

## INTRODUCTION

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### Riosucio: Race, Colonization, Region, and Community

#### RIOSUCIO

Most towns in the Colombian Coffee Region are laid out predictably on the Spanish-American model of a symmetrical grid emanating from a central square. Typically, an imposing church dominates a well-kept central plaza. The other three sides of the plaza are lined by brightly painted government buildings, businesses, and the balconied houses of leading citizens. Writer Peter Osborne, in a travel essay, juxtaposes the utopic symmetry of Colombia's urban grids with dystopic images of violence, isolation, and poverty. For Osborne, each town in Colombia "is dreaming of the national capital, all towns are elements in a dreaming of national unity." This yearning for unity is common, he suggests, "in a Latin America haunted by interior and exterior distance and marked by the terror of social disintegration."<sup>1</sup>

The town of Riosucio, however, has an unusual layout. Rather than the usual central plaza, there are two plazas of equal importance, an upper and a lower, each with its own equally imposing church. The town sits on the verdant eastern slopes of Colombia's western Andes at about 1,800 meters above sea level, surrounded by coffee groves and jagged rocky peaks. It is the seat (*cabecera*) of a township or district (*municipio*) of the same name that extends westward up to the mountain ridges and eastward down to the Cauca River. The outlying areas of the rural district are inhabited by poor country people (*campesinos*), the majority of whom refer to themselves as indigenous (*indígenas*). Riosucio's indigenous population and



Map 1. Colombia, ca. 1995

off-center layout make it an anomaly in the Coffee Region, a region known in Colombia for the whiteness of its inhabitants and the conservative orderliness of its picturesque towns. In recent decades, the district of Riosucio has had a heavy guerrilla presence and has suffered political and criminal violence, belying the region's image as an area of relative tranquility in this war-ravaged country.<sup>2</sup>

2 Muddied Waters



Map 2. Riosucio and Neighboring Districts, ca. 1995

This book views the history of the white, western Coffee Region from the perspective of mixed-race Riosucio. It is about how a town and a region came to be defined in racial terms and the implications of those definitions for the local inhabitants. As nineteenth-century Colombians explored, described, and colonized their interior, they mapped racial hierarchy onto an emerging national geography composed of distinct localities and regions. They elaborated a racialized discourse of regional differentiation



Figure 1. View of Riosucio from the West, 1994

that assigned greater morality and progress to certain regions—and to certain localities within regions—that they marked as “white.” Meanwhile, those places defined as “black” and “Indian” were associated with disorder, backwardness, and danger.

When I first visited Riosucio in 1992, I called on the municipal officer in charge of cultural affairs, a folklorist named Julián Bueno, and asked him about the town’s history. I was trying to learn about white-identified migrants from the neighboring region of Antioquia who had settled in and around Riosucio in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I had planned to study the conflicts that had occurred when Antioqueño pioneers encountered and displaced their racial “others”—local mestizos, blacks, and Indians. My own encounter with Bueno, however, displaced the focus of my research. In Bueno’s dramatic recounting of local history, these “others” take center stage, as they do here in my book. Bueno insisted that in order to understand the history of Antioqueño migration, I first had to understand local history, especially the story of Riosucio’s two plazas. He went on to tell me how the “plaza of the Indians” and the “plaza of the whites” had become one town and had forged a unified local “race,” the *raza riosuceña*, which was later “invaded” by the *raza antioqueña*. I would hear and read versions of this local origin story time and again over the course of my research.

The tale, as Bueno and many other townspeople tell it, begins in the early nineteenth century, at the very end of the colonial era. Several groups of Indians lived in the area, which was richly endowed in gold. The biggest Indian community was La Montaña, which was ruled benevolently by a maverick republican priest, Father José Bonifacio Bonafont. Northwest of La Montaña was a Spanish settlement known as Quiebralomo, where African slaves worked the mines. Father Bonafont had enlisted the priest of Quiebralomo, one Father Bueno, to help him put an end to the acrimonious disputes between the two communities by uniting them as one. On 7 August 1819, Riosuceños say, the two priests founded the new town at a site that had long been known as “Río Sucio” (or “Dirty River”), after a muddy creek that runs down from the mountains above. The villagers of La Montaña and Quiebralomo carried their respective patron saints in processions from their village chapels to the new town, and the priests ordered their old chapels burned to the ground so that they would not return.

The founding date (which is not substantiated by historical documents) is highly significant. That same day in 1819, Simón Bolívar’s pro-Independence forces won their first decisive battle over Spanish forces at the famous Battle of Boyacá, far away from Riosucio in Colombia’s eastern cordillera. Colombians still celebrate August 7th as a national holiday. By claiming this patriotic date as its founders’ day, Riosucio links its own history to that of the nation.

But the story does not end with Independence. The fragmented republic still had to become a nation, just as the dual town still had to become one. The Indians of La Montaña and the villagers of Quiebralomo still did not get along and refused to attend the same church. Each group maintained its own parish and its own plaza. The priest gave the higher, western plaza to the Quiebralomeños; the Indians received the lower, eastern plaza. A fence divided them. Yet, Julián Bueno told me with a smile, a new generation of young people began sneaking across the fence at night for sexual assignations, which often led to pregnancies and even marriage. The two “races” came together in sexual union as the fence came down. A new, or mixed-race (*mestizo*) community, formed. “Little-by-little,” Bueno recounts in one of his writings, “emerged the racial element that was the true Riosuceño.” By the 1840s, I was told, the president of the Republic had ordered the fence torn down because he was outraged to see his citizenry so divided.<sup>3</sup>



