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**The Unmaking of Empire: Nature and Politics in the Early  
Colombian Imagination, 1808-1821**

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**The Unmaking of Empire: Nature and Politics in the Early  
Colombian Imagination, 1808-1821**

**by**

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**Report**

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## **Abstract**

# **The Unmaking of Empire: Nature and Politics in the Early Colombian Imagination, 1808-1821**

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In this report I argue that during the independence wars from Spain and the first decade of republican rule, the learned elite of the viceroyalty of New Granada—present day Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Panama—articulated narratives of nature and science to debates over provincial hierarchies, to justify provincial unity, foreign commercial integration, and the creation of political symbols for the new polity. In the process of undoing the Spanish empire, the lettered elite conceived of their homeland's natural bounties as key cultural capital, and as the language with which to frame their aspirations as political community, as part of a national polity or of regional *patrias*. By using newspapers, constitutional debates, scientific writings, and visual evidence, I place the elite's sensibilities and concerns about their fatherland's nature in the wider context

of political transformations that took place from 1808 and on. In the first section, I explore eighteenth-century assessments of New Granada's nature, offering an overview of key conceptions of New Granada's geopolitical situation and nature that shaped the Creole imagination. In the second section, I characterize the reforms brought about by the Bourbon monarchy in New Granada, giving weight to the socialization of practices of the utility of science among the learned elite. The third section illustrates how Neogranadians deployed nature in assessing provincial fragmentation, and in the debate over the preeminence of Santafé as capital when the monarchic crisis exploded. The fourth section explores how nature was employed as an argument in debates over the integration of present-day Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador into a single republic, and the adoption of a federal or a central state. Finally, section five discusses the role of New Granada's natural landmarks in discourses of provincial and foreign commercial integration, along with a reflection on the use of nature as political symbol for the new republic. My aim is to explore the ways that the lettered elite incorporated nature into geopolitical discourses of a polity separate from Spain, and to uncover the tensions embedded in the ways they imagined their desired nation.

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## **Note on translations**

Except when otherwise noted, all translations in this report are my own. In most cases, I have reproduced the original words or phrases in the footnotes.

# **The Unmaking of Empire: Nature and Politics in the Early Colombian Imagination, 1808-1821**

## INTRODUCTION

Spain and its empire faced an institutional crisis following Napoleon's invasion and removal of King Ferdinand VII in 1808. In response, intellectuals and politicians created local councils, or *juntas*, across the Iberian Peninsula and in the Americas. By 1810, most of the Spanish American *juntas*—whether royalists or seeking for independence—proclaimed their right to govern the Spanish colonies. They began the process of achieving representation for their own territories, adopted republican governments, and wrote constitutions.

A long natural history tradition, along with the opening of different institutions of learning framed in Enlightenment thought, contributed to the configuration of an intellectual community that invented their homeland through geopolitical narratives. This elite community shared a concern for the future of their *patria*, and trusted in science to elevate the colonies to the status of republics. During the revolutionary process, the majority of individuals that took over the reins of provincial governments were part of this narrow literate society. Educated in the ideals of enlightenment science, and sharing

a public space in newspapers, and literary circles, this group believed that mastering nature was necessary to exercise effective political power.<sup>1</sup>

I argue that, during the independence wars from Spain and the first decade of republican rule, the learned elite of the viceroyalty of New Granada—present day Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Panama—articulated narratives of nature and science to debates over provincial hierarchies, to justify provincial unity, foreign commercial integration, and the creation of political symbols for the new polity. In the process of undoing the Spanish empire, the lettered elite conceived of their homeland’s natural bounties as key cultural capital, and as the language with which to frame their aspirations as political community, as part of a national polity or of regional *patrias*.

As an object of academic research environmental historians have researched the relationship between human beings and nature along three main lines of inquiry: the changing interactions between humans and environment; the environmental consequences of socioeconomic activities; and the attitudes, beliefs, and values about nature that shape religion and science.<sup>2</sup> This project is interested in the latter. Rather than understanding nature only as an actual physical entity, I will emphasize nature as a

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Gutiérrez Ardila, argues that this group also shared the theoretical assumptions knowledge of natural law. This was decisive in shaping the government shift, and in the relations between the different provinces. Gutiérrez Ardila, Daniel. *Un nuevo reino: geografía política, pactismo y diplomacia durante el interregno en Nueva Granada, 1808-1816*. Bogotá, Colombia: Universidad Externado de Colombia. 2010, 109.

<sup>2</sup> The word “nature” has over twelve different definitions in the Spanish Language Dictionary of 1803. It encompasses meanings ranging from “the essence and own being of each thing”, “the virtue, quality, or property of things” to “the aggregation, order and disposition of all the entities composing the universe”, Real Academia Española. *Diccionario De La Lengua Castellana*. Cuarta edición. Madrid: Por la viuda de don Joaquín Ibarra, impresora dela Real Academia, 1803.



cultural construct that is embedded in political debates and decision-making, in scientific inquiry, and in symbolic representation.

I examine works that contest a historical fiction that has been rooted in Colombian nation-building narratives since the nineteenth century. These traditions claim that a political unity, with the city of Santafé in the center, governed New Granada at independence. As the works of some scholars have shown, it was the ‘region,’ not the ‘protonation,’ that offered the strongest sense of belonging for the early republican elite.<sup>3</sup> In an attempt to present independence as a sudden rupture that gave birth to the nation, Colombian scholars have neglected to identify the different provincial discourses that informed and shaped how the learned elite grappled with turning their country into a geographical and political reality.

I also dialogue with the work of scholars revising the coincidence between the “maturation of a movement of renovation and growth in the natural sciences” in Spanish America – and with particular strength in the viceroyalty of New Granada- and the upheaval of the Spanish colonies and the declaration of their independences.<sup>4</sup> The overthrow of scholastic science and the pursuit of a modern American science under the pillars of Enlightenment are commonly regarded as key antecedents to the revolutionary outburst in Spanish America and the rise of a Creole patriotism. This paper follows David

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<sup>3</sup> Op.Cit. Gutiérrez. König, Hans-Joachim. *En El Camino Hacia La Nación: Nacionalismo En El Procesode Formación Del Estado Y De La Nación De La Nueva Granada, 1750 a 1856*. Santafé de Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1994; Múnera, Alfonso. *El Fracaso De La Nación: Región, Clase Y Raza En El Caribe Colombiano (1717-1821)*. 1st ed. Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Glick, "Science and Independence in Latin America (with special reference to New Granada)," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 71 (1991), 307-334. Antonio Lafuente, "Enlightenment in an Imperial Context: Local Science in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Hispanic World", in *Osiris*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Series, Vol. 15, Nature and Empire: Sciences and the Colonial Enterprise, (2000).

Brading and Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra's arguments, regarding the origins of Creole patriotism in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century.<sup>5</sup> However, I revise particularly what concerns to an eighteenth century tradition of patriotic interpretations of nature, and the formation of a public sphere in New Granada. My effort here is to link Creole ideas about nature, to actual processes of debate and decision-making triggered by the monarchical crisis, in terms of political and territorial organization. The "Creole ideology" was not homogenous and expressed itself often in ambiguous ideas and expectations of the political future of the colonies. Nevertheless, following Anthony McFarlane's argument, the repercussions of the colonial administration support of the Botanical Expedition and the ideas of Enlightenment to stimulate economic development, encouraged Creoles to view Spanish policy toward New Granada with a more critical eye.<sup>6</sup>

I place the elite's sensibilities and concerns about their fatherland's nature in the wider context of political transformations that took place from 1808 and on. In the first section, I explore eighteenth-century assessments of New Granada's nature, offering an overview of key conceptions of New Granada's geopolitical situation and nature that shaped the Creole imagination. In the second section, I characterize the reforms brought about by the Bourbon monarchy in New Granada, giving weight to the socialization of

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<sup>5</sup> Brading, D. A. *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State, 1492-1867*. Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Cañizares-Esguerra, Jorge. *How to Write the History of the New World: Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2001.

<sup>6</sup> McFarlane, Anthony. *Colombia Before Independence: Economy, Society, and Politics Under Bourbon Rule*. New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

practices of the utility of science among the learned elite. The third section illustrates how Neogranadians deployed nature in assessing provincial fragmentation, and in the debate over the preeminence of Santafé as capital when the monarchic crisis exploded. The fourth section explores how nature was employed as an argument in debates over the integration of present-day Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador into a single republic, and the adoption of a federal or a central state. Finally, section five discusses the role of New Granada's natural landmarks in discourses of provincial and foreign commercial integration, along with a reflection on the use of nature as political symbol for the new republic. My aim is to explore the ways that the lettered elite incorporated nature into geopolitical discourses of a polity separate from Spain, and to uncover the tensions embedded in the ways they imagined their desired nation.

#### A TRADITION OF NATURAL HISTORY, AND A NEW GENERATION

Nature as part of the imagination of European-descended people in the New World began as soon as Christopher Columbus arrived in America in 1492. The discursive construction of the New World's nature by the first chroniclers and travelers is full of accounts of the unknown and marvelous fauna and flora of a portion of the world, which possessed a different natural universe from that of Europe. For the sixteenth century, the chronicles of the Indies of José de Acosta, and Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo contained

remarkable assessments of the New World's nature.<sup>7</sup> As part of their mission, the Jesuits interpreted the new natural world.

The *Descripción del Nuevo Reino de Granada* of the Jesuit Alonso Medrano, 1600, is one of the earliest such accounts of New Granada's environment. Through a universalizing vision of American nature, and the precepts of the evangelization project, the nature as conceived by the *muisca*s –the indigenous tribe that inhabited the central highlands of present day Colombia- was demonized by the Jesuits, and recreated through the lens of Christianity.<sup>8</sup> For the *muisca*s, as for other Andean societies, divinity manifested itself in many places, like rivers, mountains, caves, crops, and certain trees. In order to rework indigenous “idolatrics” into Christian terms, the Jesuits founded parishes at sacred indigenous sites, and introduced visions of nature that focused on its exploitation.<sup>9</sup>

In the influential and widely read *El Orinoco Ilustrado* of 1731, the Jesuit priest Joseph Gumilla called the attention of the Spanish monarchy to the agricultural potential of the lands by the Orinoco basin.<sup>10</sup> Given the natural predisposition of the lands of New Granada to generate naturally a great amount of natural productions, Gumilla asserted:

(...) The terrain will be snubbed if we do not fix our eyes upon it, to record the virtue that bears in its entrails, to give handfuls of valuable

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<sup>7</sup> Acosta, José de. *Historia Natvral Y Moral De Las Indias, En Qve Se Tratan Las Cosas Notables Del Cielo, Y Elementos, Metales, Plantas, Y Animales Dellas: Y Los Ritos, Y Ceremonias, Leyes, Y Gouierno, Y Guerras De Los Indios*. Seuilla: Impr. en casa de I. de Leon, 1590. Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, Gonzalo. *Historia General Y Natural De Las Indias*. Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1992.

<sup>8</sup> Luis Fernando Restrepo, “Los limites de la razón occidental: La ‘naturaleza’ muisca y los proyectos intelectuales de los jesuitas en el Nuevo Reino de Granada, siglo XVII”, en *El Saber De Los Jesuitas, Historias Naturales Y El Nuevo Mundo*. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2005. 172-194.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 184.

