

Gregorio Hernández de Alba (1904-1973): The Legitimization of Indigenous Ethnic Politics in Colombia

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One of the most remarkable recent developments in Colombian twentieth-century history is the success of the indigenous political movement. Currently, 81 indigenous ethnic groups comprising 603,000 people have rights over approximately 25 per cent of the national territory (Pineda 1995, 13).¹ The vast majority of the territory belonging to the indigenous communities of Colombia is held collectively: 80 per cent of the indigenous population owns 408 *resguardos* (collective inalienable land grants) with a total extent of 27,621,257 hectares (Pineda 1995, 13). In the Constitution of 1991 the nation affirmed the inalienable nature of the indigenous collective landholdings (Van Cott 2000, 85). Indigenous communities also have the right to judicial autonomy within the *resguardos* and the direct disbursement of state funds to the *resguardos*' council authorities.

Implementation of this progressive legislation has not been free of conflict, and, in certain areas of Colombia, landowners and non-indigenous groups have contested the legal claims of indigenous communities with violence and coercion. The Colombian state has sometimes failed in its duty to protect and safeguard the legislative success of the indigenous movement. Thus the success of the indigenous movement has not solved many of the problems of violence and inequality that indigenous communities face. At the same time, it is critical to recognize the importance of the legitimacy granted to indigenous communities' claims on the state, and to understand the means by which indigenous communities have achieved legal recognition of their claims by the state. Because of this legitimacy, the indigenous movement has achieved remarkable success.

Scholars have attributed the success of the indigenous movement to the strength of the indigenous grassroots organizations (Avirama 1994, Findji 1992), to the weakness of the central state (Van Cott 2000), to the exceptional indigenous intellectual leadership of Colombian indigenous communities (Rappaport 1990) and, recently, to successful intercultural relationships established with non-indigenous sectors of society (Laurent 2005, Caviades 2000, Rappaport 2005, Troyan 2002).

While these factors have played an important role in the success of the Colombian indigenous movement, the ways in which the central state has actively supported the indigenous ethnic agenda is often overlooked. Many scholars assume that the state, prior to the 1990s, was antagonistic to the preservation of communal landholding amongst indigenous communities. Historians have paid limited attention to the construction of a discourse within the Colombian state that legitimized the ethnic politics of the indigenous communities from as early as the 1930s. Scholars who concede that the state may have enacted some positive policies towards the indigenous communities see this trend as emerging in the 1980s (Gros 1991, Laurent 2005). The emergence and consolidation of the guerrilla movement

in the 1980s would have forced the state to agree to the territorial demands of the indigenous communities (Gros 2000, Laurent 2005).² While I agree that the state's weakness vis à vis the guerrilla movements played a crucial role in the state's concessions, a political solution based on granting large amounts of territory to the indigenous communities was only possible and seen as legitimate because intellectuals and the central state had legitimized ethnic politics prior to the 1980s.

Far from being antagonistic to ethnic claims made by indigenous communities, the Colombian state, instead actually encouraged the formation of an indigenous identity during two discrete historical periods before the 1980s. From 1930 to 1947 the Liberal state began to construct an ethnic indigenous identity based on collective landholding and to value indigenous culture. During a second pivotal period, from 1958 to 1962, the Colombian central government legitimized the claims of indigenous communities based on ethnic identity, thereby creating a political space that indigenous activists would use to mobilize and negotiate their claims. During both these periods, the state grappled with issues of nationalism and legitimacy. The valorization of indigenous communities in the 1930s by the state gave the Liberal Party, which had recently gained control of the central government after many decades of political exclusion, a new role and legitimacy in rural areas of Colombia. After the period of tremendous violence that engulfed Colombia from 1947 to 1953, the central state and its leaders sought to re-establish its presence and legitimacy in rural departments. One non-indigenous intellectual and activist, Gregorio Hernández de Alba,³ played a crucial role in the state's legitimization of indigenous ethnic politics in the two periods mentioned.

The life of Gregorio Hernández de Alba offers a window into the progression and evolution of the central state's vision of indigenous peoples and their claims. Hernández was an exceptional person because he was both an intellectual and an activist from within the state. Though Hernández was by no means the only Colombian intellectual of note to write about and analyse the Colombian indigenous communities, when looking at relations between the state and indigenous communities, he was a particularly important figure because his interest in indigenous communities lasted for over forty years and because he was able to translate his intellectual activities into state policy.

While other Colombian *indigenistas*, such as Antonio García, made thoughtful and innovative analyses of the predicament of the indigenous communities in the 1930s, their interest in and advocacy for these communities as ethnic groups faded with the rise of Marxist politics and class discourse in the 1960s and '70s. Hernández, on the other hand, remained an *indigenista* even when *indigenismo* was passé. He was also in charge of the central state's policy on indigenous communities starting in 1958. His commitment to the ethnic politics of indigenous communities matured and proved all the more influential.

Indigenismo: making indigenous communities 'visible'

After decades of Conservative rule, the Liberal party won the presidential election and gained control of the central government in 1930 (Bushnell 1993, 181). The central government and the presidency remained in the hands of Liberals until 1946. During this era of Liberal control, the government consolidated its alliances with the urban working class through favourable workers' legislation. Along with this progressive legislation, the Liberal republic proposed agrarian reform legisla-

tion and attempted to organize rural workers. Many Liberals perceived the countryside as a bastion of conservatism and wished to create new alliances with the peasantry, including the indigenous people who lived overwhelmingly in the rural areas. Another concern of the Liberal party was the growing popularity of socialist and communist movements in the countryside, which threatened the hegemony of the bipartisan system.