Figure 2. Upper Plaza of Riosucio, 1994

The significant founding date and the story about young lovers of different races coming together to form a town, has led some nationally prominent, liberal intellectuals to describe Riosucio as a microcosm of the mestizo nation. Riosucio, derided by other inhabitants of the Coffee Region as a regional anomaly, redeems itself as a national metaphor. As the Colombian intellectual Germán Arciniegas once wrote to one of Riosucio's most prominent sons: "Why am I so enthusiastic for Riosucio? Simply because in certain measure it is the image of the Republic. It is the district in which really began the independent life of Colombia."<sup>4</sup>

After the fence came down, the upper-lower dichotomy took on new meanings. In the mid-nineteenth century, inhabitants often told me, hardworking, fair-skinned "colonists" (*colonos*) from Antioquia settled in the highlands west of the cabecera. In the twentieth century, these highlanders moved down into the town itself and colonized the western, upper plaza, the "plaza of the whites." The lower plaza, meanwhile, remains the "plaza of the Indians." The partisan rift in Colombia between Liberals and Conservatives is also manifest in local geography. The upper plaza and the highlands above became a stronghold for the Conservative Party, while the slopes stretching eastward from the lower reaches of the town down to the Cauca River were dominated by Liberals. Cross-town and cross-party romances continued to blur political and social boundaries even after



Figure 3. Lower Plaza of Riosucio, 1994

partisan violence engulfed the countryside in the 1940s–1950s; such romances remain the subject of nostalgic anecdotes today.

This narrative about the melding of two races provides an example of how Colombians in one community, by referring to race, have made sense of their local, regional, and national history and geography. As this book will show, this narrative is not the only version of Riosucio's history, though it is the one favored by inhabitants in the cabecera. The construction of this narrative around a series of oppositions—upper versus lower, white versus Indian, Antioqueño settler versus local inhabitant, and Conservative versus Liberal—reflects townspeople's understanding of Colombian society as deeply and historically divided. Such a pessimistic view is not surprising in a country that has suffered repeated civil wars since its inception, has the oldest active left-wing guerrilla groups in the hemisphere (as well as right-wing paramilitary death squads and powerful criminal gangs), and in which the government has exercised tenuous control over the national territory. Anecdotes about young lovers overcoming racial and political divisions, about fences torn down and idealistic priests, however, also suggest a lingering optimism that such rifts may be overcome, that unity and peace might someday be achieved.<sup>5</sup>

Oral and written versions of local history provided one entry into my research about how Colombians worked out their identities “on the ground”



Figure 4. Church of San Sebastián, on the Upper Plaza, 1994

over time. While based in Riosucio from 1993 to 1995 and making trips to other towns and cities, I consulted a variety of sources, including local registries of land transactions, public notaries, local judicial archives, local newspapers, official gazettes, travel narratives, published books and articles by local and regional authors, administrative archives of municipalities and indigenous communities, regional administrative archives, ecclesiastical archives, and scattered documents that people pulled out of desks, boxes, file cabinets, coffee sacks, and paper bags. As texts, such sources provided many examples of the changing discourses of identity. The sources also provided insights into the daily workings of the colonization process by allowing me to trace transactions and relationships among indigenous leaders, politicians, land speculators, lawyers, priests, settlers, foreigners, and local and regional elites. These sources suffered from disrepair and loss. Key collections had been purposely destroyed during previous waves of political violence, and other archives had fallen to pieces due to neglect. I also faced the lexical challenge posed by my sources; words like “race” and “region” proved to have multiple and contradictory meanings that I found difficult to pin down.

In scholarly as well as popular accounts of the history of Riosucio and the Coffee Region, four terms, in particular, crop up repeatedly: *raza*, *colonización*, *región*, and *comunidad*. All four figure prominently in this book. Despite their frequent usage, their meanings vary according to his-





Figure 5. Church of La Candelaria, on the Lower Plaza, 1994

torical and social context. Translation into English renders them all the more problematic. They have been subject to slippage, misuse, and mistranslation even though, or perhaps because, their translation appears so transparently obvious. Because of the centrality of these key words in Colombian popular and scholarly discourse, and in my own analysis, I begin this book by historicizing them and considering the problems they present. The terms introduce the general themes that run through the remainder of the book. I start with one of the most historically significant, widely used, and slippery concepts in the Americas: Race.

#### RACE/RAZA

In 1907 a local official named Francisco Trejos sent a report on land conflicts in Riosucio to the new regional capital of Manizales. In it, he classified local inhabitants by *raza*. He referred to the local residents who traced their ancestry to the village of Quebralomo as the “*raza quebralomeña*.” The Indians who occupied much of the adjacent rural hinterlands he called the “*raza indígena*.” Finally, he called the settlers from Antioquia and their descendants the “*raza antioqueña*.” To each of these groups, Trejos ascribed a specific “character,” or set of inherent traits. Trejos wrote that the Quebralomeños were given to music, art, and squandering their resources on festivities. The indigenous “race” was even

worse: they were lazy, selfish, poor, and alcoholic, although the indígenas also monopolized the district's land and its mineral resources. The Antioqueños, on the other hand, were "known everywhere for [their] love of labor [and] enterprising nature."<sup>6</sup>

Trejos's report provides one example of how Latin Americans have long used race to justify transferring resources out of the hands of the poor and into the hands of the more commercially oriented. But the meanings associated with race have varied. Scholars today increasingly reject the term "race" as a scientific category. Yet even though the term is now considered a "social construction," scholars and census-takers alike still rely on the template, first developed in the eighteenth century by Enlightenment naturalists, which classifies major varieties of humankind according to physical characteristics and continental origin (Caucasian/white, Mongolian/East Asian, Ethiopian/black, American/Indian, and Malay/Southeast Asian). This classificatory scheme has coexisted historically, however, with other definitions of race. In nineteenth-century Colombia, as elsewhere in Europe and the Americas, race often referred, literally, to breed (as in a "race of cattle"), lineage, or kin-group. Races, moreover, were often identified with regions ("la raza antioqueña") and even with small towns and villages ("la raza quiebralomeña"), although nations could also be defined in terms of race (such as "la raza colombiana"). This implied that members of each "race" shared a common lineage, as well as common biological and cultural characteristics. Racial identity, then, has been as much about lineage, culture, and place of origin within the nation as about phenotype or continental origin.<sup>7</sup>