<sup>10</sup> Gumilla, Joseph. *El Orinoco Ilustrado; Historia Natural, Civil Y Geográfica De Este Gran Río*. Bogotá: Editorial ABC, 1955.

fruits, and appreciation for Europe. (...) And if this fertile terrain produces cocoa beans as it does, what woods, and what harvests would it produce in favor of farming, and irrigation? (...) Oh, and what a country, if its fertility was achieved!<sup>11</sup>

Determined to raise awareness of the agricultural potential of New Granada, Gumilla encouraged Spaniards to populate the fertile lowlands of the Orinoco River, and establish villages, and cattle ranches. He noted that in those lands “everything invites cultivation, and everywhere this country offers rich and abundant fruits.”<sup>12</sup> As in the writings of father Joseph Gumilla, father Basilio Vicente de Oviedo suggested a connection between the evangelic and the economic.<sup>13</sup>

In *Cualidades y Riquezas del Nuevo Reino de Granada*, 1760, the Jesuit Basilio Vicente de Oviedo, pointed out the paradox of the viceroyalty of New Granada. Born in the province of Boyacá in 1699, Oviedo received his education on the Colegio de San Bartolomé in Santafé, and became priest in the Seminario de Popayán. He worked as priest in several towns: Guane, Nemocón, San Gil, Mogotes, Curití, Paipa, Charalá, Paya, etc. In his natural history, Oviedo claimed that New Granada was the richest province of all the Indies, and at the same time the poorest due to the lack of commerce.<sup>14</sup> Timidly, he urged measures to allow the development of commerce, and encouraged the settlement of

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<sup>11</sup> “Quedará desairado el terreno, si no fijáramos en él los ojos, para registrar la virtud que encierra en sus entrañas, para dar a manos llenas frutos de mucho valor, y aprecio para Europa. “y si aquel fecundo terreno así produce el cacao de suyo, que arboledas, y que cosechas diera al favor del cultivo, y del riego? (...) Oh, y que país, si se lograra su fertilidad.” Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. “todo convida al cultivo, y por todas partes ofrece el país larga correspondencia en ricos, y abundantes frutos.”

<sup>13</sup> Ewalt, Margaret R. *Peripheral Wonders: Nature, Knowledge, and Enlightenment in the Eighteenth-Century Orinoco*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2008. 24.

<sup>14</sup> The original title is: *Del Nuevo Reino de Granada y sus riquezas, y demás cualidades, y de todas sus poblaciones y curatos, con específica noticia de sus gentes y gobierno*. Oviedo, Basilio Vicente de. *Cualidades Y Riquezas Del Nuevo Reino De Granada*. Bucaramanga: Gobernación de Santander, 1990. 44-52.

more Spaniards to populate the lands. In his work, Oviedo included a detailed inventory of the herbs, barks, fruits, minerals, flowers, domesticated animals, and birds of the kingdom. He described the type of climate where these natural productions were found, and presented an inventory of the cities of New Granada in terms of their splendor in “churches, convents, edifices, and politics.”<sup>15</sup> Oviedo hoped his assessment of the kingdom’s natural bounties would be useful for priests and their parishes, and increase the resources for the evangelization process. In addition, although Oviedo highlighted the abundance of natural productions, he made no argument about New Granada’s potential for exporting agricultural products to the world.

In addition to Gumilla’s portrayal of the Orinoco River as “the gateway of New Granada’s commerce,”<sup>16</sup> and Oviedo’s depiction of New Granada as the richest of all territories in the Indies, several natural histories produced by Jesuits aimed to counter the assertion of European naturalists who maintained that New World’s nature was degraded, and its inhabitants inferior. Juan de Velasco, for example, finished the *Historia del Reino de Quito en la America Meridional*, in 1788, although it was not published until the 1830s. In the first volume, Velasco presented a natural history of Quito, cataloguing local flora and fauna using Quechua terms. He also wrote against European naturalists like Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, Corneille de Pauw, William Robertson, and the Abbe Raynal who conceived of New World’s nature and climate in negative terms.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The Jesuit sketched the hierarchy of all the parishes of the kingdom where the city of Tunja occupied the first place. Ibid. 121.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Cañizares-Esguerra, Jorge. *How to Write the History of the New World: Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2001. 249-253.

Velasco's work refuting the opinion of these naturalists was part of a larger trend among other Jesuits like Francisco Xavier Clavijero, Juan Ignacio Molina, and José Lino Fábrega, writing in exile. As part of the Bourbon reforms and a broader tendency in Europe to curtail the corporate power of religious orders across the Atlantic, the Spanish Crown expelled the Jesuits from America in 1767.<sup>18</sup> Antonello Gerbi argues that, paradoxically, these defenses and counterattacks by exiled Jesuits had the effect of "providing their distant fellow countrymen with a whole battery of national traditions and glories."<sup>19</sup>

After the expulsion of the Jesuits, members of the lay Creole elite, some of them later regarded as founding fathers of independent Latin America, defended New World's nature, from the unfair opinions of European naturalists as well. Leading figures like Manuel de Salas in Chile, José Manuel Dávalos and Hipólito Unanué in Peru, and Francisco Jose de Caldas in New Granada, made arguments regarding the benign influence of the climate in their kingdoms. Creole naturalists believed that the opinions of those who had never traveled to the New World lacked the validity of experimental science and direct observation. By contradicting the opinions of acknowledged European intellectuals, these Creoles made claims to authority, as inhabitants of the land that they studied. The defense of their homeland was a mechanism that awoke their consciousness as inhabitants of America, a separate territory from Spain. At the same time, it evidenced

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid: 234-261.

<sup>19</sup> Gerbi, Antonello. *The Dispute of the New World; the History of a Polemic, 1750-1900*. Rev. and enl. ed. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973. 190-191.

their aspirations to be part of a European lettered elite, generating useful knowledge, and attempting to insert themselves in the network of Western naturalists.

Eighteenth century Jesuits conceived of New World's nature as a resource rich and abundant. They fostered a global commercial vision that placed New Granada at the center, as an agricultural hub. This vision, later expanded by the lay Creole elite, was long in the making, and is better understood within the context of the Bourbon Reforms. The following section explores the reforms and the specific institutional setting that shaped the Creole elite's attitudes and sensibilities toward nature.

#### THE BOURBON REFORMS IN NEW GRANADA

Throughout the colonial period, New Granada was among the less dynamic domains of Spain. The basis of its economic and foreign trade was gold, but on a scale which was not comparable to silver in Mexico and Peru.<sup>20</sup> By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the lettered elite of Spanish America envisioned kingdoms where the sciences and arts were spread throughout the territory. They would serve to encourage a dynamic and prosperous economic development that placed Iberia and its colonies in a preeminent place in the world's commercial and scientific maps. However, the inhabitants of America, particularly those of New Granada, grappled with a reality of

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<sup>20</sup> Jaime Jaramillo Uribe, Adolfo Meisel and Miguel Urrutia. "Continuities and Discontinuities in the Fiscal and Monetary Institutions of New Granada, 1783-1850". In *Transferring Wealth and Power from the Old to the New World. Monetary and Fiscal Institutions in the 17th through the 19th Centuries*, Michael D. Bordo and Roberto Cortés-Conde, eds. (Cambridge, 2001), 414-450.



economic stagnation, in a territory characterized by a broken topography, which limited interactions between provinces.

A key antecedent for the territorial organization of New Granada was the promotion of the Real Audiencia of Santafé to the category of viceroyalty of New Granada, through the Real Cédula of August 20 of 1739. Both New Granada's economic decline and the colonial administration's incapacity to counteract the increasing smuggling activities throughout the Caribbean coast influenced the decision. The mineral riches and abundant fruits of New Granada were falling in foreign hands, to the detriment of the Spanish Crown. In addition, policymakers hoped that creating the viceroyalty would diminish provincial autonomies, in favor of the Bourbon's centralization project, moreover during Carlos III's reign between 1759 and 1788. As J.H. Elliot asserts, in the authoritarian centralized monarchy of Charles III there was no room for the semi-autonomous kingdoms and provinces preeminent during the Habsburg composite monarchy.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, in the case of New Granada the system of *intendencias*, established elsewhere in Spanish America to end with the corruption among *alcaldes*, never became a reality.

The Bourbons' centralization project sought to exercise effective control over natural resources on both sides of the Atlantic. In their view, the Habsburg's composite monarchy impeded the effective exercise of royal authority, and obstructed the development of agriculture, trade, and industry, all prerequisites for national power and prosperity. Thus, a series of fiscal, administrative, educational, and military reforms were

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<sup>21</sup> Elliott, John Huxtable. *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006. 321.

implemented within the empire. In order to determine how to improve the economic situation, Spanish and Creole intellectuals and politicians engaged in research projects that evaluated local conditions. In Spain and later in the colonies, from the 1760s on, government officials and private individuals created the *Sociedades Económicas de amigos del País*, with the aim of promoting agriculture, industry, and commerce.<sup>22</sup> In the colonies, this measure was replicated together with the attempts to survey and document the physical features of the territories and its natural productions inspired in the scientific spirit of the Enlightenment.

Within this framework, New Granada's officials engaged in a series of reforms. Francisco Moreno y Escandón, the fiscal of the *audiencia* of Santafé, presented a plan in 1774 to introduce applied and empirical sciences to the colony. Moreno y Escandón plan promoted experimental methods in natural sciences, and a critical stance toward the scholastic method.<sup>23</sup> The plan established lectures on natural history, chemistry, physics, and mathematics. By then, residents of the viceroyalty also had already begun to study natural law. A new concept started to emerge in the Neogranadian thought, that of the

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<sup>22</sup> On the intellectual and political activities of *consulados* and Economic societies in Spanish America see: Gabriel Paquette. "State-Civil Society Cooperation and Conflict in the Spanish Empire: The Intellectual and Political Activities of the Ultramarine Consulados and Economic Societies, C. 1780–1810." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 39, no. 02 (2007): 263-298. Also, Ma. Cristina Torales Pacheco. *Ilustrados En La Nueva España: Los Socios De La Real Sociedad Bascongada De Amigos Del País*. 1st ed. México, D.F: Universidad Iberoamericana, Departamento de Historia, 2001.

<sup>23</sup> *Historia De Las Ideas Políticas En Colombia: De La Independencia Hasta Nuestros Días*, 1st ed. (Bogotá, Colombia: Taurus, 2008): 39

“social utility of science.” Until then, this idea had been alien to a colonial culture imbued in heavily religious colonial culture.<sup>24</sup>

The promotion of empirical sciences headed by the Spanish crown took place not only at universities, but also in other institutions of learning. The Spaniard José Celestino Mutis led the Botanical Expedition of New Granada between 1783 and 1808. The expedition was part of the reform process that sought to exercise effective control over the rich flora of the colonies.<sup>25</sup> The goal of these Expeditions was to survey the vegetable, animal, and mineral wealth of Spanish domains overseas. The Royal Botanical Expedition of New Granada involved the collection, description, classification, naming and drawing of plants, animals and minerals, as well as making astronomical and geographical observations.<sup>26</sup> The Astronomical Observatory of Santafé –completed in 1803- was also part of the project of turning the kingdom into a key repository of geographical and scientific information, for the advancement of commerce, and the progress of universal knowledge. It was also the first permanent observatory ever built in the Americas.

Unlike other Expeditions in the New World, whose members were mostly Spaniards or foreigners from other parts of Europe, New Granada’s Royal Botanical

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<sup>24</sup> Colombian historian Jaime Jaramillo Uribe regards the introduction of the educational reforms in New Granada as the beginning of positive spirit in New Granada. Jaramillo Uribe, Jaime. *El Pensamiento Colombiano en el siglo XIX*. 2nd ed. Bogotá: Editorial Temis, 1974. 323-332.

<sup>25</sup> Antonio Lafuente claims that the program of scientific expeditions to America promoted by the crown from the 1760s onward were the clearest sign of the dynamic of Enlightenment Spanish science. Antonio Lafuente, “Enlightenment in an Imperial Context: Local Science in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Hispanic World”, in *Osiris*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Series, Vol. 15, *Nature and Empire: Sciences and the Colonial Enterprise*, (2000): 159.

<sup>26</sup> Florentino Vezga, *La expedición botánica*, Bogotá, Biblioteca Aldeana de Colombia, Editorial Minerva, 1936, p. 32.