The indigenous population of Colombia, in overall percentage small, was important politically in the Cauca department because of its relatively large size and because of its long history of political mobilization. Some of the most prominent indigenous leaders of the Cauca were attracted to communism and socialism (Gros, 180). Thus the process of making the indigenous population of Colombia, and in particular that of the Cauca, 'visible'⁴ through indigenismo was an integral part of the political agenda of the Liberal party.

Indigenismo is understood here as the attempt to value indigenous peoples and their culture in the context of a national culture that had esteemed its Spanish character above all else. Indigenismo in Colombia was but one facet of the effort of the Colombian Liberal state to emphasize 'popular culture' and to redeem folklore in the 1930s and 1940s (Silva 2005). The vast majority of proponents of this movement, like Hernández himself, came from the middle class. Scholars such as Roldán (2002) and Braun (1985) have pointed out that the emergence of this class was both parallel and intrinsic to the political changes of the 1920s and '30s.

Hernández was very much a representative of this emerging Liberal middle class, a class that sought to participate in the political life of the Colombian nation. He entered politics through his attempts to make the indigenous communities visible to the Colombian state and public. By following the trajectory of his life, the evolution of the Colombian state's attitudes and policies in regard to the indigenous communities will be further illuminated.

Gregorio Hernández de Alba was born on 20 June 1904 in Bogotá, Colombia (Perry 1994). The family was comfortable but not wealthy. According to his son, Carlos Hernández, Gregorio Hernández's father was perhaps an architect but more probably a builder of houses (interview 1999). Thus, while Hernández can be considered a member of the intellectual elite, economically he belonged to the middle class. When his father died, the children from his father's first marriage paid for Gregorio and his brothers' education. Hernández studied at the *Escuela Nacional de Comercio de Bogotá* where he met Germán Arciniegas, one of the leading Liberal Colombian intellectuals. Through Arciniegas, Hernández was to meet many important Liberal politicians who would later grant him political posts.⁵

Arciniegas and later Hernández also belonged to one of the main organizations devoted to propagating nationalism and indigenismo, the artistic and literary Bachue group (Perry 1994, 24). The Bachue members' aim was to create an authentic and nationalistic culture while avoiding the pitfalls of European fascism.⁶ The Bachue group was not a cohesive organization but rather a gathering of loosely connected intellectuals who were exploring issues of national identity from very different angles and perspectives. An important contribution that the Bachue group made was to question the negative portrayal and representation of indigenous peoples and heritage that prevailed in Colombia in the 1930s. Laureano Gómez, a principal leader of the Conservative Party and an influential speaker, was profoundly pessimistic about the Colombian racial character because he saw the indigenous and Afro-Colombian groups as inferior, lazy, and as impediments to

Colombia's progress (Melo 1992, 99). While these middle class intellectuals were not necessarily connected with or even aware of the reality of the indigenous communities, they sought to challenge the pessimistic and racist assumptions of many Colombian intellectuals. They also criticized the country for its lack of knowledge of its indigenous heritage (Varela Hoyos, 1930).

In order to remedy this lacuna, Hernández founded the first archaeological society of Colombia with Guillermo Fisher in 1935 (Botero and Perry 1994, 7). Hernández was the director of this agency until 1946. Thanks to Hernández's encouragement and persuasion, Gustavo Santos, a member of this archaeological society, would transform it from a private initiative into a state agency, as it became part of the Ministry of Education in 1937⁷ (Hernández archive, Perry 1994).

When Hernández started his anthropological fieldwork in 1935, Luis López de Mesa, the Minister of Education, sent him to the Guajira to take part in an ethnological expedition funded by the University of Pennsylvania and Columbia University. In the Guajira he worked with German and North American specialists such as Korn, Petrullo and Kirchhoff. After completing his fieldwork in the Guajira, he published *Etnología Guajira* in 1936, making Colombian intellectuals aware for the first time of the presence and significance of indigenous communities such as the *Wayu* (Pineda 1984, 222). Despite his lack of formal ethnological training, he played a major role in publicizing Colombia's indigenous groups and cultures.

Hernández continued to stress the value of indigenous culture through his writings from his later fieldwork undertaken in San Agustín, Huila, and Tierradentro, Cauca.⁸ These writings did much to modify attitudes and prejudices toward indigenous cultures. He published his findings in the major newspaper, *El Tiempo*, and in academic and cultural journals such as *Revista Pan* (1935) and the *Revista de las Indias* (1938).

Throughout Latin America, indigenistas were devoting themselves to the study of pre-Columbian cultures. Hernández's work was particularly important to Colombia, given its lack of a famous civilization comparable to the Incas and the Aztecs. Contemporary intellectuals such as Ignacio Torres Giraldo, a renowned Marxist and intellectual, while lauding the indigenistas' attempt to show that indigenous groups were heirs to impressive civilizations, saw the archaeologists and indigenistas as mere museum collectors who were uninterested in the current predicament of indigenous groups and irrelevant to those groups' political agenda (Torres Giraldo 1975, 5). This criticism was valid in the sense that some archaeologists were indeed removed from the political reality of indigenous communities. But this stage of collecting evidence of the value of indigenous civilizations in Colombia was a crucial and necessary one on the way to establishing the importance of encouraging present-day indigenous communities to preserve their culture and way of life. The territorial gains and cultural recognition of the indigenous groups in the 1991 Constitution were based on a shared understanding of the value of indigenous culture.