The word race, as used in Colombia, has thus been linked both to the nation as a whole and to human and spatial components within the nation. And, as Trejos's report suggests, different usages of the term have coincided and overlapped. There have also been some inhabitants of Colombia—that is, the indígenas—whose particular "race" seemed at times to place them off the map entirely. Classificatory schemes like Trejos's often described indígenas as a "race" apart—that is, one that was separate from the regions and localities that composed the nation. The very word, indigenous, adopted during the early republican period to replace the Spanish caste label *indio*, suggested a timeless presence on the land—a primordial claim that the indígenas themselves have cited time and again in their efforts to defend their landholdings. But the term has also been used against them, to exclude them from full membership in the

modern citizenry. The indígenas of Riosucio have long spoken Spanish. But, as we will see in subsequent chapters, they have only partially integrated into the regional identities through which Antioqueños, Caucanos, and other “races” have claimed their regional affiliation and thus their national citizenship in this “country of regions.” Indians have often remained off the map in terms of racial regionalization to a greater extent even than have blacks. For, as anthropologist Peter Wade’s work on blackness and regionalism has demonstrated, “blackness” in Colombia has been, in part, a regional ascription.<sup>8</sup>

In order to study the multiple ways that race has been constructed, without reifying any single meaning, scholars such as Wade, Michael Banton, and others have adopted the term “racialization” to describe a process of marking and naturalizing human difference with reference to hierarchical categories. The racialization process, then, divides humanity into groups characterized by certain traits—which can be either biological or cultural—that are assumed to be inherited. In this book, I apply the racialization approach to Colombian history to explore how various identities—regional, national, local—became endowed with seemingly inherent characteristics. The geographical categories through which Colombians located themselves within the national community were racialized, and racial prejudices and inequalities were thus inscribed in the spatial ordering of the emerging nation-state.<sup>9</sup>

### COLONIZATION / COLONIZACION

Historically, the spatial ordering of Colombia has not been static. Rural Colombians historically have been on the move, reshaping their geography as they went. Over the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, successive waves of migrating miners, farmers, and ranchers cleared and settled the forested slopes and valleys that lay between the scattered highland colonial towns. By far the most studied and celebrated of these migratory currents has been the *colonización antioqueña*, usually translated into English as the “Antioqueño colonization.” Beginning in the late colonial era, and continuing throughout the twentieth century, the expanding population of what is now central and eastern Antioquia spilled over into neighboring areas, especially the department of Cauca. Antioqueño migrants expanded agricultural production and developed commercial networks throughout northwestern Colombia.<sup>10</sup>

These migrations contributed to the consolidation and expansion of the region of Antioquia and, in 1905, to the creation of a new administrative department, Caldas. The new department of Caldas initially consisted of territories carved out of the departments of Antioquia and neighboring Cauca. Riosucio, which had belonged to Cauca, was one of these. At the time that the department of Caldas was founded, coffee cultivation was spreading through Antioqueño villages on the volcanic, mid-range slopes (between about 1,000 and 2,000 meters above sea level) of the central and western Andean ranges. The new capital of Caldas, Manizales, had previously been part of Antioquia and was prospering as a hub in the coffee trade. The department of Caldas soon became synonymous with coffee. In 1957 it would split into three smaller coffee-growing departments. Colombians even today continue to refer to all three departments as one unified region, which they variously call the "Coffee Region" (*la región cafetera*), the "Coffee Zone" (*la zona cafetera*), the "Coffee Axis" (*el eje cafetero*), the "Coffee Belt" (*el cinterón cafetero*), or "Old Caldas" (*Viejo Caldas*).<sup>11</sup>

Colombians generally describe this region as entirely populated by people of Antioqueño heritage; the history of Caldas is often presented as a "white legend," or, more literally, as a "rosy legend" (*leyenda rosa*) of "colonización." Colombians generally use this term to refer to the expansion of agricultural frontiers and the creation of settlements in previously uncultivated lands, and so, except for possible environmental consequences, the implications of the term are relatively benign. To translate the Spanish word *colonización* as merely "colonization," as geographer James Parsons and others have done, is somewhat misleading, because the strictly agricultural definition of colonization is no longer the most common one used in English. The word "settlement" more accurately encapsulates the domestication of a forested wilderness that was celebrated by Parsons and other proponents of the "white legend."<sup>12</sup>

Some popular and scholarly accounts present a "black legend" of Antioqueño colonization to challenge this "white legend." As Riosuceños point out, many of their ancestors occupied the area long before the Antioqueños. Cauca was not simply a "virgin" territory (as the "rosy" versions of the story tend to portray it) awaiting the civilizing impulse of the Antioqueño axe. Recent revisionist historians, moreover, have depicted a process of "colonization" in every sense of the word: the Antioqueño takeover of communities, local governments, commercial networks, and landholdings—what Julián Bueno of Riosucio referred to as an "invasion."<sup>13</sup>