Expedition involved the participation of many members of the Creole elite. The expedition lasted over 25 years –until 1816- and was the longest of such enterprises in Spanish America.<sup>27</sup> Antonio Lafuente argues that by the end of the eighteenth century, a new form of patriotism began to take shape among the colonial elite, giving priority to the useful dimensions of knowledge.<sup>28</sup> Within this tradition, Daniela Bleichmar asserts that utility and visuality served symbolic and concrete purposes, and the botanical illustrations –more than six thousand- produced by Mutis’ expedition, resulted in the development of a distinctive “American style” created in response to the perceived shortcoming of European natural history imagery.<sup>29</sup>

Lafuente also states that the implementation of the ambitious reform program of the Bourbons miscalculated the consequences, both in New Spain and New Granada. The immediate outcome, claims Lafuente, was a large-scale politicization of science, together with the politicization of the scientists themselves: “the scientists were soon to discover that such a bond with the Bourbon dynasty limited their potential for institutional action.”<sup>30</sup> However, this causal understanding of “enlightenment reform” and independence, represented by the activities of Creole scientists, obscures in some cases the complexity and depth of Creole identity, and the long-term consequences of the

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<sup>27</sup> Among the expeditions supported by the Spanish crown during the second half of the eighteenth century, the Botanical Expedition of New Granada was by far the longest in duration. Other eighteenth century expeditions included: Peter Löfling to the Orinoco River (1754-56); Pavón, Dumbey, and Ruiz to the viceroyalty of Peru (1777-1788); Sessé and Mociño to New Spain (1787-1803); and, Malaspina to the American coasts, South American Pacific, and New Zealand, and Australia, (1788-1794), among others.

<sup>28</sup> Op. Cit. Lafuente: 169.

<sup>29</sup> Daniela Bleichmar, “A Visible and Useful Empire. Visual Culture and Colonial Natural History in the Eighteenth-Century Spanish World”, *Science in the Spanish and Portuguese Empires, 1500-1800*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2009. 293.

<sup>30</sup> Op.cit. 159.

reforms.<sup>31</sup> The category of “scientists” is overly monolithic and anachronistic, as it fails to incorporate the multi-stranded social identity of naturalists, lawyers, landowners, tradesmen, militiamen, etc., of those who participated in the Bourbon reformation project and later in the independence processes. Anthony MacFarlane argues that the significance of the Botanical Expedition lie in its cultural and political repercussions as it lead creoles to reformulate their expectations of the Bourbon dynasty.<sup>32</sup> In this sense, the statement that that Creole scientists’ fostered the idea of independence from Spain has different shades and needs to be understood in a wider context where commercial and economic interests played a key role.

As the paper will show later, the first years of the so-called independence process was more a struggle to face the institutional crisis of the crown, than a deliberate attempt to separate from Spain. A number of contingencies—starting with Ferdinand VII overthrown- played a role between 1810 and 1816, when Creoles attempted to safeguard the Kings domains from the French threat. Nonetheless, the crisis allowed the Creoles to channel a series of discontents and demands, which Spanish Americans, had accumulated over the years toward Spanish officials, rooted in part on the strains on America’s population that the rationalization of the fiscal system through taxes and monopolies caused.<sup>33</sup> However, scientific expeditions across the Spanish Atlantic domains would create profound changes. A case in point in New Granada was the configuration of a

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<sup>31</sup> Paquette, Gabriel. *Enlightened Reform in Southern Europe and Its Atlantic Colonies, C. 1750-1830. Empires and the Making of the Modern World, 1650–2000*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2010.

<sup>32</sup> McFarlane, Anthony. *Colombia Before Independence: Economy, Society, and Politics Under Bourbon Rule*. New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

<sup>33</sup> Elliot, *Empires of the Atlantic World*. 355.

Creole lettered elite socialized in the importance of natural knowledge, and formed within the legacy of Mutis's expedition, and the Bourbon reforms.

Between 1808 and 1812, a member of the Botanical Expedition, Francisco Jose de Caldas, published the journal titled *Semanario del Nuevo Reino de Granada* in Santafé de Bogotá.<sup>34</sup> Creoles from throughout the kingdom published papers on geography, climate, astronomy, agriculture, mining, education, trade and zoology in the new journal. The works of Creole naturalists meant to raise awareness of the natural resource potential for developing the kingdom. As Caldas asserted about the role of Creole scientists, “we want our astronomical works to improve our geography, our roads, and our commerce.”<sup>35</sup> Caldas invoked nature and its utility for the development of the country. By underlying the role of natural knowledge in the politics of New Granada, the spirit of the reforms distinguished between two types of knowledges. First, the theoretical-speculative, and second a utilitarian-pragmatic, that for the reformers adequately responded to the real needs of the *patria*.<sup>36</sup>

Exploring the territory through the lens of natural history, geography and astronomy became the objective of a group of Creoles that engaged in the enterprise of measuring, describing, systematizing, and representing nature. With the firm utilitarian objective of turning the kingdom into a profitable commercial hub, Creole scientists proposed ways to

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<sup>34</sup> A detailed and sharp analysis of the *Semanario* is found on Mauricio Nieto's work. Nieto insists in the inextricable relationship between knowledge and power and his central aim is to demonstrate that scientific practices are political practices. See Nieto Olarte, Mauricio. *Orden Natural y Orden Social: Ciencia y Política en el Semanario del Nuevo Reyno de Granada*. Bogotá D.C: Universidad de los Andes, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales-CESO, Departamento de Historia, 2009.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.: 12-13.

<sup>36</sup> In Spain this pragmatic spirit was fomented by figures as Pedro Rodríguez de Campomanes, first minister of economics of Carlos III, and José Moñino y Redondo.

make the kingdom a viable source of wealth for the Spanish nation. Through the pages of the *Semanario*, the lettered elite positioned themselves as the leaders of a social project, as the “wise hand” responsible for material wealth and prosperity, the basis of public happiness.<sup>37</sup>

However, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Bourbon policies to improve control over the empire had failed in New Granada. Contraband continued to develop, and legal commerce and internal production had not improved. By then, New Granada was not able to sustain itself financially. The attempts to debilitate provincial autonomies characteristic of the Habsburg’s corporate society, and create a strong centralized state did not succeed as well. Elliot asserts that, “the Creole elites of the kingdoms of Peru and New Spain, of Quito and New Granada naturally clung to the historic privileges and traditions of the lands that had become their *patrias*.”<sup>38</sup> Along with the consolidation of local elites in New Granada, geographic conditions exercised a great influence in the configuration of the territory as a habitat divided in relatively isolated zones.<sup>39</sup> The Creole learned elite faced Spain’s crisis with an awareness of the great challenges that New Granada posed in terms of trade, communication between provinces, and political organization.

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<sup>37</sup> Nieto, *Orden Natural y Orden Social*, 131.

<sup>38</sup> Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World*. 320.

<sup>39</sup> Múnera, 40.

## THE EVE OF INDEPENDENCE

1808 marked the beginning of new political processes in Spanish America. New rhetorics, concepts, political languages, and ideas had started to break through *old regime* features. In the long-durée, the narratives and sensibilities towards nature crafted by Jesuit natural histories had left an impact on a lay Creole aristocracy, and were refurbished in the framework of the Bourbon monarchy's Enlightenment-inspired educational, administrative and fiscal reforms. However, Creole natural knowledge was shared in a public sphere through newspapers, literary circles, and correspondence. Local urban identities in Spanish America had long been based on religious discourse concerning the cult of saints, relics, and clerical learning, and the geopolitics of evangelization. After the expulsion of the Jesuits 1767, and in the wake of independence, local identities were linked to urban centers, and in the aspiration of *villas* to become the urban centers of their own provinces.<sup>40</sup>

During the independence process, the Creole patriots appropriated natural and geographic data in order to vindicate the economic agricultural potentiality of their own provincial *patrias*, overshadowing a centralized Spanish economic project. While they maintained loyalty to the King, at least between 1810 and 1816, New Granada's Creoles were more than imperial agents. They relied upon their Spanish identity to differentiate

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<sup>40</sup> In her study of the role of rural nuclear settlements in New Granada, Martha Herrera shows that by the end of the eighteenth century 94% of Spanish America nuclear settlements were classified as *pueblos*, and only around 6% were *villas* or *ciudades*. Herrera Ángel, Martha. *Ordenar Para Controlar: Ordenamiento Espacial y Control Político en las Llanuras del Caribe y en los Andes Centrales Neogranadinos, Siglo XVIII*. Bogotá, Colombia: Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia, 2002. 17-22.



themselves from the majority of the population, which was composed by peoples of mixed race, and to reaffirm their natural status as members of an enlightened elite.<sup>41</sup>

When the monarchic crisis triggered New Granada's *juntas* movement in 1810, natural knowledge began, for the first time, to have a real application in politics. No other place in Spanish America witnessed such an outburst of *juntas*. In the debates that ensued during and after the monarchic crisis, nature was frequently invoked by intellectuals and politicians and used as argument. One of the greatest challenges for politicians and intellectuals in nineteenth century independent Latin America was to make a new republic imaginable and desirable in a fragmented and multiethnic society with vast territory with blurred borders.<sup>42</sup>

This new group of Creoles, inspired in the new disciplines of Enlightenment learning, invented pragmatic and secular approaches to nature, where the welfare of the kingdom was placed in the heart of localisms, and in their aspirations as governors of their own provincial *patrias*. In 1808, when Fernando VII was overthrown, the director of the Botanical Expedition, Jose Celestino Mutis, died in Santafé. The Creole elite of New

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<sup>41</sup> From the perspective of the New Cultural History "Nueva Historia Cultural," Renán Silva has focused his work in the process of development of this new social group, in this case "the Enlighteners." He studies the new imaginary forms of representation built by the Enlighteners around such problem as wealth creation, labor, nature and knowledge. These new forms of representation facilitated the coalescence of an intellectual community around a common project. See Siva, Renán, *Los ilustrados de Nueva Granada, 1760-1808: genealogía de una comunidad de interpretación*. Medellín, Banco de la República, Fondo Editorial Universidad EAFIT, 2002. See also Nieto, Mauricio, Castaño, Paola y Ojeda, Diana, "Política, ciencia y geografía en el Semanario del Nuevo Reyno de Granada," en *Revista Nómadas*, No. 22, Bogotá, Instituto de Estudios Sociales Contemporáneos, Universidad Central, abril 2005: 114-124; y Nieto, Mauricio, Castaño, Paola y Ojeda, Diana, "El influjo del clima sobre los seres organizados y la retórica ilustrada en el Semanario del Nuevo Reyno de Granada", en *Revista Historia Crítica*, No. 30, Bogotá, Departamento de Historia, Universidad de los Andes, julio-diciembre de 2005: 91-114.

<sup>42</sup> Uribe de H., María Teresa. *Las Palabras De La Guerra: Metáforas, Narraciones y Lenguajes Políticos: Un Estudio Sobre Las Memorias De las guerras Civiles En Colombia*. 1st ed. Medellín: Carreta Editores, 2006.

Granada was left in charge of continuing the enterprise. However, as Spain lost its monarch, Creole figures engaged with activities related to governing in place of the king. The same elite that participated in the Botanical Expedition, and other similar research projects also became involved in the *juntas* movement. During this process, the Creoles of Santafé, willing to centralize the provincial *juntas* movement in the capital of the viceroyalty, faced the opposition from other provinces. Neogranadians deployed nature in the debate over the preeminence of Santafé as capital when the monarchic crisis exploded. Next section explores this polemic.