Experiences in Europe 1939-1941: formation of the American consciousness

Hernández was becoming increasingly aware that indigenous civilizations were worthy of study, and that notions of European superiority were absurd in the face of the carnage and destruction that World War II had unleashed. Dr. Paul Rivet, then director of the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, invited him to pursue his ethno-

logical studies in Paris (interview 1999, Perry 1994, 65). Dr. Rivet had come to Colombia to attend the archaeological exhibition honouring Bogotá's 400th anniversary (Botero and Perry 1994). Hernández's connections to the Liberal Party enabled him to obtain the necessary financing to go to Paris with his family. Eduardo Santos, the president of the Liberal government, gave him the diplomatic position at the Colombian consulate that would finance his stay (interview 1999). Eduardo Santos and minister of education Luis López de Mesa were eager to have a Colombian intellectual study in Europe.

Hernández's European diary draws an interesting and ironic contrast between Europe and his beloved Colombia. In the first entry of this diary, dated 24 August 1939 when he was in Berlin, Hernández wrote:

Never before in any city have I felt myself to be such a stranger as in this clean, big, uniformed and militarized city. A stranger because of the language, because of the spirit. Alone. Terribly alone, thinking on this café terrace of [indcipherable word, BT]. In the back-and-forth of European politics, in the lack of conscience of these civilized peoples, in the tragedy that is upon us, that weighs on the air and on my Colombia, my wild America, where we still have peace, where we still live freely without obstruction, where the ethics and morality of people still have meaning, where one is still devoted to a doctrine and carries it out. Left-wing, right-wing, centrist, no matter. Whichever is followed, it is followed faithfully, nobly.⁹

Hernández deemed 'civilized' Europe morally flawed and saw dictatorship as an inevitable result. In contrast, he linked the Colombia that he loved with democracy, peace, and a strong sense of morality.

This sense of European ideology and politics as morally corrupt and invalid for the continent of America was no doubt reinforced by his presence in Berlin when Germany and Russia signed the non-aggression pact in 1939. It also helps to explain why he was not attracted to Marxist policies or by the Marxist discourse that became so popular in the 1970s in Colombia. Hernández portrayed Stalin's Russia as similar to Nazi Germany. He felt that European ideologies, including communism, were intrinsically corrupt. His reaction to his experiences in Europe also shed light on the evolution of his future career and the formation of his ideology, which took on such a different character from, for instance, that of Antonio García¹⁰ who combined indigenismo with socialism.

Hernández was also convinced that Europe and the Europeans were a civilization in decline and that this war would end its pre-eminence. He foresaw, quite accurately, that this was a historical moment and an opportunity for America as a continent to pick up the torch of 'civilization'. However, Hernández's naivety and belief that goodness, democracy, and liberty were America's qualities skewed his perception of politics in the American continent. By drawing a sharp contrast between the Americas and Europe, he neglected to take into consideration the authoritarian tradition in some parts of Latin America as well as the U.S.'s oppressive treatment of African Americans and Native Americans in the 1930s and '40s. Naturally, one needs to take into account the time of the writing of this diary when, indeed, Europe was at its lowest moment and his own nostalgia for his homeland at its height. His optimistic portrayal of Colombia is the result of the exceptional moment, in the 1930s, when democracy and hope for social change flourished. The most important element about Hernández's experiences in Europe during the war

was that they made him supremely aware of the issues of race and the dangers of discrimination against people for ethnic or religious reasons, something that would mark the rest of his life and career.

On 25 August 1939, consul Quijano ordered Hernández to return to Paris immediately. The outbreak of the Second World War was imminent. His description of his train trip reveals not only his great capacity for narration and observation but also his sympathy with those in danger because of their race. Whether the train would make it before Germany closed the borders was not at all certain, and the tension of certain passengers is palpable in the account.

Two gentlemen of some age and a young couple in the other compartment are invited to leave the train. On the railway platform they ask for their passports that a policeman is keeping. They sit on a bench. They do not look at anyone. They do not talk. They respond curtly to the soldiers' questions. The train leaves. They sit silently watching us leave. They are Jews. They could not leave this hell. For a moment perhaps they had held on to hope. But the last door was closed roughly. What is next for them? Hopefully death. Ah civilization. Ah the great Germany. Ah the crime of being born in Europe.¹¹

Hernández was remarkably prescient, sensing the terrible fate that awaited the Jewish people. In September of 1939, the 'final solution' was not yet known to most European observers and was only confirmed after the Second World War. He pointed out the absurdity of a 'civilized' nation seeking to exterminate people for their religion or race. His moral outrage and disgust at the events that took place in Europe were reiterated throughout his diary.¹²

In April 1941, Gregorio Hernández visited Madrid. Here, too, he associated European civilization with moral decadency and dictatorship. This attitude helps to explain his eagerness to emphasize the American and indigenous nature of Colombian identity. His overwhelming impression of Spain under Franco was of a country of unhappy and oppressed people. Prostitutes and beggars approached him while he was walking and he attributed their great number and eagerness to the prevalence of hunger, corruption, and 'mugre' (dirt). The numerous military parades exasperated Hernández as this description shows:

