture because they are always mediated by metropolitan and experiences. That is why it is a mistake to interpret them, as often happens, as though they were eclectic, disorderly, incomplete or naïve.

Criollismo is structured and effectively serves its purposes. In that sense, Cañizares (2001) is right when he maintains that what he calls "patriotic epistemologies" represent a novel and creative process, not a delayed, deformed—that is, insufficient and impoverished—reflection of foreign paradigms. As María Teresa Uribe mentions (2005: 229), that is not only because the *criollo* is able to "transform abstract referents into figures and images which are strong enough to produce cultural and political mutations of a broad significance", or, as Cardoso de Oliveira (1997) notes, the intersection between such epistemologies may be fertile, but also because the European colonialist reading of the colonial world itself has not limited itself to a subject-object relation in which the result is determined beforehand, but also includes the American experience, as in the case of Alexander von Humboldt and many of those who followed him. In other words, the enlightened Europeans of the 19th century, like Charles Darwin, Karl Marx and many others, have not based their views on the ingenuousness and insufficiency of the periphery but the mediation of what Rama (2004: 107) calls "vigorous internal tendencies". Those enlightened figures never interpreted America on the basis of a coherent argumentation, but in the ambit of images which naturalized American inferiority and merited a response which in turn would naturalize their own civilizing mission. Even the most fervent admirers of Karl Marx had to correct him in order to incorporate his ideas into the *criollo* vision of American nature and history. Darwin and Spencer could only be interpreted from the angle of the *criollo* interpretation

of its interaction with the world of Europe and North America, more than from the logic of their abstract argumentation.

But beyond an insistence on America's capacity to produce its own thought, we need to ask ourselves about its historic significance as well as its dark side. Although the *criollo* vision of the indio is based on relatively unchanging images, it is extraordinarily dynamic but, and this is a crucial argument, it is also politically conservative. The base line of the interpretation that is made of the *indio* are a few images produced in the 16th century, in large part under the aegis of medieval *admiratio*. In the writings of Columbus and the earliest chronicles which followed them, you find almost all of the raw material which the *criollos* have used to interpret the *indio* up to the present day, but that does not mean that those images prefigured reality from there on.

Columbus and the earliest chroniclers were anchored in the pre-modernity which Crosby (1998) calls the *modelo venerable*, a world view that refused to die in 1492 and is seen in the apparently archaic nature of the images and figures which the *criollo* used to appropriate the *indio* and his past. However, *criollismo* is not conservative simply because of the use of those pre-modern images but because it denies the condition of a historic subject to the *indio* and even its own condition of being *criollo.* This is independent of whether the way of representing the *indio* and his past is positive or negative. In both cases, the present is imagined as an authentic residue of the past and not as a platform from which the past is invented. In its eagerness to establish a policy of authenticity, it rarely offers reconstructions of history in which the past is overcome or, as a minimum, is different. Instead, it generally focuses on imagining chronological progression as a scenario in which similar occurrences are repeated which should be judged from a moral standpoint. To do that, it resorts to diverse narrative strategies, all of which take on what García (1989: 152) calls an "ontological coincidence" between reality and representation, an idea which is illusory of course. The first of these strategies consists of presenting events which are separated in time, and which of course took place in completely different economic, social and political contexts, as though they were simultaneous. It is not only a matter of "history repeats itself" but also a strategy in which repeatedly resorting to the indigenous past serves to manipulate it as a moralizing lesson for the present time. In a few words, it is a resource for enduring contemporary situations, in order to "go back to some past which we imagine to be more tolerable" (García, 1989: 156). The second strategy consists of naturalizing the differences in terms which are alien to history, resorting to fixed and relatively unmodifiable categories, with a universal value, which at times are disguised as material categories (like climate or race), but at bottom are always moral categories. In both cases, *criollismo* is conservative because of its idealist interpretation of reality which also

makes that reality look archaic (Nisbet, 1986) and ratifies the idea that the obsession with tradition and authenticity is always a conservative force, given that both reaffirm that history is an arrangement of ideas and acts which classifies "the men who act in history as good and bad, and then shows that, as a general rule, the ones who are fooled are the good ones" (Engels, 1977: 390).