#### PROVINCIAL HIERARCHIES: PLACING SANTAFÉ IN THE CENTER

During the crisis of the Spanish empire, colonial institutions began to fall apart. Local and provincial *juntas*, that proclaimed themselves as sovereign, replaced the *consejos*, *capitanías* and *audiencias*. Given the vacuum of power, in 1809, the *Real Consejo de Regencia* called an election in Spain. For the first time, deputies of America experienced the responsibility of representing their own native provinces. In New Granada, the heads of the provinces of Santa Fe, Cali, Villa del Socorro, Cartagena, Popayan, Pamplona, Antioquia, Panama, Quito, Cuenca, and Venezuela, started debating and exposing their projects for recomposing the monarchy in the Indies, or creating autonomous republics based on the sovereignty of the people. In addition, as Daniel Gutiérrez asserts, between 1810 and 1816, different territories of New Granada got

involved in an interprovincial “constitutive diplomacy” to reconstruct the lost unity, guarantee internal peace and defend the territories against foreign attacks.<sup>43</sup>

However, several members of the Creole elite expressed their discontent with the number of representatives from America allowed to be part of the *Junta Central Española*. The Creole Camilo Torres Tenorio, wrote in 1809 the famous *Memorial de Agravios*, as the official answer from the Cabildo de Santafé to the Spanish *Junta*. In this text, Torres disapproved of what he saw as a ludicrous number of Spanish Americans who were allowed to represent Spanish dominions overseas in the Spanish *Junta*. The *Memorial* was a list of Neogranadians’ complaints toward Spanish policies. In it, the Creoles of Santafé demanded equal political rights to Creoles and Spaniards. A few months later, in July 20 of 1810, the members of the Cabildo of Santafé created the *Junta Suprema of Santafé*, ignoring the *Consejo de Regencia*, and declaring the New Granada as independent federal state, keeping loyal to the King, and ascribing to a constitutional monarchy.

Notwithstanding, some provinces expressed an “anti-Spanish” sentiment, whereas others remained loyal to Spain. Camilo Torres and the members of Santafé’s *Junta* longed for a government based on justice and equality. Spain acknowledged the importance of American resources for the empire. Torres warned, however, that the “hideous government’s administration”, thwarted the possibility of attaining happiness and prosperity.<sup>44</sup> Torres also emphasized that the “the precarious wealth of metal is not what caused America to be highly esteemed in Europe”. Instead, he thought, the fertile soil,

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<sup>43</sup> Daniel Gutiérrez, *Un Nuevo Reino*: 45.

<sup>44</sup> Camilo Torres, *Memorial de Agravios*. 9.

with inexhaustible natural productions, along with the weather, were among the incontestable advantages that made America “the barn, the reservoir of all Europe.”<sup>45</sup>

Torres argued that the natural riches of the New Granada endowed him with the right to demand a greater participation of Americans in government, and to define their own destiny.<sup>46</sup> Torres’s position also suggests a shift in the Creole imagination, away from a solely extractive economy based on mining, and compromised with inserting New Granada in global trade as agricultural exporter.

Like Torres, many other Americans regretted the underdevelopment of the colonies and blamed Spain for centuries of obscurity. Creoles as Caldas, and Torres, argued that achievement in science and the arts were crucial for the happiness and prosperity of the new polities. However, they complained that New Granada lagged behind the rest of the world in these fields. This was evident during the first phase of revolution, as the study of geography faced the obstacle of the inexistence of maps with clear borderlines between provinces. Nevertheless, the political geography of the period had enormous significance, as the accumulated knowledge about the territory had, for the first time in 1810, a real application in politics.<sup>47</sup>

The Creole patriots felt that Spanish politicians were leaving them outside a project of political representation where they could reaffirm the importance of New Granada, and their importance as part of Spain. They referred constantly to their natural bounties of New Granada to argue against what they considered an unfair treatment from

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 10.

<sup>46</sup> Jaramillo Uribe, Jaime. *El Pensamiento Colombiano en el siglo XIX*. 110.

<sup>47</sup> Daniel Gutiérrez, *Un Nuevo Reino*: 19.

Spanish officers. They also blamed the Spanish despotic government from impeding the progress of human knowledge. Regarding this, Torres stated: “print, the vehicle of the lights, and the safest way to spread them, has been more severely forbidden in America, than in any other place.”<sup>48</sup> The Creole elite blamed Spain for their shameful ignorance of the wealth of the country. In addition, a deep-rooted tradition of provincial autonomies in a territory characterized by a broken topography and poor communication networks permeated elite conceptions of New Granada’s nature.

The Franciscan priest Juan Eloy Valenzuela, former director of the Botanical Expedition and disciple of Jose Celestino Mutis, warned in his early nineteenth century writings that the people of Santander lacked the necessary means to extract wealth from nature. However, rather than aggrandizing the natural bounty of Bucaramanga and surroundings, Valenzuela was skeptical of the possibilities of progress that the nature offered in that region. His descriptions of the mountains nearby Bucaramanga, as swampy and not suited for prosperity, and lacking the hand of civilization, attests to his critical stance toward the possibilities that these lands offered for economic prosperity. The priest described the hinterlands of Bucaramanga, despising the fact that mountains and eternal jungles surrounded its paths, and the enormous distance between these lands and the coast.

In an 1802 letter informing the governor of Girón, Francisco Vallejo, about a project to reduce the rural counties into urban towns, Valenzuela asserted that even though it was true that there were unpopulated lands close by, they were mountainous,

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 11.

frequently flooded, hot and ill. Valenzuela warned that, despite the temperate climate, the lands were “useless, steep and without water”. He also complained of their inconvenient geographical location. As he acknowledged, the lands were in some cases suited for agriculture but without the precise aids, the lights, and the stimulus of commerce, the inhabitants of Girón would be constrained to live in economic parsimony.<sup>49</sup> The critiques raised by Valenzuela originated from the harmful consequences that unregulated mining activity had caused over this town of the province of Pamplona. For this reason, Valenzuela believed that the district of Girón did not deserve to be raised to the category of urban town. His vision emerged out of the difficulties of administering these territories, as this land was difficult to master.

In 1809, a member of the *Real Audiencia of Santafé*, Joaquín Camacho, published a “Territorial Relation of the Province of Pamplona”, in the *Semanario del Nuevo Reino de Granada*, explaining the consequences of mining activity. Camacho explained the consequences of mining over the agricultural activity of Girón. The extraction of gold, which buried vegetable soil, left a pile of rocks on the surface, made the terrain useless, and caused landslides in riverbanks.<sup>50</sup> Unlike Valenzuela, Camacho, who apparently had better information, thought that Girón had the potential to connect with foreign trade if the navigation through the Sogamoso or the Cañaverales Rivers was encouraged. The

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<sup>49</sup> *Informe sobre el proyecto de reducción de los caseríos rurales a poblaciones urbanas*, Bucaramanga, 30 de agosto de 1802 En Valenzuela, Eloy. *Juan Eloy Valenzuela Y Mantilla: Escritos (1786-1834)*. 1st ed. Bucaramanga, Colombia: Universidad Industrial de Santander, 2006. 90-91.

<sup>50</sup> Joaquín Camacho, “Relacion Territorial de la Provincia de Pamplona”, in Caldas y Tenorio, Francisco José de. *Semanario Del Nuevo Reino De Granada*. [Bogotá: Impreso en la Editorial Minerva, s. a, 1942. 9-10.

isolation and bad communication, unfortunately, as Valenzuela also asserted, impeded the transport of commodities to other provinces, and to the coasts.

Overall, Valenzuela's denunciation emphasized the idea that nature was not worthwhile if the arts, agriculture, and communications were not cultivated to facilitate trade and prosperity. Critiques, like Valenzuela's, blamed nature itself for this situation, not necessarily the Spanish administration. However, he also suggests that much work had to be put towards realizing Girón's economic potential, and used nature to build arguments to affect political decisions regarding territorial organization. For Valenzuela, as for Camacho, Torres, and Caldas, integration and circulation were the main obstacles to overcome. New Granada was particularly underdeveloped, and these intellectuals devoted their time to investigate how to surmount these difficulties. As in Valenzuela and Camacho's assessment of the province of Pamplona, the concerns for development of New Granada frequently had a locally based scope.

Between 1808 and 1816, the Creole elite did not consolidate a national political identity. The political imagination of early republican Neogranadians was rooted in provincial identities, and linked to urban, rather than religious, centers, as it was for most part of the colonial period.<sup>51</sup> Thus, the *juntista* movement did not establish nations, but instead deepened regionally based polities and territorial imaginaries. The outcome was the reaffirmation of local and provincial identities that had a colonial antecedent, which, after the debacle of Spanish Monarchy expressed themselves in power conflicts. In addition, as Francois Xavier Guerra asserts, in the main cities, the proliferation of

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<sup>51</sup> Chiaramonte, José Carlos. *Ciudades, Provincias, Estados: Orígenes De La Nación Argentina, 1800-1846*. 1st ed. Argentina: Compañía Editora Espasa Calpe Argentina/Ariel, 1997. 196.

constitutions became the best mechanism to self-legitimize these new polities.<sup>52</sup> The organization of local juntas resulted in a number of constitutional trials in which conflicts of political geography revealed tensions between two ways of imagining new territorialities: one, as federal states, and two, as dependent on a central government.

In August of 1809, when the members of the *Audiencia de Quito* created a *junta* declaring autonomy from Spanish and keeping loyal to Fernando VII, it did not take long for Creole patriots to turn the initiative into an attempt to attain complete independence from Spain. The viceroys of Lima and Santafé sent their armies promptly, and the independence effort was shot down violently. The members of the junta of Santafé published a “Patriotic Exhortation”, condemning the violent incident, and started the publication of the newspaper *Diario Político de Santafé*. In the prospectus, the editors, Joaquin Camacho and Francisco Jose de Caldas, explained that the periodical would contain the resolutions, decrees, and objectives of the *Junta Suprema of Santafé* and the provinces’ operations, manifests, and proclamations.<sup>53</sup> They added:

We who conquered independence on July 20<sup>th</sup> of 1810, (...) us who formed a *junta* to deposit authority, and us who fluctuate in an ocean of unconnected ideas, without experience, and almost without principles, we need a *Diario Político* in which our Franklins and our Washingtons spill the lights and fix our inconstancy and uncertainty.<sup>54</sup>

Caldas and Camacho compiled the news related to autonomous outbursts in other provinces, and the political outcomes of independent rule, with the aim of going down in

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<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Chiamonte, 191. Look for original citation.

<sup>53</sup> Baxo este aspecto el *Diario Político* puede mirarse como los anales de nuestra libertad. En efecto, nosotros vamos a insertar todos los monumentos de nuestras operaciones políticas, y a pasar a la posteridad la noticia de nuestras acciones. (...) Escribiremos en el seno de un pueblo libre, escribiremos con libertad.

<sup>54</sup> *Diario Político de Santafé*, Agosto 27 de 1810, Prospecto. 1.



history for their actions. They were convinced that the only way to spread knowledge, educate people, and secure freedom and independence, was through the print press. By alluding to the founding fathers of the United States, the editors convened New Granada's men of Enlightenment, to take the reins of the path to freedom. They referred to the newspaper as the "annals of our freedom."<sup>55</sup>

However, although Santafé proclaimed freedom and independence, they nevertheless remained loyal to the king. In the prospectus, they praised the established government, by claiming autonomy, and pointing out that commerce, agriculture, arts, prosperity, and peace would be the fruits of revolution. Finally, they added, "if some day Fernando VII come to our homes, let him find happy and virtuous peoples, worthy of him."<sup>56</sup> Their stance suggests a favorable and sustained loyalty to the monarchical order, and a distancing from Spanish officials that had arrived in bigger numbers to occupy the highest ranks in colonial posts since the Bourbon Reforms.<sup>57</sup> In the absence of the king, Camacho and Caldas asserted that bringing happiness and prosperity to the kingdom was the task of Spanish Americans.