A parade with hands raised, but I did not hear a single cry of enthusiasm or faith. In the morning after the inspection of all the houses the leaders were supposed to pass by, having previously placed armed guards on the terraces and the balconies, the parade of leaders, tanks, canons, and red berets passed between the two armed lines on each side, one line looking at the sidewalk and the other at the street. Maybe it was the grey weather, or perhaps the thought of what this meant for the Spanish people? Was it the idea that it was more useful and more logical to have a party where the people, instead of being quiet and suspicious, could laugh, sing, dance, and eat? Was it the memory that in Colombia, my Colombia, I have seen heads of state walk amongst the people without a bodyguard because they represent the will of the people, work for its benefit, and are loved? I don't know what it was in the end that made me feel a sadness that led me to end this glorious April day in my room reading Inca Garcilaso (1948b).¹³

This undated passage was clearly written when Hernández was in Spain in 1941. Here again, Hernández overemphasizes the joyful and peaceful nature of Colom-

bian politics, because, in contrast to Europe in the 1940s, Colombia was a democracy where people participated in politics, fearing perhaps their partisan rivals but not a military government. These words are doubly poignant if we think how Colombia today is yet another country where politicians must have bodyguards.

It is also significant that Hernández closeted himself in his room to read Inca Garcilaso, the son of an Inca princess, who wrote a social commentary that portrayed the Incas as civilized and good in contrast to the Spanish chroniclers who depicted them as barbarians. As a *mestizo* Inca Garcilaso also represented the American identity of which Hernández was enamoured. Here, too, his interest in and concern for oppressed people and his belief in the value of every culture becomes evident. He strongly objected to Franco's policy of persecuting regional cultures and imposing cultural uniformity (Hernández diary).

On his way back to Colombia he visited Havana, Cuba, where he once again expresses his conviction that the Americas are blessed because of the freedom of their diverse peoples:

Small tamales eaten with ones' hands, hot dogs, Bacardi, beer, and above all the beauty of this city and the wonderful impression that we have coming back from Europe that we are amongst happy people, a people who can laugh and enjoy life, who can eat and talk. Ah the beauty of the American life of America, peoples who are free and at peace, blessed with so many natural marvels (Hernández diary).¹⁴

Hernández straddled the intellectual model of indigenismo, which celebrated an American identity, and the larger worldwide trend of anti-racism and anti-fascism that emerged in the 1940s. This straddling is reflected in a short article he published in *América Indígena* in 1944 (223-5), in which he suggested that indigenous cultures throughout the Americas shared common cultural traits and that this commonality could give the Americas unity. He stated: 'When telling what is Indian, we express what is American. When looking down on what is Indian, we scorn what should be uniting our countries'.¹⁵

The literature on African American identity and the Black Atlantic world are relevant here to understanding the connections between Hernández's process of turning inward to Colombia's indigenous heritage and his rejection of fascism and racism. From the end of World War I, the process of debunking notions of European intellectual and racial superiority had begun. Wilson Moses, in the *Golden Age of Black Nationalism* (1978), documents how Europeans noted the effects of the First World War:

'It was not Germany that lost the World war', wrote Oswald Spengler, 'the West lost it when it lost the respect of the coloured races'. Spengler was not the only prophet of doom to emerge in the age of anxiety following the First World War (Moses, 251).

This realization of the bankruptcy of European models allowed cultures and nations on the 'periphery' to elaborate and create alternative models of nationalism and culture. Paul Gilroy discusses the development of an alternative culture that seeks to be 'authentic', and yet is nonetheless a reaction to European models (1987, 1993). Here, Hernández played a key role. Profoundly aware of the limitations of European civilization, he sought to elaborate a new Colombia that drew its inspiration not from Spanish culture or heritage but from indigenous cultures.

This was particularly novel in a country that in the 1930s and 1940s was still very much enamoured of Spanish culture and sought to privilege its Spanish heritage. So while Hernández is part of a tradition of indigenismo that dated from his pre-war experiences, his modernity and profound commitment to anti-racism stem from his Second World War experiences. The alliance between anti-fascism and the study of ethnology went beyond a discursive level. As Roberto Pineda notes, the funding for the National Ethnological Institute research and magazine in Colombia came from the Committee for Free France headed by De Gaulle (Pineda, 231).

Back in Colombia, 1941-1958

Hernández returned to Colombia in 1941. Despite his eager expectations, however, he was to have a difficult and disappointing time over the next four years, due in part to the arrival with him of his mentor, Dr. Rivet, who went into exile in Colombia. Prior to his departure for Colombia Rivet had written to Maréchal Pétain, in charge of Vichy France, to express the betrayal he felt when he discovered that it was the French and not the German authorities that had fired him. On the morning of 14 June, as the Nazis marched through the Place de Trocadéro, Rivet had placed on the doors of the Musée de l'Homme a poem by Rudyard Kipling on never accepting defeat and on enduring struggle. The message was clear: France would rise again.¹⁶ Rivet was fired not only for his courageous gesture but also for his openly anti-racist socialism (Echeverri 1997, 69).

Accounts of Dr. Rivet's escape from Vichy France differ. Hernández certainly considered it was thanks to himself, although according to other sources, Eduardo Santos invited Dr. Paul Rivet to come to Colombia (Echeverri, 69). In a diary entry of 29 December 1941 when Hernández was excavating in Tierradentro, he wrote:

This good Dr. Rivet, when will he stop feeling so much foolish resentment towards me? I, who have proven my loyalty and shown him great service. That is life. The only thing that earns the [indecipherable word, BT] of certain men is sweet-talk, cajolery. Much, much more than proven loyalty and still vigorous service (Hernández diary).¹⁷

Whatever the truth of the matter, Hernández expected gratitude that was not forthcoming and considerable tension built up between the two men. But at first the relationship between Gregorio Hernández and Paul Rivet appeared to be functioning well: they co-founded the Instituto Etnológico Nacional in 1941 (Botero and Perry, 9). Very soon, however, Hernández lost prestige and influence. It is important to understand how Hernández's quarrel with Paul Rivet resulted in his gradual alienation from the world of academia.