The above is joined to the positive character it gives to the parochial: in *criollismo* the logics of representation of the *indio* and his past are imposed in a way that passes off the two as a genuine local product, opposite to any notion of cosmopolitan thought (Santos, 2001: 189). With the same facility with which *criollismo* traces and modifies external ideologies which favor it, it excludes unwanted forms of thought and brands them exotic. Its interpretation of the past and the *indio* mainly serve as a moralizing lesson and a warning of the danger which a change in the order of things entails, things which are considered to be obviously good and desirable, above all in relation to what is foreign. It is worth pointing out that *criollo* thought seeks a pedagogy in past times which strengthens the repetition of structures, communities and habits, generation after generation: it not only flatly denies historical change and social transformation but also warns of the dangers which the external world represents. For that reason, the past of the *indio* is often transformed into the antithesis of the foreigner. Hence, any positive aspect of the nature of the *indio* will be immediately set forth in the form of an ancestral behavior which it is easy to imagine as our "own" and is thus a weapon against external ideas, as is well seen in the articles in *El Tiempo* and *UN Periódico.*

Of course, the image of the *indio* and his past are genuinely historical, even when such images insist on showing the existence of an *indio* who does not change. At each stage, the re-creation of a limited set of Columbus-type images elaborates and re-elaborates the notion in the midst of the tensions which the *criollo* experiences in relation to European thought and his own American reality. The idea which served as raw material for defining the *indio* was the difference between the "civilized" person and the "savage" (Mazlich, 2004: 143). But from the 16th century onward, the idea of civilization was reinterpreted in the light of the here and now, by means of creative and ingenious formulas which changed over time in accordance with concrete historical contexts. As Chesneaux (2005: 75) points out, the relation between each present era and any era of the past is more important than that which may exist between any other era of the past and the rest of the past. In that regard, there is not a single idea about the *indio* which has a vestigial character, that is, which is not manipulated in terms of the precise context in which the *criollo* finds himself. When it insists that the *indio* is authentic and original, it signifies something which is of vital importance for the present, not the past itself.

In other words, just as the idealization of the *indio* by the *criollo* does not really refer to the *indio*, his images of the past rarely refer to the past.

One of the proofs of the currency of the *indio* and his past is that it is activated at times when it is politically relevant, especially when the *criollo* perceives an external threat. The *criollo* thinks of the history which has transpired since the 16th century as the repetition of crises in which he plays the role of the victim, rarely the victimizer, and nothing reminds him of his condition more than the dates of the Conquest, the ideal synonym for foreign aggression. Of course, since every historical period has a good dose of crises, a symbolic resort to the indigenous past is never irrelevant; but in addition to external aggressions (real or imagined), the anniversaries of the first contact between the European and the *indio* of America heighten all sorts of emotions which are exploited to reaffirm and reinterpret images of the past in relation to recent experiences. Of course, there is nothing cabalistic about such dates, but they provide a special opportunity, which is rarely ignored, to introduce the images of the past into the present. The Independence of Colombia and Venezuela was brought about in the name of three hundred years of foreign occupation; one hundred years later, the fourth centenary of the Conquest was celebrated in the midst of theories about race and the cleansing of race, climatic determinism, the peak of North American and the decadence of European imperialism; and more recently, during the fifth centenary, it put images of the Conquest into the context of the multicultural ideal and, therefore, the notion of the encounter between two cultures. No image of the Conquest is built on the others, much less does it reassess them. All are built on the currency of the present.