The Creole patriots of Santafé, as well, as those on other regions, proposed projects to organize an autonomous polity. The newspaper sought to gain the support of the public opinion, and convince the provincial leaders to face the crisis of the empire uniting forces. One of the fundamental problems of the transition from the colonial to the republican regime was yielding provincial sovereignties. Provincial autonomies had been

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<sup>55</sup> They added also: "Literatos sabios, medita, escribid: Si calláis en estos conflictos sois traidores a la Patria. (...)La patria os abre los brazos, ella os pide la sostengáis con vuestras luces, y con vuestros escritos." Ibid. 1.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>57</sup> König, Hans-Joachim. *En El Camino Hacia La Nación*, 58.

in conflict since the late colonial period. At the beginning of emancipation, these divergences became stronger with the challenges posed by the absence of the king. The dispute between Cartagena and Santafé was an old one, however, and during the early nineteenth century, new arguments informed this long-lasting polemic.

Since the 1770s, Cartagena had expanded around its military role in the defense of the Spanish Empire, and in its central position in the legal trade of New Granada.<sup>58</sup> The elite of Cartagena was certain that its geographic position would allow this city to become the capital of the Viceroyalty, and later the republic. The tradesmen of Cartagena believed in their capacity to intervene in the progress of the province, what resulted in conflictual relations with mercantile houses in Cadiz, and with vice royal authorities and elites of Santafé.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, intense smuggling had constantly hindered the Bourbons' attempt to turn Cartagena into a key commercial port of the Atlantic. On the eve of independence, the colonial administration proved weak in controlling New Granada's Caribbean region, and in securing it from illegal trade.

During the eighteenth century, Santafé consolidated as the hinterland's leading city in New Granada. As Anthony MacFarlane argues, this was due to three factors: "its role as a center for government, its position in a fertile and populous area, and its function as the principal point for distributing imports brought from Cartagena."<sup>60</sup> By early nineteenth century, the elites of Santafé added another layer to the commercial-related disputes with

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<sup>58</sup> Helg, Aline. *Liberty & Equality in Caribbean Colombia, 1770-1835*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004. 80-81.

<sup>59</sup> Their economic interests led then to create the Consulado de Comercio de Cartagena in 1795 which was criticized sharply by the elite of Santafé. Múnera. *El fracaso de la nación*, 111.

<sup>60</sup> McFarlane, Anthony. *Colombia Before Independence: Economy, Society, and Politics Under Bourbon Rule*. New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1993. 52.

Cartagena. Emphasizing scientific arguments, they asserted the natural supremacy of the capital, legitimating the preeminence of Andean geographies versus coastal ones. In the *Influence of Climate Over Organized Beings*, Caldas assessed New Granada geographical spaces from the standpoint of climate theories. By analyzing the influence of climate over organized beings, Caldas sketched a human geography that split the kingdom into two main territories: The Andes, inhabited by civilized and superior races; and the coasts, jungles, and plains, inhabited by uncivilized and inferior races.<sup>61</sup>

The elite of Cartagena stressed their privileged geographic position in order to counteract their Andean opponents. They sought independence from the other provinces, arguing that Cartagena could easily become a world commercial port, leading the Caribbean toward modern progress. The junta of Cartagena proposed the creation of a federal government with a capital in Medellín. The elite of Santafé used the same geographic argument. They sought to place the capital city as the center of the prosperity of the kingdom, in an attempt to weaken the regional autonomy of the Caribbean.<sup>62</sup> The advocated a centralist government with Santafé as the capital.<sup>63</sup>

The learned elite of Santafé thought that the city should maintain its position as capital city after independence. The possibilities of creating a new polity with Santafé in

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<sup>61</sup> Caldas understood by climate, not only the degree of hot and cold, but also the electric charge, the amount of oxygen, atmospheric pressure, abundance of rivers, lakes, the disposition of mountains, jungles, grasses, degree of population, winds, rains, thunders, humidity, etc. Francisco Jose de Caldas, *El influjo del clima sobre los seres organizados*, 138.

<sup>62</sup> Alfonso Múnera, *Fronteras imaginadas. La construcción de las razas y de la geografía en el siglo XIX*, Bogotá Planeta, 2005, 21.

<sup>63</sup> For a detailed account on the independence process of New Granada including an analysis of the Spanish side of the story of why and how Spain lost New Granada see: Earle, Rebecca. *Spain and the Independence of Colombia 1810-1825*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000.

the core, however, were constantly hindered. By then, the disproportion in size and population between Santafé and other important cities as Quito, Cartagena, and Popayan was not notable. For the leading figures of those cities, there was no reason to accept the natural preeminence of Santafé, and the monarchic crisis exacerbated existing regional tensions.<sup>64</sup> The representatives of the different provinces were loath to acknowledge the primacy of the current capital in the negotiation of the terms of independent rule, and these difficulties are illustrated below.

The elite of Santafé convened the deputies of the different provinces to a general congress to take place in late 1810 in order to deliberate on the best way to govern the nation. However, governors of most provinces rejected this initiative, only six of the fifteen provinces came to the assembly. The main reason was the distrust of most provinces towards Santafé. For example, the governor of Popayan loyal to Fernando VII, criticized sharply what he called the *juntas* movement for being a “usurpation of the throne,” first by the Creole patriots of Quito, and then by those of Santafé.<sup>65</sup>

In the light of the fact that various provinces were reluctant to participate in the assembly to be held in Bogotá, the editors of the newspaper considered that it would be convenient to publish a collection of letters of an anonymous traveler identified as “L.R”, dated from 1803. These letters praised Santafé and described the advantages of the capital. They were published throughout five numbers of the *Diario Político*;

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<sup>64</sup> Gutierrez, *Un Nuevo Reino*, 50.

<sup>65</sup> *Diario Político de Santafé*, número XXXVI, Diciembre 28 de 1810.

presumably, the author was the French physician Luis Rieux, a foreign supporter of Latin American independences.<sup>66</sup>

In the first letter published on October 6 of 1810, only a few months after the declaration of independence of Santafé, the traveler tried to raise awareness of the beauty of the plains of the capital city. Arriving to Santafé, asserts de traveler, was a relief after journeying through the thickets of the Magdalena River and the swampy paths of Honda and Facatativá. He described the landscape, and with it, the orderly landscape of houses, flocks, herds of horses, cows and sheep. Then he measured the length of the esplanade where the city is situated, pointing out how the Bogotá River crosses the plain and falls off the cliffs at Tequendama, “where it forms the tallest and most beautiful cascade of the world.”<sup>67</sup>

The fecundity of these fields is marvelous, asserted L.R, indicating that Europeans only missed a few things from their homeland when they traveled across Santafé’s savannahs. The plants of the temperate zones, like wheat, cabbages, lettuces, thistles, artichokes, and other vegetables, including apples, peaches, cherries, and plums, could grow perfectly well there. After a long and bothersome journey, where the only plants adorning the countryside were those from the tropics, L.G felt pleased to arrive finally in Santafé.

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<sup>66</sup> Pedro Ibáñez, *Crónicas de Bogotá*. “El enigma de las iniciales que autorizan estas opiniones sobre formaciones geológicas, que acogió Caldas en el Diario Político, casi lo ha arrancado del dominio de la hipótesis el publicista don Luis Orjuela, anunciando la fundada pretensión de que ellas corresponden al nombre del médico francés Luis Rieux, quien para ese tiempo ya había vuelto a Bogotá, después de un forzado viaje a España a causa de sus complicaciones en el proceso de Nariño, en 1794.” 30 .

<sup>67</sup> Diario Político de Santafé. Agosto 27 de 1810. num. XVI. 63

In his second letter, published on October 19 of 1810, L.R continued to praise Santafé by describing its weather. The uniformity of Santafé's weather was beneficial for the learned elite, he argued. Their capacities were not affected by the excessive heat or cold, allowing them to remain in constant activity during the year. "If the sciences were to emigrate to America, they will certainly establish its empire here", the traveler claimed. He acknowledged the capacities of the learned elite of Santafé to become the standard-bearers of universal sciences.<sup>68</sup> In the last letter, he dedicates a long description of the mineral bounties of Zipaquirá. Finally, he warned that Americans resources yet to be untapped, would flourish the day that Neogranadians realize that their bounties are the key to progress, breaking the dependent relationship with despotic Spain.<sup>69</sup>

The intention of Caldas and Camacho by including these descriptions of Santafé was to contribute to the ongoing controversy among different provinces of the kingdom on the convenience of having Santafé as center of the unified republic. By presenting arguments that placed the capital of the viceroyalty closer to Europe, and thus to civilization, the authors stressed geographical hierarchy, subtly alluding to arguments of Andean supremacy in the voice of an anonymous European authority. The political process by which the Creole elite attempted to form a union of provinces having Santafé in the center was certainly affected by the spatial structures of New Granada. Its broken topography made communication between provinces extremely difficult. It took longer to travel from Cartagena to Santafé, than from Cartagena to Cadiz in Spain. The reproduction of L.R's letters also attests to the belief that the learned elites of the capital

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<sup>68</sup> Diario Político de Santafé, October 19, 1810, num. XVII, 67.

<sup>69</sup> Diario Político de Santafé, num. XXI, 67.

city held the privilege of inhabiting the one place in the kingdom where the lights of knowledge had spread successfully. Santafé was thus the reservoir of educated people of the kingdom that reclaimed for them the authority to direct the polity's destiny in scientific, political, and economic matters. They present the capital city as a space designed to rule the whole kingdom by urbanites: magistrates, legislators, and scientific experts.

For the Creoles of Santafé, what made the city ideally suited for a capital city was its familiarity with Europe. Its temperate weather contrasted with the tropical extremes of Cartagena. Unlike other places in the Caribbean, and New Spain, New Granada did not develop an extensive plantation economy. Contrasting with the Jeffersonian trade embargo, between 1807 and 1809 – when the Congress imposed a nearly complete block on international commerce in the United States– Santafé's elite aspired to supply the world with exports. Nonetheless, the capital and its surroundings, as depicted by the lettered elite, appealed to aspirations of autarky. Due to the irregular contact between population clusters throughout the Andes, and the microclimates at different altitudes, there was the possibility of self-sufficiency.

In the same issue where the first letter of the traveler L.G. was published, the Creole ideologist of independence Frutos Joaquín Gutiérrez expressed his frustration with the atomization of provincial interests that impeded unifying the general will of the nation in Santafé. He claimed:

I call homeland (*Patria*) not the place where I was born, neither the department nor the province where I belong. (...) The son of Cartagena, El Socorro, Pamplona, and maybe that of Popayan, has not looked at

the limits of the Kingdom of New Granada, as limits of his own homeland. Instead, it has tightened his glance to the province.<sup>70</sup>

Afterwards, Gutierrez asserted that Santafé took on its shoulders the cause of the whole kingdom, and worked to bind up all its parts and form a robust body with an energetic spirit. Furthermore, as the provinces did not send their representatives to Santafé, they also ignored a call to “spread schools of sciences and geography to impart the necessary lights to every town.”<sup>71</sup> He argued that the wise elites of Santafé proposed a system to build an honorable code for the new nation, but it had caused the distrust and envy of some provinces. The aim of unifying the *juntas* movement in the capital, responded according to Gutierrez, to a necessity to bring all the parts of the kingdom under the umbrella of Enlightenment as a condition to achieve freedom.

As his frustration grew deeper, Gutierrez claimed that Santafé should look at itself as independent from the projects of the other provinces.<sup>72</sup> He continued by avowing the prerogatives of the city to be a capital. Geographically, Santafé is centrally located, contends Gutierrez, and is endowed with benign temperatures, embellished by the fertility of the soil, and sufficiently inhabited. Thus, he concluded, “Santafé doesn’t need the other provinces.”<sup>73</sup> Gutierrez’s depicted Santafé as the center of Enlightenment in the kingdom, suggesting that only by gathering around the capital city, will the other provinces be able to head in the right direction to achieve freedom and prosperity. The incapacity of some provinces to assume their own representation and governance was

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<sup>70</sup> Diario Político de Santafé, 13 de octubre de 1810, numero XVI. 5-7.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 6.



reflected in complaints about the lack of enough enlightened peoples, knowledge, and resources to assume this task.