The new generation of anthropology students saw Dr. Rivet as the serious European scientist while they viewed Hernández as a local amateur. As Marcela Echeverri Muñoz has pointed out, this classification of Hernández as an autodidact revealed the categories constructed by colonialism and anthropology's desire to be perceived as a modern and neutral science (1997, 70). The greatest irony was that Hernández had come back from Europe convinced that these European notions of intellectual superiority were unfounded and that Americans (of the continents of the Americas) were humanity's hope.

Hernández felt relegated in his own country to a subordinate position in the world of ethnology and archaeology. Prior to Rivet's arrival, Hernández was often

characterized as the founder of anthropology in Colombia (Isherwood 1949). Hernández had enjoyed his role as the leader of archaeological and ethnological expeditions. When Rivet arrived on the scene, Hernández probably found it very difficult to defer to him and be in a subordinate role.

Rivet was obviously a man used to complete loyalty and deference. His letter to Maréchal Pétain¹⁸ made it clear that he saw himself as the leader and that he was leaving a considerable 'oeuvre' for humanity with the Museum. Hernández, who had only been a foreign student in Paris, was suddenly transformed into the co-director of the Ethnology Institute in Colombia. This sudden shift in power in the relationship most probably caused the difficulties between Rivet and Hernández. Hernández's alienation from Colombian academia began when he resigned from his academic position as a professor at the Ethnology Institute (Perry, 97). He stated in his letter of resignation that the tensions between him and Rivet were unbearable.¹⁹

Fortunately for Hernández, the United States government invited him to participate in the study and elaboration of the Handbook of South American Indians in 1943, which gave him a respite from his quarrel with Rivet. Hernández published several chapters on the indigenous people of Colombia in the *Handbook of South American Indians* (Steward 1948). He also established lifelong relationships with U.S anthropologists and in particular with the anthropologist, John Rowe, who subsequently came to the Cauca to work.²⁰

Return to Cauca Department: 1946-1950

In 1946 the director of the University of Cauca invited Gregorio Hernández to come to Popayán to found an institute of ethnology affiliated to the University of Cauca. While Hernández was probably thrilled to do work in the Cauca Department, his return there might have felt like being exiled to the provinces. Though Popayán was a charming colonial city with numerous churches, it was far from the centre of intellectual life in Colombia. Hernández's geographical exile translated into an intellectual one; after his quarrel with Rivet, he never recovered his position in Bogotá's intellectual circles and his publications in ethnology progressively diminished. His status as an outsider to Colombian academia led him to concentrate his later years on political activism from within the state.

However, the years in the Cauca were important in that Hernández solidified his commitment to social anthropology and 'applied anthropology' (Perry 1994). At the institute, Hernández formed a new generation of Colombian anthropologists who did their fieldwork in the Cauca and their studies at the University of the Cauca. For instance, Rogerio Velásquez did fieldwork in the Cauca for his degree and went on to become a recognized Colombian anthropologist. Hernández, his students, and Rowe wrote ethnographic diaries that provide a fascinating window into the indigenous communities of the 1940s.²¹ This innovative approach to anthropology with its emphasis on applied anthropology would lead future generations of Colombian anthropologists to widen their focus and to become politically engaged.

Perhaps because his position as an amateur anthropologist, his ethnographic fieldwork and his presence in the Cauca in the 1940s, Gregorio Hernández started to shift his focus from the study of indigenous communities to publicly supporting them. As an indigenista, he had spoken out in favour of indigenous values and cul-

ture, but once he was living in the Cauca he began to take concrete steps to improve the life of the indigenous communities.

His activism did not preclude a certain paternalism. His relationship with the Guambiano painter, Francisco Tumiña known as José Antonio Tumiña, illustrates Hernández's mixture of paternalism and good intentions. Tumiña was invited by the newly founded Ethnological Institute in Popayán to leave his community to teach the Guambiano language and culture to the ethnologists and students in Popayán (*El Liberal*, 1950). To invite an indigenous person to become a university teacher was a very novel idea for the Cauca in the 1940s. Hernández saw the value and richness of Guambiano culture and wanted to make certain that it was preserved and that Colombian anthropologists were aware of it. However, from Hernández's notes we find out that Tumiña was also required to be the general handyman in the offices of the institute and assigned such tasks as sweeping the floor in addition to teaching his indigenous language (1948a). His custodial work reveals the inherently unequal relationship of power that existed between him and Hernández.

Nonetheless, Hernández's patronage extended to Tumiña's artistic endeavours. Hernández and Rowe organized an exhibition of Tumiña's paintings in Bogotá and Popayán. His work was published in a book, *Nuestra gente Namuy Misag: tierra, costumbres y creencias de los indios guambianos* (Tumiña-Pillimue 1949), and was also publicized in the major Colombian newspapers. Tumiña went on to become the first indigenous schoolteacher for the Guambianos.

Hernández was convinced of the importance of bilingual education and of the role that indigenous schoolteachers could play in the maintenance of language and culture. Indigenistas were familiar with these concepts but Hernández was the one to try to implement them in practical ways. Tumiña even travelled to Ecuador to learn about semi-mechanized weaving, his trip funded by a U.S. grant that Hernández had applied for, when Hernández became the director of Indigenous Affairs in 1958.²² Hernández's relationship with Tumiña was to last his lifetime.