In fact, the historic character of *criollismo* rules out the discovery of strategies which are aware of the *criollo* idea of the *indio* and his past, independently of the conditions in which those strategies are developed. In the opinion of Quijano (1999, 2000), the colonial domination from the 16th century onwards has been based on the notion of race, but this idea strips *criollismo* of its historical vigor and forgets that the strategies of domination are dynamic and complex. Although the ranking of human beings into a hierarchy is implicit in the idea of race, the *criollos* have been extraordinarily skillful at basing exclusion on dynamic criteria (Wade, 2002: 9; Restrepo, 2007: 41). This book argues that while the Enlightenment brought racial categories and hierarchies and they were further developed in the second half of the 19th century, they were not able to detach themselves from the moral imperative. Even in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, when Europe developed theories in which race or geography could autonomously explain human hierarchies, their geographical determinisms, differences of phenotype and genetic speculations were rarely able to shed the notion of civilization, rooted, in turn, in considerations of morality and conduct.

Instead of a single historical logic there are complex and changing relations between the categories, like race, climate and morality, which are applied to the *indio* and his past. If one wished to choose the most inclusive category of analysis, it would have to be that of civilization, since it does not deny the dynamic of history and subsumes more specific social constructions, including race. The contrast between the civilized and its opposite is dynamic, because as Serje (2005: 6) notes, it refers to complex relations of domination reflected in multiple and even contradictory discourses which produce difference, instead of trying to eliminate it. The idea of the savage was initially associated with a state of Nature, prior to civilization, but at the same time it served to evoke the best of the human condition and thus embodied a utopian thought; in fact, savagery was defined as the natural condition of life before civilization but not as its opposite (Ellingson, 2001; Kuper, 2005). With the Enlightenment, the difference between the savage and the civilized acquired a full historical sense. As Lucien Febvre and Norbert Elias showed, the idea of civilization implies a progressive forward movement and therefore, the end of the rudimentary state of primitivism (Kuper, 1999). The Enlightenment stamped a historic meaning on the development of reason and it also speculated about future progresses. In that sense, since that time and to the present day, civilization has looked on itself as a process of ongoing construction which is still current.

The above digression on the meaning of civilization is crucial because the appropriation of the *indio* and his past by the *criollo* could only take place thanks to the notion of civilization and the historic meaning of it which breaks the mold of the *modelo venerable*. It is worth insisting on this point. In the New World of the 16th century the contrast between savages and civilized men was based on a monotheistic religion—Christianity—which, based on the idea of a single God, judged the whole of humanity. In any of its forms, including Islam of course, a monotheistic religion acknowledges the enemy in terms of the criterion of "purity" (Moore, 2011) and in that sense aspires to totality, because its opposition to the "other" is irreconcilable and can only be resolved by means of the exculpation of the enemy's sins. The famous *Requerimiento*, drafted by Juan López de Palacios, was taken from the doctrine of Islam and consisted of a "requirement" or "demand" read out to Native Americans to inform them of Spain's right to conquest in the name of a divine plan. This prelude to conquering them by blood and fire was none other than an acknowledgment that the difference was understood in terms of a single God and the many who were ignorant of that (Seed, 1995). In fact, the model of civilization employed from the 17th century onwards continued to impose and reproduce that difference, but at the same time it fragmented it and allowed it to be adopted or rejected in bits and pieces, which changed it into more of a historical process than a religious condition.