This book argues that “colonization,” in the common English sense of the word, provides a more accurate description of this process than the Spanish term “colonización,” but I also attempt to avoid the “black legend” trap and do not conceptualize colonization as merely a top-down process of imposed submission. Studies of European colonialism in the Americas, Africa, and Asia have demonstrated that effective colonizing has historically involved the participation of the colonized, who have simultaneously resisted and adapted to colonization, thus shaping the different colonial systems that resulted. Just as the Black and White legends are each inadequate for describing the Spanish conquest, such legends are also too simplistic for understanding colonization in post-independence Colombia. Both the “bad” and “good” legends of the Antioqueño migration share a common flaw in that they tend to attribute agency almost exclusively to Antioqueños, thus reaffirming stereotypes that cast Antioqueños as inherently more energetic and innovative than other Colombians. Popular and scholarly accounts do not fully account for the active participation of other Colombians in transforming western Colombia. The importance of Caucanos in the “Antioqueño-ization” of northern Cauca has generally been overlooked. This book highlights the actions and goals of Cauca land speculators, politicians, and indigenous authorities, and thereby reconceptualizes the so-called Antioqueño colonization as a multilateral process of region formation.<sup>14</sup>

In facilitating Antioqueño settlement, Cauca’s elite hoped to remake Cauca in the white image of Europe and the United States, or at least to remake it in the white-ish image of Antioquia. They sought to bring progress to Cauca by transforming its population—in other words, by colonizing it racially. By “progress,” elite Latin Americans meant commercial prosperity and capitalist modernization, which they saw taking place in the nations of the North Atlantic, and even in Latin American countries, such as Argentina, that were attracting European immigration. In Cauca, however, demographic whitening through migration took place without a large-scale influx of Europeans. A handful of European migrants and investors did come to Colombia, but their actions as individual colonizers in this case were less important than the ideal of Europe (and, increasingly, the United States) as the paradigm of progress. Cauca lacked sufficient economic resources, accessibility, and infrastructure to lure and retain foreign immigrants, so it had to settle for Antioqueños as the next best thing. Members of the Cauca elite sought to augment their own black, indigenous, mestizo, and mulatto campesinos with migrants from

Antioquia, whom they perceived to be whiter, more industrious, and more inclined to participate in a commercial economy. Indigenous authorities and black Caucanos resisted certain aspects of this process, but they, too, seem to have associated whiteness with progress.<sup>15</sup>

The example of Antioqueño migration demonstrates that processes of colonization in the Americas did not end with the expulsion of European colonial powers. Scholars working within a variety of paradigms have argued that colonization in various forms continued after independence. In the 1960s and 1970s social scientists of the “dependency” school argued that “neo-colonialism” subordinated modern Latin American nations economically to the United States and Europe. *Dependistas* also identified internal structures, such as concentrated land ownership and the greater prosperity of certain regions over others, that they referred to as “internal colonialism.” The state and the structure of the economy, they argued, served the interests of the export sector and maintained the peasantry and marginal provinces in poverty. This approach was revelational in exposing the impoverished underside of capitalist modernization—the “poverty of progress”—but dependency theory has also been rightly criticized by historians and other scholars for often subsuming historical contingency and human initiative to overriding, “top-down” economic structures and for simplifying the complex patterns of labor and land tenure that have characterized rural Latin America.<sup>16</sup>

Social historians of colonization “from the ground up” have shown how, in resisting and adapting, colonized peoples contributed to shaping the resulting social order. In western Colombia, this book argues, indigenous and black people took an active role in shaping regional transformations that gave rise to a new demographic and political geography. Through their participation in the patronage networks of political parties, as well as in various institutions created by the church and state, indigenous and black Colombians directly affected land tenure and government policy. In Riosucio, three indigenous communities negotiated with intermediaries and settlers, ceding a portion of their communal holdings yet maintaining most of their lands and institutions in the face of ongoing efforts to dismantle them.

Recent scholarship on “postcolonialism” and “coloniality” has incorporated certain insights of the dependency framework, especially regarding the extent to which capitalist modernization in former colonies implied the suppression of communal identities and ways of life that clashed with

elite notions of progress. In theorizing the relationship between the grassroots community and the modern nation-state, however, such research sometimes places the nation-state in opposition to autochthonous local and ethnic identities that are implicitly or explicitly posited as the authentic identities of colonized rural peasantries. Rather than place the modern state in opposition to traditional communities, I look within the nation to the historical dynamics between region and locality to understand how each affected the other. My approach forms part of a growing body of ethnographic and historical scholarship on rural society that does not assume that local, racial, and even communal identities are necessarily more “authentic” than national identity. This scholarship also emphasizes the participation of “subalterns” in both resisting and creating nation-states.<sup>17</sup>

The cultural and linguistic emphasis of much recent scholarship on colonialism and postcolonial nation-state formation, moreover, has shown that colonial legacies are discursive and political as well as economic. Modern capitalist states reformed and sometimes radically revised the racial, gendered, geographical, and other social categories through which empires had previously classified and governed their subjects. “Technologies” of colonialism, such as cartography, census enumeration, and ethnography, provided tools for the consolidation of the modern state and the hierarchical orderings of populations and spaces within the nation. Colonized groups have paradoxically made use of these tools in redefining their own identities, even in those instances in which they have defined themselves in opposition to the state. Thus, post-independence colonization was not simply a continuation of earlier forms of colonialism. Post-colonial processes of colonization remapped social relationships onto new national geographies of power.<sup>18</sup>

#### REGION / REGION

Most Colombian historiography emphasizes the colonial-era origins of Colombia’s regions. Drawing on the insights of recent scholarship on regionalism in Brazil, Europe, and other parts of the world, however, this book considers the emergence of regions as an integral part of the process of postcolonial nation formation in Latin America. I agree that the roots of regionalism run deep into the colonial past; local loyalties were paramount in the colonial period and independence wars. But the racialized

discourse of regional differentiation and the full-blown regional identities that still affect Colombian life today took shape in the post-independence era.<sup>19</sup>