Hernández developed relationships with a number of indigenous people during his stay in Popayán. His son Carlos remembered how indigenous people stayed at Hernández's house and shared family meals. Carlos also recalled how his father insisted that the word *indio* never be used by his sons because of the racist way this term is and was used in Colombian society. Hernández's conduct differed sharply from the way most non-indigenous people behaved towards indigenous people in Cauca in the 1940s. The British playwright Christopher Isherwood, who travelled through Cauca in 1947, recounted his surprise when eating in a restaurant located in Silvia near Popayán, where he was accompanied by an Afro-Colombian and an indigenous person. The Afro-Colombian was allowed to sit at the table, but indigenous person was sent to the kitchen (Isherwood 1949).

The period of *La Violencia*, 1948-1953

Jorge Eliécer Gaitán's assassination in April 1948 ushered in the 'official' first stage of what became known as *La Violencia*, a period of civil war during which approximately 200,000 people died. Liberals fought against Conservatives in their pursuit of political power; however, scholars agree that issues of social class and ethnicity intersected with partisan affiliation as the conflict progressed. For intellectuals affiliated with the Liberal Party, this period was especially difficult until 1958,

when an agreement between the Conservative and Liberal parties was reached.

In 1950 Gregorio Hernández and his family left the Cauca after a package containing dynamite had been detonated in front of their home in Popayán. On 12 January at 2:45 a.m., the sound of an explosion roused Hernández and his family.²³ The blast of the bomb lifted the sidewalk and demolished the outside walls of the house, shattering two interior windows. Even though his house was located next to the National Palace and police headquarters, no policeman or other civilians appeared to see what had happened, which astonished Hernández. In his letter denouncing the dynamite attack, Hernández also proclaimed his affiliation to the Liberal Party and declared that as far as he knew he had no enemies in the city of Popayán. The question remains, did Hernández really believe that he had no enemies? If so, naivety must have blinded him to the consequences of his political affiliation during La Violencia. It was not that he was unaware of the violence that was taking place in the countryside; his letters to American colleagues discussed the difficult political situation in Colombia. However, Hernández may have believed that this violence would not touch him personally since he belonged to the elite. His response to the perpetrators of this crime was to characterize them as fundamentally uncivil and lacking in proper education.

Back in Bogotá 1951-1974: activism from within the state

In 1951 Hernández returned to Bogotá. He and his family faced a difficult economic situation, as he could not find work at any university. His son attributed this failure to his Liberal party affiliation. While his party affiliation was an impediment to a teaching position, his quarrel with the disciples of Paul Rivet must have also contributed to his unemployment problems. He was by no means the only Liberal intellectual that had difficulties in finding work: many prominent future anthropologists, such as Virginia Gutiérrez de Pineda, left the country for this reason, and took the opportunity to further their education. Hernández eventually managed to obtain a position as the secretary for the Catholic Colombian Committee of Immigration (interview 1999).

When the Liberals returned to power in 1958 with Alberto Lleras Camargo as president, Hernández was named director of the *Jefatura de Resguardos Indígenas* (Headquarters of Indigenous Resguardos), a section of the Ministry of Agriculture. Hernández was following a pattern that had started with the establishment of the archaeological institute in the 1930s; he sought support from the Liberal state through his personal connections to create institutional support for his work with indigenous communities. Hernández successfully convinced Lleras Camargo of the importance of creating a separate division of Indigenous Affairs that would be part of the Ministry of Government instead of the Headquarters of Indigenous Resguardos. In December 1958, a presidential decree created the Instituto Indigenista Nacional de Colombia / National Indigenous Institute, of which Hernández became head.²⁴ In 1960 the Division of Indigenous Affairs, which now included the Headquarters of Indigenous Resguardos, was transferred to the Ministry of Government.²⁵ The transferral and the new name signified that the national government was giving new importance to indigenous issues.

During his tenure as the director of the Headquarters of Indigenous Resguardos, Hernández brought the OIT (*Organización Internacional del Trabajo* / International Labour Organization) to Colombia.²⁶ The OIT had already established pro-

grammes in Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. It provided technical and financial assistance for Andean governments to 'integrate' their indigenous populations while respecting their culture. The OIT diagnosed the problems of indigenous people in the Cauca as stemming from poverty, lack of access to land, and to the breakdown of traditional ethnic institutions. In consultation with Hernández, the OIT decided to identify those peasants who lived on resguardo land of the Cauca as indigenous or Indian. The innovative and revolutionary aspect of the Andean programme in the Cauca was the idea that the preservation and strengthening of collective ethnic institutions was necessary to promote modernization and integration into the national society.

The role of Hernández here was crucial in that he had persistently maintained that the resguardo was of fundamental importance to indigenous communities. One of the reasons for establishing a territorial basis for an ethnic or indigenous identity was that in the Andean region of the Cauca the boundaries between an indigenous or *mestizo* identity were not always clear. The colour of skin and bloodline could not always be used as markers of ethnic identity. Language was also not a valid marker since some members of indigenous communities no longer spoke their 'native' language.