Without an idea of civilization as history and thus, of the reaffirmation of a positive facet of the image of the *indio,* with a historic sense as well, which could be assimilated, any process of *criollización* would have been fruitless. Now, we would have to ask ourselves what the idea of civilization meant in the context of *criollo* strategies for social differentiation. In her provocative study, *Civilización y violencia*, Cristina Rojas reminds us that colonization entails a "regime of representation" which refers to the process of dialogue "which facilitates encounters, overlaps and exchanges between internal and local interpretations" (Rojas, 2001: 27). In the opinion of that study, *criollismo* does not resolve those overlaps in any way, but for that reason it refuses to establish inalterable differences, not because any of the factions which put them into play imposes itself, but because the thought about the indigenous past is stubbornly ambiguous by nature and is always constructed at the apparent cost of coherence, which reaffirms its emotive meaning more than its rational one. The image the *criollo* has of the *indio* is not only ambiguous because of the disjunction between ideological manifestation and social practice, but also because it is double-faced on the level of discourse: the *criollo* aspires to imagine himself as the heir which he is not. The image of the *indio* and his past is often imagined as a shared legacy, working like a true "invention of tradition", to use Hobsbawm's term, but at the same time it is impossible to regard it as a tradition which is completely shared: at certain times "they" and "us" are mixed up as if they were the same, but at others, difference is not renounced and is clearly delineated. The *criollo* appropriates the *indio*, but the latter does not stop being the "other" (Ramos, 1998). The *criollo* texts on the *indio* are ambiguous, insofar as they bear the weight of an interpretation in which there is an attempt to blur the distinction between subject and object which is never fully successful.

The origin of this ambivalence is, of course, the colonial deed. Although the *criollo* speaks of "his" *indios* or "his" past, as Earle (2007) points out, both things are always found to be outside of his reality, at least partly, whether it is the doctor from Boyacá who sees the biological tragedy of the Colombian people in his indigenous ancestors, the Liberal politician who wants to recover the native past, Bolívar who depicted himself as the avenger of the Incas or Che Guevara who says that as a Latin American he understands the Incas of Machu Picchu better than the foreigner.

Naturally, it would seem that the least important protagonist of *criollo* indigenism is the *indio* himself, insofar as it was not designed to interact with the native but with "others"—internal or foreign opponents—who are much more important in the play of representations (Krotz, 2002). This seems to be true independently of the negative or positive assessment of the *indio* which the *criollo* invents. When it is used in the positive sense, the term serves to distance the foreigner in the name of the historic legitimacy of the *criollo*. When it is used in the negative one it serves

to exclude the "people". It is not by accident that, in a large part of Colombia, when *indio* is used as a derogatory term it is more frequently directed against the urban *mestizo* and the *campesino* than the indigenous people themselves, since the former are thought to be enormously more dangerous to the social order than the latter. In other words, when it is for internal consumption, the negative appraisal is not necessarily always aimed at him but in more general terms and because it is more effective, it focuses on all of those who, due more to their socio-economic position than their condition of natives, represent a threat to the established order. An anecdote which illustrates this point has to do with the stage curtain of the Te-
3 & 4 atro Colón (Columbus Theater) in Bogotá, which was inaugurated in 1892 on the occasion of the Fourth Centennial of the "Discovery". It was commissioned from Annibale Gatti, an Italian artist who had never been in Colombia, but inspired by Colombians and Italians who had lived in the country, decided to include two images which would give an American flavor to a work of art aimed at exalting the great universal figures of the theater: a group of *campesinos* who are shown listening to someone's explanations of a number of town plans and the figure of a Guaraní Indian dressed in the style of the primitive (Cantini, 1992: 429). However, the two motifs were completely different: while the first referred to the common people, the second was an idealized personage, exalted in turn in the indigenist opera of the Brazilian composer Carlos Gomes. There was no doubt about the image which had to be left out. The president at that time, Rafael Núñez, rejected the image of the common people, of the *pueblo*, with the argument that it was not decorative enough and so Gatti replaced it with a group of dancers dressed in European clothes. And so, of course, he is still there: the half-nude Guaraní indigenous man who accompanies the universal heroes of the theater (Cantini, 1992: 42–3).