Colombia, like other Latin American countries, emerged from the independence wars of 1810–21 with a fragmented society, territory, and economy. In 1830, the sparsely populated young republic, then known as New Granada, nominally encompassed the disparate valleys and slopes of three Andean mountain ranges and two coasts, as well as part of the Isthmus of Panama. The mostly rural and small-town inhabitants were quite literally and physically separated by great “interior and exterior distance.” Except for coastal ports, colonial New Granada’s principal towns and cities had mainly sprung up among the high plains and temperate valleys of the Andes. The Andean population centers, each supplied by its respective agricultural hinterland, were separated from one another by mountains and lowlands. During the first struggles for independence from Spain, many of these towns and cities declared themselves to be republics; others were loyalist strongholds. They set themselves up as city-states and sometimes fought bitterly against their immediate neighbors. These local rivalries continued into the early national period. Jurisdictional boundaries between them remained vague.<sup>20</sup>

Beginning in the 1850s, Colombian politicians shaped the republic into a loose federation of “sovereign states,” known colloquially as *países*, or countries, each with its own standing army, currency, postal service, and constitutional government. Communications and trade between states, and often within them, were tenuous at best. Colombia lacked cart roads; in many mountainous areas the steep, muddy trails were not even passable for mule trains. The federation suffered repeatedly from civil wars between Liberals and Conservatives that tended to take the form of conflicts between separate states. Federalism, as the following chapter will show, both reflected and contributed to the strengthening of regionalism in nineteenth-century Colombia.<sup>21</sup>

Also influential during this period were various efforts to map and describe the national territory. In the mid-nineteenth century, Colombian and foreign explorers enumerated, mapped, measured, and classified the national territory and its diverse inhabitants and climates. Some of the most important ethnographic and cartographic research was sponsored by the government over the course of the 1850s as part of a series of geographical expeditions under the auspices of the Chorographic Commission.



The commission's reports, maps, and illustrations constructed the new republic as a heterogeneous nation composed of various races tied to specific localities and regions that had "progressed" at different rates. The *costumbrista* fiction of the era, rich in ethnographic detail, further reinforced the image of Colombia as a country composed of distinct spaces and peoples.<sup>22</sup>

The elite writers who produced these texts tended to attribute the varying levels of economic progress and "civilization" obtained by the inhabitants of each locale to a combination of environmental conditions and inherited characteristics that presumably shaped racial stock. Manuel Ancizar, for example, traveled the Eastern Andes for the Chorographic Commission in 1850–51. He described the climate, customs, economic conditions, and apparent mixture of African, Indian, and European descent particular to each community. Based on these factors, he assessed their relative capacity for progressing. A decade later, José María Samper attributed New Granada's political instability to the coexistence of distinct "ethnographic zones." He described the civilized highlands as populated by whites, light-skinned mestizos, and the more easily assimilated Indians, whereas the tropical lowlands were inhabited by politically excitable blacks, zambos, and mulattos, along with barbaric Indians. Nineteenth-century writers like Ancizar and Samper were leading statesmen as well as intellectuals; they catalogued and interpreted Colombian history, geography, and ethnography as part of their project to build the Colombian nation.<sup>23</sup>

Colombian regionalism continued to fascinate twentieth-century scholars. The general consensus that region has been important historically, that regional loyalties often override national identity, and that Colombia is regionally divided has not, however, led to agreement among scholars as to how to define Colombia's regions or how to count them. The Antioquia physician Luis López de Mesa, writing in 1934, perceived the nation as composed of seven regions; the social scientist Virginia Gutiérrez de Pineda, thirty years later, described four. Both linked region to race and culture. López de Mesa referred to regional groups as "racial groups," while Gutiérrez de Pineda referred to "cultural complexes." Both López de Mesa and Gutiérrez echoed earlier writers, such as Ancizar and Samper, in describing each regional group as the product of a particular mix of what sociologist Orlando Fals Borda would later refer to as Colombia's "tri-ethnic" racial stock. They also considered the cultural

and physiological adaptations that each group had made to its environmental niche.<sup>24</sup>

López de Mesa, like many Latin American intellectuals of his era, was influenced by a current of eugenics theory, according to which environment affected racial characteristics. These “neo-Lamarckians” believed that environmental adaptations were passed on from one generation to the next. For López de Mesa, environment and heredity together shaped Colombian character, culture, and phenotypes. In his analysis, those regional groups with the largest preponderance of European blood and dwelling in the country’s temperate climates, such as the Antioqueños, were superior intellectually and physically to the blacker and more heavily Indian peoples of other regions.<sup>25</sup>

In the 1960s Gutiérrez de Pineda linked race and sexual behavior in drawing her own map of Colombia’s regional cultures. She examined demographic patterns and ethnographic data, and she mapped patterns of male-female relationships, production, and household formation across the country. She noted, for example, a high frequency of Catholic marriage in Antioqueño-settled areas and, conversely, a high percentage of free unions and out-of-wedlock births in Afro-Colombian areas. Her innovative work was relatively free of her predecessors’ explicitly sexist and racist judgments, and she placed what we now call gender at the center of her analysis. Yet, her widely cited study may actually have served to perpetuate the same stereotypes that had informed earlier writings on region.<sup>26</sup>

More recently, some researchers have interrogated the stereotypes themselves, examining how Colombia’s regional identities have been constructed relationally and how racial stereotyping has played into that process. Particularly important for this book is the recent work of three scholars who analyze how Antioqueños have constructed their regional identity against an “other.” Historian Mary Roldán, in her study of mid-twentieth-century political violence, locates the “other” on the periphery of the department of Antioquia. She argues that Antioquia’s history and geography have been shaped by a “hierarchy of cultural difference.” The old core of Antioquia, centered in and around the Aburra Valley, has defined itself by “piety, Hispanic (‘white’), legitimate birth, Catholic marriage, and capitalism.” Antioqueños have tended to perceive their more recently incorporated periphery as “deviant” because of its heavily indigent and black population. Anthropologist Claudia Steiner draws similar

conclusions in her historical study of the administrative incorporation of one of these peripheral areas, the Caribbean zone around the Gulf of Urabá, into the department of Antioquia. Administrators from central Antioquia explicitly described Urabá inhabitants as racially inferior, and sought to transform the population's social customs, a goal the administrators referred to as *antioqueñización*.<sup>27</sup>