On 5 November 1959, Hernández drafted a memorandum²⁷ that elaborated the policy the state agency would adopt. According to Hernández, the national government was convinced that the division of resguardos and the allotment of land to the heads of households was leading to the loss of land for most indigenous families. This was a strong statement at a time when the Colombian government was attempting to carry out its agrarian reform. Hernández suggested that this loss of land resulted from the fact that most indigenous rural people did not know the pertinent real estate laws. He depicted non-indigenous people as preying on the indigenous population by obtaining their lands at low prices or, in some cases, violently forcing their removal. As a result, the lands of many indigenous people became concentrated in the hands of the few who engaged in extensive cattle ranching. Hernández suggested that when land was turned over to the cattle ranchers, the indigenous person left without land to cultivate became a 'social problem'. He also pointed out that even if the division of the resguardos did not result in larger concentrations of lands, it led to the transformation of resguardos into *minifundios* or small plots of land that were not sufficiently productive. Furthermore, the division of the resguardo eroded the unity of indigenous rural people and diminished the cooperation of the indigenous community belonging to the resguardo. The resulting loss of respect for the indigenous councils led to 'immoral behaviour' and the disrespect of laws within the resguardo.

In order to understand the significance of his memorandum, it is important to take into consideration the ongoing violence in the countryside. Unlike most of the intellectuals of the time, Hernández did not attribute the violence in the rural regions of Cauca exclusively to class and/or partisan issues. Because of his indigenista background, he continued to argue that indigenous rural people were distinct from the other rural people. Instead of attributing the ongoing unrest in areas where indigenous communities resided to the appeal of Marxism and/or partisan affiliation, he focused on issues of cultural identity.

Hernández played an important role in the creation of a political space for indigenous communities to argue for their rights on a cultural basis and to sidestep in part the hegemony of partisan politics. In other words, indigenous communities,

because they were represented as ‘different’, could argue for alternative visions of Colombia outside the traditional party system without being systematically categorized as subversives.²⁸

In December 1959 the Colombian congress adopted a new law that created an administrative unit in departments that had more than ten *resguardos*. This administrative unit was to enforce Law 89 of 1890 (a law which protected the *resguardos* and indigenous councils) and to support the social and cultural development of indigenous reservations. As the correspondence between Hernández and the employees of these administrative units show, there was a genuine effort to ‘foster’ ethnic identity and to encourage members of the *resguardo* to respect and/or reform their *cabildos* or councils.²⁹

Throughout his tenure as director of the Division of Indigenous Affairs, Hernández argued for the rights of indigenous people and safeguarding of land. He wrote ceaselessly to the authorities of municipalities and provincial governments, reminding them of the rights that the people of the indigenous communities held. He sent representatives from his agency to the Cauca to inform the indigenous people of their rights and to tell them about the national state’s new policy of supporting communal landownership. His government representatives encouraged indigenous communities to elect councils and to organize themselves.

These measures were not always successful and Hernández’s initiatives were sometimes met with distrust and incomprehension. As García has documented in today’s Peru, the relationship between outsiders and the indigenous communities can be fraught with tensions and misunderstandings even when the outsiders are advocating an ethnic agenda and teaching the native language in school, activities that should in theory appeal to the indigenous communities (García 2005). Despite the top-down approach of some activists and their invoking of the state’s power to impose their agenda on these communities, the indigenous ethnic identity in Peru has become of late a more positive one. A similar process occurred in Colombia in the 1960s in the transformation of the conceptualization of indigenous ethnic identity, one in which Hernández played a crucial role.

In the 1960s, Hernández argued for and obtained the entrance of the Summer Language Institute / Wycliffe Bible Church. As David Stoll points out, Hernández defended the Summer Language Institute because he viewed the preservation of indigenous languages as essential in order to ensure the survival of indigenous cultures and because he saw the Protestant missionaries as a counterweight to the overwhelming power of the Catholic Church in the *territorios nacionales* (national territories) controlled by the Catholic missionaries (Stoll 1982, 167). Unfortunately for Hernández, this measure earned him the enmity of his colleagues in anthropology. He was vilified and accused of being an agent for U.S. imperialism. Thus, the last years of his life spent as the director of indigenous affairs were increasingly isolated and lonely. He died in 1973.

A political and discursive space

Though his friendships with prominent Liberal politicians and his relatively privileged position enabled his view of the indigenous people to hold sway while he was in charge of the division of indigenous affairs, his legacy was first and foremost a legacy of ideas and formation of culture. The Colombian state was too weak during *La Violencia* when guerrillas increasingly encroached on the prerogatives of

the Colombian state for Hernández to be able to impose his ideas through governmental representatives. The Colombian state and especially Hernández's division of indigenous affairs was in no position to coerce and force indigenous communities to adopt the line of the state. This was fortunate in the long term because the ideas and concepts that Hernández put forth would later on be adopted, transformed, and fully consented to precisely because the Colombian state had not been in a strong position.

The weakness of the Colombian state had two principal effects. It limited Gregorio Hernández's immediate impact but at the same time it created a political and discursive space for new activists to emerge from the indigenous communities. It also created a precedent in which non-indigenous activists would 'advise' and 'participate' in the formation of the indigenous modern day movement. It would take the dedication and bravery of indigenous leaders and communities to actually implement the state discourse at the local level and to restructure the local power relationships.

From 1958 until his death in 1973, Gregorio Hernández was concerned with activism from within the state. He spent his last 16 years trying to improve the lives of individuals and their indigenous communities. He made two important pragmatic contributions: he suspended the dissolution of *resguardos* and he sent agency representatives of the national government to different departments (where *resguardos* still existed) to initiate and activate collective structures of land and governance. As a result of these two governmental actions and his series of articles in the national press, the Colombian non-indigenous public firmly associated collective landownership with the indigenous people. In the national imaginary, the indigenous person of the Cauca respected the traditional authority of the indigenous council and held the right to collective landownership.