The independence leader Antonio Nariño published in his newspaper, *La Bagatela*, an article presenting a judgment about the government of New Granada in 1812. He contended:

This revolution appears to be more a dispute over lands, than a real political transformation to recover freedom. Daily, there are more papers in New Granada about the boundaries of the provinces, than there were in the old *audiencias* about the limits of the *haciendas*.<sup>74</sup>

Nariño criticized sharply the preeminence of the economic interests of the Creole elite over the general force that should drive emancipation: a return to lost freedom. The same criticism of the atomization of provincial interest in detriment of a national project is apparent in Antonio Nariño's writings. He was an advocate of a centralized political system, so for him, the provincial fragmentation was jeopardizing the achievement of freedom. Nariño aimed to gather deputies from all the provinces of New Granada to discuss the government to be established in a congress he would preside over. One of the central questions addressed by the provincial deputies should be, asserted Nariño, how to turn poor provinces into sovereign states. When the day comes, claimed Nariño, the general will of the representatives of each province should be for the construction of independent Sovereign States, not only from Spain, but also from other European powers.

When the second congress met, a deputy expressed the frustration of the uselessness of the Sovereign decree, as there was a gap between what the law established and reality. In real life, the provinces fell short, lacking in income, tribunals, militia, schools, and

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<sup>74</sup> *La Bagatela*, April 12 of 1812.

universities. Moreover, they complained about the lack of people to educate or to harvest crops. Nariño asserted that a new decree would allow every province, now turned into sovereign states, to increase their number of judges, magistrates, soldiers, and philosophers. To make sure that the necessities of each province were met, he assured that he would demand from coastal, warm weather provinces the production of plantain and sugar cane, and from highland, cold weather ones the production of wheat, potatoes, and artichokes. By alluding to the great variety of products in different altitudes, Nariño fostered the possibility of integrating the provinces through commerce. Regarding the possibilities of achieving independence, Nariño thought that having the wheat, the plantains or the legislators was not as important as having the titles that endowed Americans to possess and exploit the land. In Nariño's thought, the possibilities of Neogranadians to exploit their lands freely will be achieved when those lands belonged to the Americans, and when the necessary, men and resources to sustain sovereignty were available. Establishing independent rule from Spain, however, took a lot more than the will of the provinces to achieve freedom.

#### THE SHIFT TO REPUBLICAN CONSENSUS

In 1814, King Ferdinand VII regained his throne, and the military reconquest of the recently declared independent territories of America began. Spain regained formal control of her overseas domains by 1815. The campaign led by general Pablo Morillo established a 'terror regime' to hold back independence. This enterprise caused the execution, by firing squad and hanging, of a substantial number of patriot leaders,

informants and collaborators of the emancipation process. However, the liberation campaign soon started, was undertaken by Simón Bolívar. In the context of the independence wars, a congress met in the city of Angostura in 1819, while the liberation army entered triumphally into the city of Santafé, soon to be renamed Bogotá. Another congress met in 1821 in the city of Cucuta to define the Fundamental Law of a new polity called Colombia, including current Venezuela, Ecuador, Panamá, and Colombia.

There was a shift from unanimous monarchism in 1808 to a republican consensus in the decade of 1820. As Francois Xavier Guerra asserts, this shift is better understood through the lens of constitutions as the fundamental milestones to trace down the imaginaries and political language of the era. The constitutional debates reflected the motivations, concerns, anxieties, ideologies and identities of a governing elite. The legitimacy of the republican and constitutional projects in the former dominions of Spain in America could not be bestowed by your majesty the king. Besides the sovereign *pueblo* legitimizing the republican state, early republican politicians frequently invoked the “Sacred Book of Nature” as the source of legitimacy to justify America’s separation from their ruling intruders.<sup>75</sup> The concept of “book of nature” has its origins in Renaissance natural philosophy and expresses a conception of the natural world as God’s creation. By invoking this concept, early republican politicians justified independence and the new political order stepping away from a divine authority in the form of a king. Early republican discourse used arguments of nature and natural law as a way to justify a new self-evident and universal sovereignty.

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<sup>75</sup> Venezuela, *Textos Oficiales De La Primera República De Venezuela* (Caracas: Academia Nacional de la Historia, 1959), 230.

The elite's views of nature are interwoven through the discussions on how to make Colombia a viable country and create a scientific tradition in the wake of independence. Also in the constitutional debates of the time, nature is powerful and dictates the destinies of the republic. This is attested to by the constant invocation of the natural law by the lettered elite. From their perspective, the benefits of nature were to be found in both the cultivation and exploitation of natural resources and in the beauty of nature, with its non-material and spiritual values.<sup>76</sup>

Along with the discussion over the location of the capital city of the new republic, one of the most important debates and reason for many of the struggles Latin America faced during the nineteenth century was whether to adopt a centralized or federalized political organization. While discussing the Fundamental Law during the Congress of Cúcuta in 1821, the early republican elites of Venezuela and Cundinamarca tried to define whether or not these two pueblos should merge into a single nation. At stake in such debates was the question of what will benefit the union and what kind of government to establish. During one of the debates, the Neogranadian Miguel Tobar claimed that the union of Venezuela and Cundinamarca was preordained by nature as a natural sequence of mountain ranges and geological formations.<sup>77</sup> Leandro Egea, another representative, added that approving the union would be accepting the colonialism of New Granada over Venezuela, highlighting a geographical hierarchy. Idelfonso Méndez replied that New Granada would win and Venezuela would lose with this merger, since

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<sup>76</sup> Thomas M. Lekan, *Imagining the Nation in Nature: Landscape Preservation and German Identity, 1885-1945* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004): 2.

<sup>77</sup> Acta 13ª, sesión del día 18 de mayo de 1821: 35

Venezuela had more provinces, people and resources. However, he added that nature and convenience demanded the union.<sup>78</sup>

In the last debate to approve the union of Venezuela and Cundinamarca Vicente Azuero asked: “Shall we unite or not with Venezuela, and if we do, how?”<sup>79</sup> José Manuel Restrepo stressed the need to create a republic formed by Venezuela and Nueva Granada, with a government divided between the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches. As Tobar claimed before, Restrepo contended that nature indicated this union, and added: “What mountain chains, or immense rivers separate them?” Subsequently he warned that the federal system was too weak for this republic, and that a central government was more convenient vis-à-vis the current state of affairs, as not all the provinces were completely free.

José Ignacio de Márquez opposed to the union of Nueva Granada and Venezuela in a central government, pointing out that it was impossible to form a whole nation from such a vast territory. He added: “(...) nature has fixed its limits; in the proportion that the political body extends, much more it weakens.”<sup>80</sup> Márquez questioned the congressional representatives about how inconvenient a central government would be, writing: “How to demand the citizens to cross immense distances to implore justice or abandon them to a multitude of subalterns?”<sup>81</sup> The relationship between vast territories and the political body extended over it exemplifies a conception of politics that entails exercising power over nature as a geographical representation of a possible republic. A constitution has to

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Acta 14ª, sesión del 19 de mayo de 1821: 40.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 41.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

rule over the territories and the people as a unit of citizen. In this logic, the reach of the constitution depends on nature's fixed limits.

The early republican elite negotiated the political geography of the newly born republic, during the early provincial outburst and the republican consensus periods, by using nature as an argument. In the process of unmaking the empire, nature was invoked as a preset order to which the political rule being settled could not escape. The next section deals with key natural landmarks invoked widely by the political elite to build narratives of provincial unity. These took the form of national symbols and narratives of Colombia's nature, both used in a context of shifting imperial influences.

#### OPENING NATURE TO THE WORLD AND NEW POLITICAL SYMBOLS

Nineteenth century representations of nature and the attempts to employ science to build a viable country in New Granada reflect the anxieties and desires of intellectuals creating a nation that was beleaguered by civil unrest and economic decline. Because of this, there was a need to refashion the emblems of empire. During the early republic, the Creole elite incorporated representations and conceptions that linked the political ideals of the age, freedom, sovereignty, with discourses about nature. In addition, the nineteenth-century events of independence challenged the intellectual, political, scientific and artistic elite to adapt an array of images from a long iconographic tradition, to the new exigencies of representing a new nation. Insurgents were conscious of the importance of symbols for the national project. To distinguish every nation from the

other, it was important to replace Spanish emblems with a new American iconography.<sup>82</sup> After several years of conflicting provincial sovereignties in the interregnum period, during the Gran Colombian era the political elite stressed the country's natural features to craft a new identity, no longer based of atomized provincial identities but on features that served to integrate the polity vis-à-vis the world.

In 1811, when the constitutional congress declared the independence of Venezuela, a commission formed by Francisco de Miranda, Lino de Clemente and José de Satta y Bici was designated to present a design for the flag of the new nation. The flag they presented was formed by yellow, blue and red, in unequal stripes, and had in the upper left a shield with an indigenous woman seated in a rock, with feathers adorning her head and a quiver full of arrows in her back. Later on, after the congresses of Angostura and Cúcuta between 1819 and 1821, the lettered elite decided to keep the coat of arms of the First Republic of Venezuela, as the symbol for the union of Panamá, New Granada, Venezuela, and Quito, under the argument that this emblem was better known across the republic. In spite of this, the lettered elites designed a new version of the coat of arms including a ship in the back navigating in the Caribbean sea towards the setting sun. In the sky, three stars represented Venezuela, Cundinamarca, and Quito, and in the top, an olive branch, as symbol of peace, surrounding two holding hands, representing the union of these provinces, in a new polity called Colombia. (Figure 1)

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<sup>82</sup> Rebecca Earle. *The Return of the Native: Indigenismo and Myth-Making in Spanish America, 1810-1930*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007. 50.



Figure 1. *Coats of Arms of Gran Colombia*, Fundamental Law, December 19 of 1819

In earlier emblematic traditions of Jesuit natural histories, the figure of a transatlantic galleon navigating in an agitated sea represented the Jesuit corporation. In the missionary vocation of the Jesuits, there was an interest in the knowledge of remote regions with an enigmatic and mysterious natural environment full of resources. The galleon is an allegorical figure for the search of knowledge beyond the limits of the European world.<sup>83</sup> However, the ship that appeared in the Gran Colombian symbol no longer represented the conquest of mysterious nature, but the potential for commerce of the new polity and the optimism that the enlightenment elite held toward achieving progress. Nature would no longer be represented as fabulous or strange, but mastered by a buoyant intellectual elite expressing an awareness of the natural disposition of Colombia for world commerce and

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<sup>83</sup> In an engraving of the New World's nature in a Jesuit book of 1663, *Chronica da Companhia de Jesu de estado do Brasil: e do que obrarão sevs filhos resta parte do Novo Mundo [...] e algvnas noticias antecedents curiosas, e necessarias dos cousas dequelle estado*. Lisboa 1663. *El Saber De Los Jesuitas, Historias Naturales Y El Nuevo Mundo*. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2005. 10.



the natural bounty. For instance, the ship in the coat of arms is heading off from the continent, alluding to the exportation of commodities from Colombia.

A recurrent theme in the symbol of America has been the representation of a woman, which is an old European tradition associated with the four parts of the world.<sup>84</sup> Cesare Ripa, an Italian aesthetician of the sixteenth century published in (1593) a highly influential book of emblems based on Egyptian, Roman and Greek representations. In Ripa's allegory, America is a naked woman, with feathered ornaments, holding a bow and a quiver full of arrows. Under her feet there is a human head crossed by an arrow, which represent the depiction of indigenous populations as barbarian and cannibals. In addition, in the ground, there is a caiman, a reptile of great size noteworthy and abundant in America (See Figure 2).<sup>85</sup> However, differently from Ripa's emblem, the woman in Colombia's coat of arms now appears carrying in her left hand a flagpole, and a Phrygian cap. She is surrounded, not with symbols of barbarism and cannibalism, but with symbols alluding to commerce, arts, and sciences. The caiman still appeared but is also accompanied by vegetables.