Peter Wade's influential study of race in contemporary Colombia juxtaposes the white–mestizo Andean core, epitomized by Antioquia, with a periphery constituted by the “Indian” Amazon basin and the black coastal regions. He argues that a “black/non-black” dichotomy prevails in Colombia, whereby the black regions constitute the principal “other” against which the non-black majority of mestizos and whites measure their superiority. Lowland frontier Indians, similarly, provide another version of this primitive “other.” Indians and mestizos of the interior highlands, however, do not fit as comfortably into Wade's scheme. In focusing on the relationship between Antioquia and the peripheral coasts, he leaves largely unexplored the subtle interregional racial gradations that have historically pervaded the Andean interior of Colombia, as well as the nineteenth-century historical processes that shaped Colombia's contemporary regional map.<sup>28</sup>

Other historians and geographers of Latin America have struggled in their efforts to create a working model of the sub-national region as an abstract system and conceptual tool for historical analysis. I prefer to study regions as modern products of historical processes and as subjects for historical study, rather than, as historian Eric van Young conceptualizes them, as trans-historical “depersonalized abstractions.” I prefer not to count or attempt to precisely map out Colombia's regions, or even to define and use “region” as an analytical tool in and of itself. Rather, this book examines region, like race, largely as a historically produced, discursive notion and meaningful collective identity.<sup>29</sup>

Expanding historically on Peter Wade's observation that in contemporary Colombia “region has become a powerful language of cultural and racial differentiation,” I argue that Colombians' strong regional identities emerged in tandem with a national discourse of racial and regional differentiation that served to organize the emerging nation-state in space and to embed racial hierarchy on the mountainsides of Colombia. Underpinning this discourse of regional differentiation were assumptions about race (and, as we will see below, about gender as well). The discourse of re-

gional differentiation associated certain regions with whiteness and thus with prosperity, sexual propriety, and progress, and other regions with blackness, Indianness, sexual impropriety, and backwardness.<sup>30</sup>

This book takes a constructivist approach to region, just as it does to race. Among the common-sense “truths” that we express in our cultural discourses, place is one of the more difficult to deconstruct, precisely because it appears to be a natural part of this Earth, and because our deepest and most cherished sense of who we are refers in part to where we come from. Recent historical geographers and other critical scholars of geography and power have argued for greater attention to the historical processes whereby power relations came to be embedded in territorial organization and perceptions of space—of how territorial space has been configured historically in a series of seemingly discrete and timeless, yet inherently unstable, overlapping, and contested places (regions, countries, homelands, neighborhoods, to name a few). Space, in this view, is a malleable social construct that manifests and reinforces power relations in society.<sup>31</sup>

Even the most hegemonic discourses and strongly felt collective identities, however, do not preclude agency or dissent. Widely accepted discourses—such as discourses of regionalism or patriotism, for example—can be used to make highly contradictory arguments and stake competing claims. Subsequent chapters will show how the racialized discourse of regionalism has provided a language that competing factions in Colombia have used in their debates over power and the distribution of resources in and among their local communities.<sup>32</sup>

#### COMMUNITY / *COMUNIDAD*

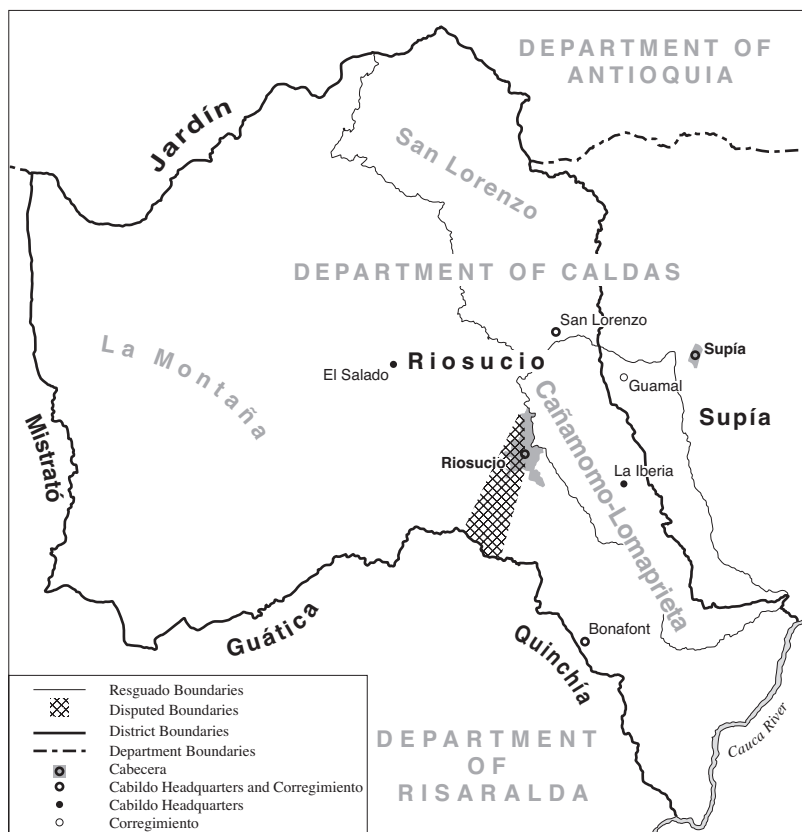
One way of describing Colombia’s regions, to borrow a concept usually applied to nations, is as “imagined communities.” Benedict Anderson defined the nation as “an imagined political community . . . imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” Cynthia Applegate and Mary Roldán have both extended this notion of imagined community to apply it to regions within nations. Members of regional communities, even those who have never met, are bound by affective ties.<sup>33</sup>