It should be stressed that, even though *criollo* thought passes as libertarian with respect to the foreign enemy, real or imaginary, it does not create an alternative to colonialist thought. *Criollismo* would like to be relativist, but it is not. It takes hold of the symbolic value of belonging to the excluded, to the "peoples without history" (in the sense of Wolf, 1982). But the truth is that the headlines which eulogized the *indio* in *El Tiempo* are not revolutionary or progressive. Its reaction to a foreign hegemony is not a denial of it, in exactly the same way that Ricci's decision to shift the center of the world was no more than a reaffirmation of colonial intentions. It is evident that its logic consists of presenting itself as a response of the "native" in the face of an external world which is hostile, ill-intentioned and regards the *criollo* with suspicion. For that reason, we need to inquire into not only the prejudices about the *indio*, but the positive assessment of him as well, given that we are not dealing with antitheses between colonial logics and an undermining of the same. The *criollo* needs the noble savage as much as he needs the cannibal or even more:

both the one who is the custodian of Nature and the ignorant aboriginal, or the peaceful *indio* or cruel savage.

The ambivalence of *criollismo* allows it to pierce political positions, mixing them up and amalgamating them until, on occasions, they become indistinguishable. The fundamental reason why that is so lies in its capacity to present itself as if it were not an ideology. In the words of John and Jean Comaroff (1992: 28–31) about hegemonic thought, *criollismo* has the virtue of raising itself to an ideology that is not explicitly an ideology, to the point that it seems to be neutral. In addition, the indigenous past is presented in the form of a heritage, and it thus turns it into one of the resources which is hardest to discredit and least suspected of being propaganda and mythology: the past and present are esteemed as a gift, a symbolic legacy which is not open to argument (García, 1989: 150). By means of that legacy, *criollismo* can present itself, with impunity, as the nemesis of the colonial discourse and therefore establish an element of communion between individuals and groups even though their concrete political and economic roles are unequal. Independently of whether we are dealing with the imposition of the Catholic religion or Enlightenment rationalism, the *criollo* logic that is the basis of interpreting the indigenous past invades everything. That does prevent disagreements but old and recent personages which no one would regard as compatible ideological symbols may reach fundamental agreements about the *indio* and his past. Of course, there is a line running from Columbus and his hyperbolic image of a New World which would win him glory, to the conquistador who exalted the lands of America to show off, to the European, to the 20th century *criollo* who struggles to show the enlightenment of the native, to the doctor who thinks he has found a superior race in the indigenous people, to the Marxist who regards them as a living proof of a socialist paradise. And there is also a long road from the infantilization of the *criollo* by Francisco José de Caldas and the pitying glance at the orphaned state of the Colombian by García Márquez. But all of them (simultaneously) refer to the *indios* and "ourselves", showing that *criollo* thought is able to forge a historical tradition, which is emotionally built and enables old ideas to be repeated in similar formats through changing contexts and even by interlocutors of the most varied ideological tendencies.

The interpretation of cultural history

Insofar as the focus of this book is *criollo* thought, it only pauses to consider foreign thought about the American native and his past when it is seen in concrete *criollo* practices. In a previous section, it insisted that *criollo* thought is rich and is not a simple distortion of European thought. However, it is not wholly autochthonous,

either because the colonial process makes it hard to distinguish between the local and the universal, or, to be more precise, between what is native and what is exotic (Melo, 2006: 97). Without the foreign referent, *criollo* thought is, in short, unable to rid itself of "alien" forms of interpreting itself and its surroundings, in which the *indios* are inevitably present. Nevertheless, given that there are no pure ideas which result from discursive or epistemological processes that are outside of social relations, or the tangle of contextual, political, institutional, social and economic elements in which ideas concretely unfold (De la Cadena, 2005; Correa, 2006: 16), foreign debates will be incorporated into this book as and when they are relevant to an understanding of the reaction of the *criollo*, in accordance with his own experiences of life and his national realities.