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<sup>84</sup> See for example: Alegoría de América. *Iconología* Tomo II, Edición de Siena, 1613, Ripa, Cesare (2002). *Iconología*, 2 t., Madrid: Ediciones Akal. p. 108

<sup>85</sup> Yobenj Aucardo Chicangana Bayona, Ministerio de Educación Nacional, Republica de Colombia, Colección Bicentenario, *La independencia en el arte y el arte en la independencia*. Bogota, 2009.



Figure 2. Allegory of America. *Iconologie*.

The representation of the indigenous populations was far from being a vindication of the original inhabitants of those territories. The Indian princess, which appeared widely throughout Spanish America, represented American autonomy rather than indigenous submission.<sup>86</sup> With a narrative of the return to a previous age, that in which the New World was free, the elite stressed images of the original inhabitants of the territory and renamed places using the former native names. This return alluded to the idea of restoring the natural liberties that Spain had taken away after years of despotism and unfair domination. In discourses, independence was justified as a passage to a “natural state”,

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<sup>86</sup> Rebecca Earle, *The Return of the Native*, 51.

but with the lights and dispositions that the Creole elite, and Nature, had conceded to Colombia. In the language of the time, claims like “God and nature authorized our independence” were commonly used in constitutional texts. The American autonomy signified the possibility to extract the riches from nature and insert New Granada in the world’s commercial and scientific map.

The coats of arms of the United Provinces of New Granada illustrate the project of integrating the scattered provincial projects into a sole polity. In 1815, the representatives of the junta of the United Provinces of New Granada, decided that the new republic should be represented not by the “factitious insignias of despotism,” but with the “simple and precious adornments bestowed by Nature.”<sup>87</sup> The governing elite established that the seal of New Granada would feature elements of the natural landscape: the Chimborazo volcano, the condor of the Andes, the Tequendama fall, the Panama Isthmus –with a ship on each side of the isthmus- and several open pomegranates. (Figure 3) The Tequendama Falls, located in the highlands nearby Santafé; the Chimborazo volcano in the central present day Ecuadorian Andes; and the Panama isthmus in the union between Central and South America, in present-day Panama. The three sites appeared in several writings and descriptions of the Neogranadian lettered elite. They represented New Granada's passport to progress and the possibilities of integrating New Granada internally, and with the world, through trade and science.

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<sup>87</sup>“(…) deseando vívidamente que en lugar de las insignias facticidas del despotismo aparezca esta nueva República con los sencillos y preciosos adornos que le concedió la naturaleza; ha venido en decretar el escudo de armas de la República en la forma siguiente.” Law of July 14<sup>th</sup> of 1815, Provincias Unidas de a Nueva Granada, in Ortega Ricaurte, Enrique (1954). *Heráldica Nacional*. Banco de la República, Bogotá: 50-51.



Figure 3. Coat of Arms of the United Provinces of New Granada, 1815.

In *The influence of climate over organized beings*, Caldas presents a detailed account of the nature of the Andes. He presents images of a very rich nature, “(...) the vegetation of our Andes seems to touch the extremes of the globe.” Comparing the Andes’s wealth with other ends of the planet, Caldas continues, “It is only needed to descend 5000 rods to pass by the Pole’s moss to the jungles of the equator. Two more inches in the barometer causes the empire of flora to change.”<sup>88</sup> Caldas argues that in the Andes, varied vegetation is found at different altitudes. He says, “(...) We have here an unsuspected order; a vast and profound plan, a wise and omnipotent hand that has distributed

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<sup>88</sup> “El influjo del clima sobre los seres organizados, Santafé, (10 de mayo de 1808), Francisco José de Caldas, *Obras Completas*. Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1966: 103-104.

everything according to the laws of pressure and heat, (...)”.<sup>89</sup> Caldas is describing the Andes as a system of microclimates where the hand of the Creator has arranged to find all the vegetation of the world in a single space. “Our Andes are the origin of incalculable goods”, asserts Caldas in an attempt to show the Andes as a temple where the extremities of the globe are reunited.

Caldas asserted that the Andes mountains were the “most famous of the universe” and that their location was privileged for scientific observations. Although he never left New Granada, he dares to contend: “There are few places on the globe’s surface more advantageous for observation, (...)”.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, constantly amazed by the perfection of nature, Caldas described the Chimborazo volcano, located in the Andes mountain system, as follows:

(...) when I find myself in the environs of the most beautiful place that one can find on Earth, that it seemed formed by Nature’s plan, I come out of me and burn in Desire to verify it as soon as possible. The *Chimborazo*, this colossal mass, situated at 2 ½ degrees of austral latitude, whose slopes descend directly towards the Pacific coast and whose path unites Quito and the port of Guayaquil, presents all the extension and all imaginable comfort to observe the heat of the water from the snow-point to the sea level. (...).<sup>91</sup>

For Caldas, New Granada’s nature is not only beautiful and expansive, but also a privileged place for the scientists who, through empirical observations, would extract the secrets of the natural order.

Another outstanding example of the attempts of an elite to situate their country at the very center of the world, through the idea of the microclimatic attributes of the

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 112.

<sup>91</sup> “Ensayo de una Memoria. Sobre un nuevo método de medir la altura de las montañas por medio del termómetro y el agua hirviendo, seguida de un apéndice”, in Francisco José de Caldas, *Obras Completas*. Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1966: 170.

Andes, is found in the Peruvian physician Hipólito Unanue, (1755-1833). Unanue, was a Creole patriot born in Africa, who embraced the independence cause as Zea, Caldas, Lozano, and other Creoles did.

A shared feature between Colombia and Peru are the Andes Mountains. Unanue described them as ‘enormous hills of the mountain range of the Andes, from whose eminent slopes, the degrees are substituted to all the climates of the universe.’ Unanue also described Lima as the richest and most celebrated city of Southern America. In the center of this ‘happy piece’ of the globe, we find the pleasant valley of Lima, ‘site of the rich and cult capital of Peru’, Unanue claims. Caldas, as Unanue does, asserts that the Andes mountains are the “most famous of the universe” and that its location was privileged for scientific observations.<sup>92</sup>

Caldas also wrote about the suitability of economic development using the Tequendama Falls and the Panama Isthmus as markers of prosperity. He thought that geographical knowledge was the thermometer by which the enlightenment, commerce, agriculture and prosperity of the *pueblo* was gauged. For Caldas geography was the fundamental basis of political speculation. He argued that New Granada’s geographical position made that territory naturally suitable for universal commerce. On the one hand, it has northern natural resources, and on the other hand, “all the productions of America’s noon.” It has also, Caldas noted, two ports, on the Pacific and on the Atlantic oceans.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 112. In *The influence of climate over organized beings*, Caldas presents a detailed account of the nature of the Andes. He presents images of a very rich nature and compares the Andes’s wealth with other ends of the planet Caldas. Caldas describes the Andes as a system of microclimates where the hand of the Creator has arranged to find all the vegetation of the world in a single space. The Andes is presented by Caldas as a temple where the extremities of the globe are reunited. See “El influjo del clima sobre los seres organizados, Santafé, (10 de mayo de 1808), Francisco José de Caldas, *Obras Completas*. Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1966: 103-104.

Caldas said, “there is no better location neither in the Old World nor in the New World than New Granada, (...) Our Andes are so rich as those others [Mexico and Peru], but we occupy the first place.”<sup>93</sup> Caldas not only situates New Granada in a privileged and gifted place among the globe, and within the Creator’s work, but as a center for world trade and thus for economic progress.

The Panama isthmus, Caldas noted, is a proof of Nueva Granada’s geographic disposition for commerce.<sup>94</sup> Caldas described the isthmus as the most famous of the universe and as the narrower part of the New World. Caldas asserted that its geography facilitated commerce and that this place of the world has immense natural resources. Camilo Torres also praised the Panama Isthmus in his celebrated *Memorial de Agravios*. He highlighted the geographic situation of New Granada, as an argument to justify that New Granada deserved a better position among the Spanish provinces. He claimed: “[New Granada] masters the two seas, the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, and owes the Isthmus, that one day will receive ships from the east and south, and from the west and north.”<sup>95</sup> The Creole patriots were certainly anticipating its economic potential for commerce.

The Tequendama Fall also figured among the most celebrated natural landmarks in New Granada. The Creole poet and scientists José María Salazar wrote an aesthetic description of the waterfall. After situating it geographically, Salazar presents the bountifulness and unlimited organic potential of the cascade. With the eyes of a traveler,

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 144.

<sup>94</sup> Vasco Núñez de Balboa was the first explorer to document the existence of an isthmus connecting the Pacific and Atlantic oceans during the early sixteenth century.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. *Memorial de Agravios*, 11.

Salazar describes how luxuriant the trees are, and the pleasure of breathing fresh air. As the traveler descends, the temperature rises, says Salazar, and so the species multiply, the forms turn more elegant, and the vegetations become more vigorous. His tale, rich in literary figures alludes to the sensibility of the man to the marvelous work of the Creator, and in the closing remarks claims: “Here the art humiliates itself in the presence of nature.”<sup>96</sup> In patriot imagination the exaltation of nature intermingle constantly with nature as a scientific object of study: reachable, discoverable, measurable, and exploitable.

Salazar, Caldas, and other, depicted the Tequendama Fall as a privileged spot to witness the microclimates of the region. They claimed that one could find from the top to the bottom of its surroundings the vegetation of a variety of climates. For example, products from the temperate zones like wheat and elm trees could be found in the plains of Santafé de Bogotá. In addition, by the cataract, one could find palms belonging to the low countries of the equinoctial. As Cañizares-Esguerra had asserted, these Creoles of Nueva Granada imagined their Kingdom as the “Warehouse of the universe” that could become wealthy by supplying the world by natural products.<sup>97</sup> But the early republican elite understanding of their territory as the center of the world served the purpose to integrate, at least rhetorically, an amazingly diverse territory: From the jungles of Panama, to the highlands of Santafé, and to Quito. The interdependence between

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<sup>96</sup> José María Salazar, “La cascada del Tequendama”, en Salazar, José María, “La cascada del Tequendama”, en *Museo De Cuadros De Costumbres*. Bogotá: F. Mantilla, 1866.

<sup>97</sup> “How Derivative Was Humboldt? Microcosmic Nature Narratives in Early Modern Spanish America and the (Other) Origins of Humboldt’s Ecological Ideas,” in Londa Schiebinger and Claudia Swan eds., *Colonial Botany: Science, Commerce, and Politics in the Early Modern World* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004): 148-65.



different altitudes, and geographies was precisely what made of nature an argument for integration. This project, however, could not have been thought without an agenda to continue the seemingly brilliant scientific trajectory of New Granada, and to encourage development integrating internally and within and international context.

After the victory of the patriot army, and the declaration of complete independence from Spain, the Creole elite attempted to create new scientific institutions for the new republic, although most of them were short-lived. Francisco de Paula Santander, as the president of Nueva Granada between 1819 and 1826, issued a law to merge the current public library of the city of Santafé with the one of the Botanical Expedition of New Granada held by José Celestino Mutis.<sup>98</sup> The governing elite also inaugurated the First Scientific Mission in 1823, the Museum of Natural History and the Mining School in 1824, the Academia Nacional de Colombia in 1826, and opened several public universities.<sup>99</sup> In 1826, the Cundinamarca Congress issued a national law of education to establish central universities in the capital cities of Cundinamarca, Venezuela and Quito, with the purpose of embracing the teaching of sciences and arts in the Republic.<sup>100</sup> In addition, Simon Bolivar commissioned Englishman John Lloyd to map the Isthmus of

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<sup>98</sup> “Mandamiento para que a la biblioteca pública se reúna la librería que fue de la Expedición Botánica.” *La Gran Colombia. Decretos de la Secretaría de Estado y del Interior 1821-1824*. 1st ed. Bogotá, Colombia: Presidencia de la República, 1983. 64-65.