Anderson used the “face-to-face” village community as a reference

point for imagining the nation. As scholars have recently pointed out, however, “the apparently immediate experience of community is in fact inevitably constituted by a wider set of social and spatial relations.” Anderson himself noted that even the “primordial villages of face-to-face contact” may “perhaps” be imagined as well, but he does not explore how such imagining might happen in such an intimate context. Moreover, his model does not fully consider the extent to which collective “imagining” has been imbued with struggles over power to lead and define the community. By focusing on local power struggles within Riosucio, as well as regional struggles involving Riosucio actors, this book provides examples of how community has been imagined at various levels of society—how people constructed and contested a series of nested communities.<sup>34</sup>

Like the other key words discussed above, “community” has various meanings. On the one hand, I use the word to refer to imagined collectivities. Colombian archival documents, on the other hand, yield more contextually and historically specific meanings for the term *comunidad*. In legal documents relating to land, “community” referred to groups of people, usually but not always linked by kin, who held property in common. The indígenas of Riosucio, from the nineteenth century and into the present, like other Andean peoples, have used “community” to refer to their landholding collectivities. For indigenous Colombians, *comunidad* is synonymous with *parcialidad*. *Parcialidades* were defined during the colonial period as intimate kin-groups. The colonial state recognized their landholdings, which it termed *resguardos*, and set up indigenous governing structures to administer them under the supervision of civil and ecclesiastic authorities. The *resguardos* were theoretically indivisible and unalienable, intended to provide the basis both for the community’s subsistence as well as its tribute payments. Map 3 indicates the controversial boundaries claimed by Riosucio’s three established indigenous *resguardos*.

Over the course of the twentieth century, by asserting their rights as members of indigenous *comunidades*, Riosucio’s indígenas have challenged not only the regional mystique of whiteness, but also the mestizo identity put forth by Riosucio town intellectuals. Twentieth-century Riosucio officials and intellectuals have undermined the hegemonic myth of white Caldas by constructing their local communal history as the forging of a local (and national) mestizo race. Indigenous leaders in the outlying rural areas of the district have gone even further, by insisting that they are



Map 3. Riosucio and the Indigenous Resguardos claimed by La Montaña, San Lorenzo, and Cañamomo-Lomapieta, ca. 1995

indigenous, rather than mestizo, and are thus entitled to specific rights over much of the land and natural resources of the district. Like other indigenous activists in Colombia and elsewhere in Latin America, they now remember much of their nineteenth- and twentieth-century history as a struggle to preserve communal lands and autonomy. Yet, historical research in Riosucio shows that preserving the *comunidad* has historically meant, for indigenous leaders, active participation in the institutions of colonization.

Historical sources also reveal that, beyond the level of the landholding *comunidad*, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century *indígenas* and other Colombians rarely if ever referred to the larger collectivities they constructed explicitly as “communities.” Rather, the preferred metaphor was

an even more intimate social unit: the family. Colombians used familial metaphors to describe their own nation, regions, districts, towns, and even their landholding *comunidades*. Like any family, the imagined family involved affection but also hierarchy—a hierarchy structured by age and gender (and often by race and class as well, keeping in mind that the extended, patriarchal family in Latin America has often included servants, slaves, dependents, tenants, and illegitimate offspring). Family (like geography), and the gendered and generational relationships therein, is an intimate reality for most people that provides a way to explain other more abstract collectivities such as the region or the nation. The chapters that follow explore some of the ways that the discourse of regional differentiation was gendered as well as racialized. Assumptions about gender and race (categories that, like space, provide seemingly “natural” ways to organize difference) have shaped the imaginings of community at the local, regional, and national levels. The result has been continued inequality along race and gender lines at all levels of Colombian society and polity.<sup>35</sup>

In short, this book traces how one region, the Coffee Region, emerged in the early twentieth century out of the interstices of two nineteenth-century regions, Antioquia and Cauca. I examine how on-the-ground processes of colonization and partisan politics, along with elite efforts to map and categorize the national territory, shaped—and were also shaped by—a geography of racialized regions. The book argues that nineteenth-century Colombians developed a racialized discourse of regional differentiation that they used to classify the population and territory of their emerging nation. Then, in the early twentieth century, provincial intellectuals elaborated new theories about the regional components of the Colombian nation that built upon and further legitimated the racialized discourse of differentiation. Racialized definitions of local, regional, and national identity, however, proved to be exclusive and discriminatory and were contested at every level.

My narrative provides specificity and immediacy to this analysis by blending microhistory with regional and national history. I view the formation of the Coffee Region largely from the perspectives of the inhabitants of one district. On a local level, region formation was a process of postcolonial colonization that actively involved colonists, the colonized, and intermediaries. This book reconstructs the collaborative relation-

ships as well as the tensions between these groups. In Riosucio, debates about collective identity were—and are—part of larger struggles and negotiations over natural resources and governance. Throughout Colombia and Latin America, such conflicts have been shaped by common-sense understandings of race and region that are themselves the products of history.

I chose the district of Riosucio as the site to explore these themes mainly because it experienced the intersection of two major historical processes that are usually studied separately in Colombia: the Antioqueño colonization and the privatization of communal indigenous landholdings. In the nineteenth century Riosucio formed part of a contested borderland that marked the frontier between Antioquia and Cauca. This mountain-side district, moreover, provides a strategic vantage point from which to view a panorama of the transformations that occurred throughout post-independence Latin America: the consolidation of strong regional identities within the framework of emerging nation-states; the racial “whitening” of regions through migration, intermarriage, and myth-making; the conversion of *indígenas* into *mestizos*; the embedding of social hierarchies in national landscapes of racially differentiated spaces; the emergence of racialized discourses of modernization; the dismemberment of communal landholdings to promote commercial agriculture; and the ongoing tensions between homogeneous and heterogeneous definitions of the nation.