The metropolitan debates are always mediated and it is precisely that mediation which makes them important. That does not mean the emphasis on what is one's own may be understood as an effort at legitimization or revenge. As was noted above, one needs to criticize the dark side of *criollo* thought. In that regard, we agree with the observation of Cañizares (1999) about the way in which the *criollo* reaction against the European image of America is aristocratic and at the same time fearful towards social groups regarded as dangerous. For that reason, the question of authenticity and preference is a false problem in the context of colonization: *criollo* thought is a hinged thinking and its ideas about the indio and his past cannot be reduced to the dichotomy between the representatives of the empire (or empires) and those who, on native ground, confront them from a more human standpoint (Navarrete, 2004: 55). One and the other interact in a complex web of relations which are what interests us as a true category of analysis. Even though it is often mediated by a strong asymmetry of power, that does not exhaust the interpretation of the relationship and at times it does not even describe it satisfactorily. But, in addition, even if one could prove the preference for American instead of European thought, the motives of pride would be limited: *criollo* thought about the *indio* and his past is not designed to bring about equality. On the basis of both things, the *criollo* reaffirms his legitimacy and frequently makes use of his antagonism towards the foreigner—real or imagined—to legitimize his position in the networks of power in which he participates. And in that respect, it is important to remember that external ideologies may represent the imposition of colonial doctrines, but, potentially, they may threaten the established order, which strengthens the *criollo* image of the external world as a relatively homogeneous space full of things which are incomprehensible and dangerous. As Jorge Orlando Melo points out, the term "exotic ideas" is one of the favorite ones which are used to discredit a form of thought (Melo, 2006: 95), while the thought which is supposedly "one's own" is, almost by definition, a eulogy. In the course of history, the examples of

ideas which are rejected as alien include the liberal laicism and Darwinism of the 19th century, the Marxism of the 20th century, and the evolutionism of modern times. In this rejection, the thought "which is one's own" is often wielded in the name of indigenism.

In line with the same logic, we regard the strategy of revealing the mistakes in colonialist argumentation, more specifically, the place of Europe and the United States as the center and culmination of historical processes, as insufficient. It is not that we deny that the imperialist countries impose ideologies which are also imperialist. But what we wish to do here is expose the myths and fallacies of "our own" ideology with regard to laudatory and hyperbolic ideas about our geographies, races, *indios* and so on and so forth when they are presented in the form of a national history. In other words, this book stresses that the strategies of exclusion not only take the form of discriminatory narrations and practices which are imposed from without (geographical determinism, the racist discourse, etc.) but also work through rhetorically positive narrations about the *indio,* his past and his territory. In this book, the reader will not find arguments to convince him or her that that the *indios* were "good" or "bad", nor will it reveal the mistakes about the ancient inhabitants of Colombia and Venezuela found in Enlightenment thought or Romanticism. Instead, it will analyze the way in which the *criollo* mobilizes his imagination to respond to what presents itself as an unjust accusation against the collectivity which he claims to represent as spokesman for the race, the oppressed, etc., at the same time that he interacts with that collectivity to defend his own interests.

It is not an easy task, because that interaction is highly complex. In addition, the *criollo*'s opinions about the indigenous past are not found in a few paradigmatic writings but are scattered among a variety of sources: the press, political posters, scientific writings, high school textbooks, coins, private letters, the theater, poetry, painting and sculpture. In order to do justice to that diversity, this study seeks to nourish itself on the highest possible number of expressions in which the *indio* finds a place, as well as the highest possible number of testimonies from the largest possible number of people, independently of their scientific or artistic value or the legitimacy which was conferred on them in their age.

As a result, this investigation is based on an analysis of the *criollo* narrations in relation to their contexts, not simply as "texts" which may be read autonomously. By means of this strategy, we seek to overcome the propensity to reduce ideological tendencies to the single work of a single author as legitimate representative of any given context. The justification for its proposal to cover the greatest possible number of authors and sources is that their character varies in accordance with the context. Generally speaking, the exaggerated praises of the *indio* and his past are