<sup>99</sup> In March 18 of 1826 under the government of Francisco de Paula Santander, the central government issued the Organic Law of Public Education. Following the model of European academies, this law created the National Academy of Colombia. It sought to stimulate the knowledge in arts, natural and exact sciences, moral, and politics. See Diana Obregón, “La sociedad de naturalistas neogranadinos y la tradición científica”, en *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura*, volumen 18-19, 1990-1991: 101.

<sup>100</sup> Renan Silva, *La reforma de estudios en el Nuevo Reino de Granada. 1767-1790*. Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, Bogota, 1981.

Panama in 1828.<sup>101</sup> Patriot scientists also engaged in international diplomacy in search of loans from rich countries.

The independence movements opened up the once-closed colonies of Spain to new imperial interests, travel, commerce, and scientific exploration.<sup>102</sup> In a diplomatic note presented by Francisco Antonio Zea as vice-president of Colombia to the French Minister of International Affairs, and to the Foreign Ministers in Paris, he alluded to the idea of replacing Spanish imperial symbols as follows, “the flags of independence and freedom have replaced the lions and the towers of Castile.” The nascent states, claims Zea, are “favored by nature, powerful in resources, and sure of an upcoming future.” Among these states, Colombia rose up and does not ignore its strength, claims Zea. Next, he invites the rest of the world to participate of the resources that nature has lavished on Colombia.<sup>103</sup>

The diplomatic mission lead by Zea mission, started in 1822, sought to gain recognition of Colombia as an independent country by Europe and to obtain a loan from England. As head of the diplomatic mission, he traveled to Europe again in 1819. While there, he helped in preparation and publication in English and Spanish of *Colombia being a Geographical, Statistical, Agricultural, and Political Account of the Country with Map*. Zea’s diplomatic mission illustrate that the independence project never contemplated an autarky, but new commercial and financial relations with imperial powers other than Spain.

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<sup>101</sup> Jaime Torres Sánchez. *Introducción a la Historia de la Ingeniería y de la Educación en Colombia*. Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Facultad de Ingeniería, 2002: 145.

<sup>102</sup> Stepan, Nancy. *Picturing Tropical Nature*. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2001. 31.

<sup>103</sup> Francisco Antonio Zea, *Colombia being a Geographical, Statistical, Agricultural, and Political Account of the Country with Map*, Londres: Baldwin, Cradock, y Joy, 1822, *Colombia*, 139.

In this two-volume book, Zea and his collaborators engaged in a wide-ranging account of the country's resources. In the first section, the account presented a general relation of the territory, its extension, valleys, mountains, rivers, lakes, earthquakes, volcanoes, and oceans. It also included a historical account of the discovery and conquest, together with the report of the political divisions of the territory. Next, it depicted the population of the country, dividing it between those of Spanish descent and Indians. Following this, the book explained their distribution, degree of civilization, marriages, education, religion, and costumes. In the second volume, the book described the products of the territory: mines, sugar, coffee, cacao, tobacco, and cotton. Lastly, Zea included a diagnostic of the state of the country regarding its commerce, history and political status.

Zea's diplomatic mission sought to facilitate the approval of a loan from England and to seek scientific support in France. He brokered the compromise, before his death, to hire a number of foreign scientists and projected the *Misión Zea* that started in 1823, under the auspices of National School of Mines of Paris, and the National Institute of France. The mission employed a group of Frenchmen - under the direction of the Peruvian Mariano de Rivero - to organize the Mining School and the National Museum. It also appointed the Mexican José María Lanz to establish a school of military engineers, and to map the territory of the new Republic.<sup>104</sup>

The description of the country's nature occupies a significant portion of this account of Colombia. In the preface, Zea expresses an anti-Spanish sentiment as follows,

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<sup>104</sup> Diana Soto Arango, *Francisco Antonio Zea: un criollo ilustrado*, Madrid: Ediciones Doce Calle, Colciencias, RudeColombia, 2000: 247-248.

“the darkness with which a despotic government has surrounded their inhabitants” is the reason by which “no idea sufficiently extensive can be formed of the mineral and agricultural riches buried in these immense regions.”<sup>105</sup> As Caldas and Torres did during the preceding decade, Zea blamed the previous despotic Spanish government for the state of underdevelopment of Colombia in terms of sciences, agriculture, and mining. In his account, the Chimborazo volcano was invoked in the elite’s attempt to make their *patria* a geographical reality.

The Chimborazo volcano is described in the compendium as follows: ‘In Colombia, the greatest altitude of the Andes is conjectured to take place nearly under the equator, where the cone of Chimborazo rises to the amazing height of 7147 yards above the level of the sea.’<sup>106</sup> A representation of the volcano appeared in the diplomatic compendium of *Colombia* in 1823, at the bottom right section of a map of the country. (Figure 4) The text that accompanies the engraving acknowledges the authority of acknowledged scientists as follows: “Colombia. Tomado de Humboldt y de otras autoridades recientes”. The image is an allegory of the Orinoco River as a bearded male, and the Magdalena River as a bare-breasted woman. Between them, there is a coat of arms with the Andean condor lying on it. In the background of the image, framing the smoky Chimborazo volcano, were American palms and other trees. This same allegory of the rivers Orinoco and Magdalena was used in a foreign debt bank bond for two million sterling pound, signed by Francisco Antonio Zea in 1822. (Figure 5)

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<sup>105</sup> *Colombia being a Geographical, ...*: xxviii.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* 3.

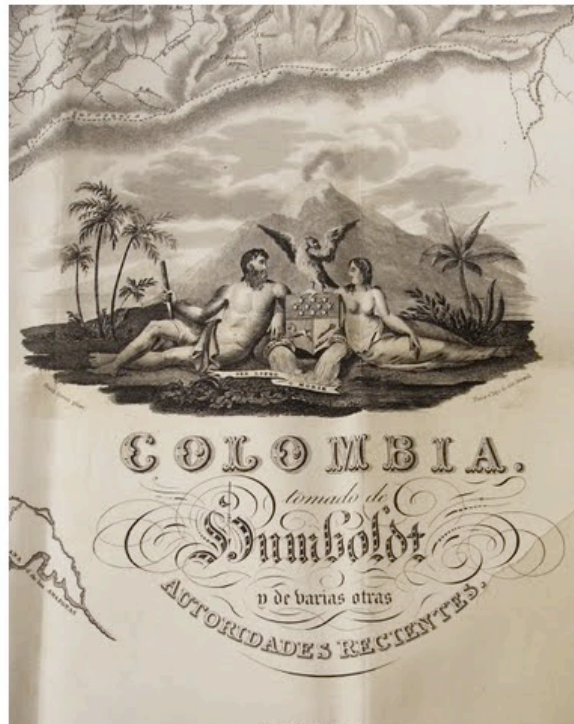


Figure 4. *Colombia being a Geographical, Statistical, Agricultural, and Political Account of the Country with Map*, London, 1823

The documents of Zea's diplomatic mission depicted Colombian nature as rich and immense, but yet to be discovered. During the time, the assessments of New Granada's nature carried out by Humboldt were widely spread among the lettered elite. Three translated publications of Humboldt appeared in the *Semanario del Nuevo Reino de Granada*. Humboldt advocated for an “*americanismo*” and for an “aesthetic treatment of natural history.” His extensive voyages and scientific works in America, between 1799 and 1804, made him an influential figure among South America's elite. Nevertheless, Creole elites' sensibilities and attitudes toward their natural surroundings have been overlooked and blurred under the figure of Humboldt, who frequently appears as the one

who ‘invented America’s nature’.<sup>107</sup> In this sense, I attempted to understand the sensibilities, narratives, and knowledge about nature that informed key political debates of the process of unmaking the Spanish empire and building new republics.



Figure 5. Bono de deuda externa por dos millones de libras esterlinas, firmado por Francisco Antonio Zea con los prestamistas ingleses Herring, Graham & Powles en París, el 13 de marzo de 1822. Colección numismática online, Casa de la Moneda. Bogotá, Colombia.

## CONCLUSION

In the context of fluctuating imperial influences, the ways in which the lettered elite grappled with nature as a source of progress and identity constructed and informed the paradoxical configuration of a post colonial territoriality that shifted from provincial fragmentation to a national political unity. The case of New Granada is an example of the intermingling of politics and science in an era of imperial dissolution bridging the transnational, the national and the local dimensions into nation building. By placing the

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<sup>107</sup> Humboldt’s ideas about the Andes microcosm, Cañizares claims, originated in his encounter with Spanish American scholars who had been developing this idea for decades. Cañizares-Esguerra, “How Derivative Was Humboldt?...: 154.

elite's sensibilities and concerns about their homeland's nature in the milieu of the political transformations that began in 1808, I stressed on the extent to which discourses on nature and science worked as political narratives during the early republic.

In the wake of independence, the lettered elite imagined their country no longer as an extractive economy, but as an agricultural hub that would provide natural resources to the world. As the first section showed, the Bourbon reforms offered the ideological tools that allowed the Creole elite to appropriate this vision, although it contrasted with the reality of a post-independence economic stagnation. Realizing the potential of New Granada's natural bounties became the objective of a Creole elite that shared a set of ideas on how to bring prosperity and happiness to the nation. Their concerns for the future of their homeland and its economic viability were embedded in the discourse of the new republic's natural resources. Invoking nature in their rhetoric allowed Creole intellectuals to emphasize an anti-Spanish discourse in which, owing nothing to Spain, New Granada had been blessed by nature and had a promising future.

By 1808, with the institutional crisis of the Spanish monarchy, Spanish Americans faced for the first time the possibility of representing their territories and making their own decisions regarding the future of their *patrias* through provincial juntas. Creole leaders soon realized that no political unity existed in New Granada, and they became engaged in interprovincial negotiations that sought integration to counteract the risks of the French invasion to Iberian colonies and safeguard the interests of the king. As the *juntas* movement developed, they triggered new versions of old interprovincial conflicts.

Climate theories informed the geopolitics of independence. For instance, Caldas's human geography acknowledged the effects of heat and atmospheric pressure over the inhabitants of New Granada and its vegetation to argue that the men of the Andes were suited with a better character than those from the coasts. As shown earlier, the intellectual elite cultivated natural knowledge as argument to justify the preeminence of Santafé as capital and as the one site in New Granada that could successfully foster the arts and sciences.

By the late 1810s, when the liberation army achieved complete independence from Spain, the elite's understanding of the natural characteristics of the territory informed the debates over whether or not to unite Venezuela, New Granada and Ecuador in a single polity. The Creole elite alluded to the fixed limits of nature as an argument to affect political decisions regarding federal or central political organization. The union of the territories into a single republic, which had previously claimed individual autonomy, was a reality by the beginning of the 1820s. In the spirit of unification, the territories became known as Colombia.

In the attempt to turn Colombia into a geographic and political reality, the ruling elite engaged in diplomatic negotiations with Great Britain and France. They also raised public awareness about the new country's potential in resources of economic growth in the context of shifting imperial influences, and sought to build an independent scientific tradition. Intellectuals celebrated the natural bounties of their newly-born republic, by praising features of the natural landscape, and using nature to design new political symbols.



The study of narratives and sensibilities about nature in the early nineteenth century shows the links between Creole political imagination, and the utilitarian and symbolic dimensions of natural knowledge. Early republican historians are familiar with the works of the Creole naturalists examined here, but they have not examined their connections to the geopolitics of independence and the Gran Colombian period. The unmaking of the Spanish empire was possible not only because of the military victories of the patriot armies over the Spanish “reconquest”, but also because of a Creole ideology, which placed the colonies at the center of the world, given their heightened awareness of their republic’s natural resources and geographic position. As I have shown, this ideology was long in the making; and during the period analyzed here, the tensions between provinces, and the shifting imperial influences are key to understanding not only how nations came to be, but also how an empire disentangled.

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