For the sake of brevity and coherence, I have chosen to concentrate on the district of Riosucio itself. The district is not studied in isolation; surrounding villages and other historical actors appear in the text when their histories affect and converge with that of Riosucio. But the book traces in depth only those communities that historically have been located within Riosucio’s own administrative jurisdiction. My archival research focused on the *indígenas*, *mestizos*, and whites who have made up the bulk of Riosucio’s inhabitants. I allude only sparingly in the chapters that follow to the black villages located outside of Riosucio’s boundaries in the neighboring districts of Supía and Marmato; their stories still remain to be told.

Chronologically, this study focuses mainly on a century of Colombian history in which overt political and social conflict was channeled into partisan conflicts between the Liberal and Conservative parties, and factions thereof. The book is framed by two momentous political developments in Colombian national history. It begins in the late 1840s, just as the two main political blocs in Colombia took the names “Conservative”



and “Liberal.” Locally, Riosucio was officially unified as a single parish district in 1846, at about the same time that families from Antioquia were starting to settle there. The study concludes with the outbreak of the last great Liberal–Conservative conflict in 1948. La Violencia, as this mid-twentieth-century undeclared civil war is known, wreaked tremendous violence on the Coffee Region and on rural Colombia more generally, and marked the transition to a much more violent, late-twentieth-century series of conflicts, involving a broader array of ideologies and actors—conflicts that continue in the present.<sup>36</sup>

The book is divided into three parts. The first two parts follow a conventional periodization for the political history of Colombia. Part 1 covers the period from the mid-1840s through the mid-1880s, when the republic was violently contested by Conservatives and Liberals, with the result that the republic was split into a federation. The Liberals dominated the weak federal government, while the Conservatives consolidated their control over certain states. Part 2 covers the political era from 1886 to 1930, known in Colombia as the “Conservative hegemony.” Historians have also referred to this period as the “white republic” because of the elite’s emphasis on Colombia’s Hispanic heritage. The centralist 1886 constitution replaced the semi-autonomous “sovereign states” of the federal period with departments. The new department of Caldas, which corresponded to the booming Coffee Region, was the economic, political, and cultural showplace of the Conservative white republic. Part 3 transcends the periodization of the first two parts to explore the interplay of collective memories and identities in the town of Riosucio and the indigenous community of San Lorenzo.

More specifically, the three chapters in Part 1 focus on aspects of regional and local history in the mid–nineteenth century. Chapter 1 uses nineteenth-century published texts to show how the discourse of regional differentiation attributed certain racial and sexual stereotypes to the western Colombian regions of Antioquia and Cauca. Conservative Antioquia was a fair “beauty” in contrast to the dark, Liberal “beast” of Cauca. The chapter also outlines the political and social processes that gave rise to these images. Chapter 2 uses local and regional archival and published sources to show how Caucanos fostered Antioqueño migration into northern Cauca. Indigenous communities lost part of their land as a result. Chapter 3 uses the same sources to discuss the participation of the indigenous communities themselves in the colonization process, focusing on the patron-client relationships through which indigenous authorities par-

ticipated ambiguously in the larger political community of Riosucio. Colonization took place through partisan networks, and the result was a local geography defined not only in racial terms but also in partisan political terms. Some communities developed lasting identities as Liberal, and others as Conservative.

Part 2 shows how Riosucio's inhabitants experienced their incorporation into the white Coffee Region and the Conservative "white republic." Chapter 4 examines the Regeneration movement itself on a national and local level, including a discussion of the Regeneration's protective legislation toward indigenous communities, aimed at civilizing them and incorporating them into the republic in a subordinated status. The Regeneration, and the Conservative government to which it gave rise, placed indigenous and black communities under white Conservative tutelage. Nonetheless, the judicial documents and land registries examined in chapter 5 reveal that Riosucio's indígenas, rather than allow themselves to be "civilized" out of existence, used the Regeneration-era legislation, as well as partisan networks, to protect their landholdings from the encroachment of settlers, incurring high costs along the way. Chapter 6 traces the creation of Caldas and the emergence of the Coffee Region and shows how racialized regionalism provided a common language for political debate among rival elites. Commercial and political leaders in the new departmental capital constituted themselves in their publications as a regional elite, the leaders of a homogeneous regional race. Riosucio intellectuals, meanwhile, expressed dissent in their own local newspapers and private correspondence; they argued that Riosucio constituted a "race" apart.

Part 3 explores how local communities imagined themselves in contradictory ways during the twentieth century through narrating, or "remembering," the past. Chapter 7 returns to the story told in the first pages of this introduction, to show how intellectuals in the town center of Riosucio elaborated a narrative of local history that challenged the hegemonic myth of white Caldas. Chapter 8 studies one indigenous community, San Lorenzo, over the long term, from the late-nineteenth century until it was officially dismantled in the 1940s, and expresses how indigenous inhabitants experienced locally the historical transformations traced in the previous chapters. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how San Lorenzo's indigenous identity has been reconstructed and remembered over the last two decades.

The concluding chapter reflects upon the implications of viewing Colombian national geography as historically constructed and racialized. The “country of regions,” I argue, was a spatial manifestation of a view of modernity that associated national progress with racial whitening and homogeneity. The racialization of progress, manifested in regionalism, has directly affected the lives of contemporary Colombians, including the black and indigenous inhabitants of the Coffee Region. Nonetheless, in Riosucio today, collective memories of “Indianness” challenge both the hegemonic regional myth of white progressive Caldas and the local ideal of mestizo Riosucio. On a national level, indigenous Colombians have been at the forefront of efforts to disarticulate progress and the modern nation from whiteness and *mestizaje*; they define Colombia as neither a white republic nor a mestizo melting pot, but rather as a racially plural nation.