more common in political discourses and those meant for the outside world than in the documents of internal policy. In addition, the discourses about the *indio* and his past move at different speeds: high school textbooks, for example, usually lag far behind political ideas. Furthermore, there is another justification for not focusing on a few texts, however important they may be: such testimonies do not have a fixed meaning but they change in accordance with the forum at which they are aimed. We have already mentioned one of the most obvious differences: the image of the *indio* varies, depending on whether the forum is national or international; but another important variable is the difference between the private ambit and that of the public forum, or the distinction between the cultured elite (many 19th century texts were not meant to be read by the *indio*, Black man or poor man or the "people". An abstract eulogy of the happy mulatto is one thing and a fear of the fierce mob is quite another in the work of the 19th century writer from the Valle del Cauca, Luciano Rivera y Garrido (Camacho, 1979: 594–5). And that duality runs from the work of the *mestizo* chronicler Felipe Guamán Poma (1534–1615), who was in fact a landowner, to the politicians of all stripes in the 20th century, including those that posed as indigenists.

The geographical and chronological ambit

Although chronological limits are always difficult to establish, at least it is relatively easy to delimit the problems which have to do with the handling of time in this book. It follows a relatively straightforward chronological order which begins with the "discovery" of America and its immediate antecedent, and continues with a succession of changes which follow a certain order. However, it does not always follow a strictly linear logic. On occasions it takes leaps or goes back to aspects of the past which seem particularly important for understanding the way how certain ideas are linked over time. In other words, it takes certain liberties with the chronological order, changing it to give a more ample discussion of ideas about certain subjects which must be rounded off, seen in perspective or even seen in advance at times, before it can go on to new historical contexts and other subjects.

Furthermore, a clarification is indispensable here. Even though Colombia and Venezuela amount to convenient areas of investigation which are more or less clear, insofar as it is impossible to understand the image of the indigenous past independently of the colonial deed, this study constantly refers to places which lie outside of those comfortable frontiers which we know today. Europe and North America are two obligatory referents, but it is also necessary to include links with other parts of America. A map published by Walter Mignolo (2000) helps to put
5 this argument in perspective. It is an effort to represent the way in which the

colonial circuit of the Atlantic linked spheres of interactions which previously existed in both the Old and the New World. In the case of America, these spheres correspond to the ones known as the Anahuac and Tawantinsuyu, that is, Central America and the central Andes. Colombia appears as a territory where the Anahuac and Tawantinsuyu overlap, while a large part of Venezuela lies even beyond that area of superposition. The map is extraordinarily important: on the one hand, America is worth what corresponded to its two great "pre-Hispanic" civilizations, while Colombia is included within the sphere of civilized life, but is not entirely autonomous. Venezuela lies outside of it.

Mignolo's map is not the only one. In reality, what now corresponds to Colombia and Venezuela is often no more than a chaotic or even empty space in relation to the dominions of the ancient Aztec or Inca "empires", a tradition which continued in the vice-regal world ruled by Lima and Mexico City and with the development of major Latin American ideas in which the roles played by Colombia and Venezuela are rarely more than marginal. In his effort to highlight the existence of indigenous worlds before the arrival of Columbus, Eric Wolf (1982: 59) accepts two regions of cultural significance: the central Andes and Central America. Colombia would have been inhabited by small societies in a permanent state of war, subject to the irreparable dominion of natural conditions, while Venezuela is barely mentioned (Wolf, 1982: 64). A large part of the responsibility for the image which Wolf transmits lies with the anthropologists, since they defined the central Andes and Central America as the nucleus and climax of the progress of the natives, at the same time that they thought of northern South America and a good part of Central America as a region with "an inferior profile of cultural development" (Lippi and Gudiño, 2004: 18).

In other words, Colombia and Venezuela only form a unit in terms of not belonging to Central America or the central Andes, that is, a kind of "no man's land" which cannot be easily defined except in relation—or better, in contrast—to other regions (Gassón and Wagner, 2004: 169). The historical explanation for this image is entirely colonial: the indigenous societies of Colombia and Venezuela were conquered after those of Mexico and Peru, which were compared with the societies of European Classical Antiquity, especially with Rome and at times favorably due to their grandeur and splendor (Lupher, 2003). Therefore, it is easy to understand why those two regions were quickly joined to Europe as reference points for their *indios* and their past. When the author of *Epítome,* one of the first-hand accounts of the conquest of the territory of the Muiscas in central Colombia, faced the need to describe the newly conquered society he did not resort to European Antiquity but to Peru and Mexico. The same happened with the Taironas of the Sierra Nevada of Santa Marta, whose magnificent cities promised to be the equivalent of Cuzco,

not Rome (in Langebaek, 2007: 33). The lands which are now Colombia and Venezuela lay far from the Inca and Aztec empires, except for the most southern part of the Colombian Andes, which bordered the outposts of the Cuzco realm. There, in fact, the notion of a frontier was skillfully depicted by Pedro Cieza, for whom the contrast between Peru and Popayán could not be anything but the same which universally separated civilization from barbarism. In fact, in the course of the 16th century and from there to the present day, those who refer to the *indio* of Colombia and Venezuela have had to deal not so much with foreign prejudices in the abstract, but with those which arose in the light of the grand civilizations of Peru and Mexico. The chronicles about the splendor of Atahualpa or Moctezuma, the complex calendars of Central America or the fantastic organization of the Inca State, to say nothing of the efforts of Felipe Guamán Poma or the Inca Garcilaso to dignify the Inca Empire or the works of José Vasconcelos and Carlos Maríategui, were and still are as important for the Colombian and Venezuelan *criollo* as the ideas about America invented in Europe.

To the abovementioned, we should add that the foreign referents change over time. Mexico and Peru have never stopped being relevant places in the reflections of the Colombian and Venezuelan *criollo*, but new debates and new concerns have added other territories which are far from contemptible. For example, when the idea about the future of the White race in the New World was created in the 19th century, Argentina—and the Southern Cone in general—became as indispensable a reference point as North America. Later on, when the controversy about the *mestizo* race broke out and the myth of racial democracy was developed, countries like Cuba and Brazil became unavoidable anchorages. And to complicate things, Colombia and Venezuela took each other as external referents at times. This can be seen in the map published by Mignolo, where the relation of Colombia with the civilized ambit contrasts with Venezuela's relation with the savage one. While the image of the past in Venezuela was built on the basis of an acknowledgment of the primitive state of its ancient inhabitants, in Colombia there has been a civilized referent, found at times in the Muiscas and at others, in San Agustín or the Taironas, although they in turn have been seen as the result of foreign influences. This situation has created epistemological differences between the images of one country and the other: since at least the 18th century one can detect an effort to show the influence of Muisca civilization in western Venezuela and attempts have been made to naturalize the contrast between the rule of the *caudillo,* the "strong man", of Caracas and the religiosity of Bogotá, the cultured and aristocratic character of the latter and the military and popular tradition of the former, all of which ideas have the difference between the civilized and the savage as a backdrop. In a recent article, Frédéric Martínez has highlighted the play of images which characterizes

the relation between Colombia and Venezuela: an emphasis on the cultural values of the former and on the republican ones of the latter; the impossibility of an integrating myth in the former and the success of the integrating hero in the latter. And in that regard, he has singled out the importance of the indigenous image in both countries, particularly the role of the pre-Hispanic legacy as a cultural heritage in Colombia and as a source of political inspiration in Venezuela through the hero-founder of its nationality (Martínez, 2006).

Nevertheless, one is forced to make a confession at this point: this book's coverage of Venezuela is weak. The author has worked on the subject of Colombia for years and perhaps his ignorance of it will be less evident to the reader. But Venezuela is another thing and despite an extraordinary opportunity to consult libraries and archives with a wealth of information about that country, to say nothing of the magnificent help of colleagues on the other side of the frontier, his knowledge cannot help being fragmentary. In short, the incorporation of Venezuela throughout this study enriches it, but more as a nebulous reference point than for the certainty of having come to a set of key ideas about *criollismo* in that country.