A remarkable man, Gregorio Hernández dedicated himself to bettering the life of others. That he was sometimes patronizing, condescending, and above all a hopeless romantic in his relationship with the indigenous communities is certain, but he never stopped working towards the goal of improving the lives of indigenous people. It is important to understand the various stages of his life and his personal struggle, which led to his exclusion from Colombian academia in the later stages of his life, and to his practice of idealistic activism. This activism led to his importance as a forerunner of the recent successes of the indigenous movement.

* * *

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Notes

1. Pineda estimated the indigenous population to be 603,000, representing 2 per cent of the population. The 1997 Colombian census estimated the indigenous population at 701,680.
2. One of the key actors in the negotiation process between the central state and the indigenous communities was the indigenous self-defence armed movement, Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame, MAQL. See Ricardo Peñaranda 1999.
3. Much of information that I obtained on Gregorio Hernández came from his personal archive located in the Luis Ángel Arango Library in Bogotá, Colombia (Archivo de Gregorio Hernández de Alba). When I first consulted this archive in 1999, it was not completely organized and catalogued. When consulting the archive a second time in 2004, some of the documents had been catalogued. Whenever possible I refer to a document number given by the archive.
4. In 1984, the Colombian anthropologist Nina S. Friedemann put forth the notion of Afro-Colombians' invisibility in a seminal essay, 'Estudio de Negros en la antropología colombiana: presencia y invisibilidad'. Jaime Arocha discussed how the Afro-Colombians' lack of visibility in the context of the Constitution of 1991 affected them politically. I have borrowed this idea of 'visibility' and 'non-visibility' from Arocha and Friedemann.
5. Most of the basic information on Gregorio Hernández's life comes from my two interviews with his son, Carlos Hernández in November 1999. Further bibliographical information is available in Jimena Perry's excellent and path-breaking thesis on Gregorio Hernández.
6. The Sunday edition of *El Tiempo* published various writings of the Bachue movement. See the issues from 15 June 1930, 20 July 1930, and 17 August 1930. My conclusions about the Bachue movement are based on their writings in this paper.
7. Gregorio Hernández, 'Carta a Don Roque Casas, Sección Geográfica Económicas, Contraloría General de la República' Bogotá, 30 June 1948, Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, Bogotá. Also see MSS 1039, Archivo de Gregorio Hernández de Alba.
8. Gregorio Hernández, 'Informe correspondiente a las labores cumplidas en la comisión arqueológica de Tierradentro', (1948) Archivo de Hernández de Alba, MSS 1197.
9. *Jamás hasta ahora me he sentido en ciudad alguna tan extranjero como en esta ciudad limpia, grande, uniformada y militar. Extranjero por la lengua, por el espíritu. Solo. Terriblemente solo, pensando en esta terraza de café de ...* [the word referring to the name of the café is indecipherable, BT]. *En el vaivén de la política europea, en las inconsciencias de estos pueblos civilizados, en la tragedia que se cierne, que ya pesa en el aire y en mi Colombia, mi América salvaje, que aún tiene paz, donde aún se vive libremente sin estorbar, donde aún se tiene sentido de la ética y la moral de los pueblos donde aún se es devoto a una doctrina que se sigue, que se cumple. De izquierda, de derecha, de centro, no importa. Cualquiera que sea se sigue fielmente, noblemente.*
10. Antonio García was a 'popular intellectual' who migrated ideologically from the left side of the Liberal Party to the socialist Party. He also was an indigenista in the 1930s.
11. Diary of Gregorio Hernández, Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango. The quotes and information about his travels in Europe come from the diary. As the diary did not have page numbers, I cannot refer to specific page numbers. *Dos señores de alguna edad y un matrimonio joven de otro compartimiento son invitados a dejar el carro. En el andén les piden sus pasaportes que guarda un celador. Se sientan en un banco. No miran a nadie. No hablan. A las preguntas de los soldados responden secamente. El tren parte. Ellos quedan callados mirándonos seguir. Son Judíos. No pudieron salir de este infierno. Un momento talvez guardaran la ilusión. Pero la última puerta fue cerrada brutalmente. ¿Qué seguirá para ellos? Ojalá sea la muerte. Ah la civilización. Ah la grande Alemania. Ah el delito de nacer en [Europa].* [In the original it reads as Euro crossed out. I have taken the liberty of adding the rest of the word since it is clear that it is what he meant to add.]
12. This did not mean however that Hernández was free of prejudice. He expressed little understanding of the Jewish refugees that boarded his ship from Spain to Colombia. He complained that they ate all the food and monopolized the chairs (Hernández diary).
13. *Desfile manos levantadas, pero no oí ni un grito de entusiasmo ni fe. Tras de la requisición, en la mañana, de todas las casas por donde debían pasar los jefes, habiendo apostado previamente guardias armados en las terrazas y a los balcones, entre dos filas armadas a cada lado, mirando*

- una a las aceras y otra a la calle, pasó el desfile de los jefes, tanques, los cañones, y las boinas rojas. ¿Fue acaso el tiempo gris, o el pensamiento de lo que esto significa para el pueblo español? ¿Fue la idea de que era más útil y más lógica, una fiesta en que el pueblo, en vez de callado y sospechado pudiera reír, cantar, danzar, comer? ¿Fue el recuerdo que en Colombia, mi Colombia he visto jefes de Estado pasearse entre el pueblo sin escolta porque representan su voluntad, laboran por su bien y son amados? No sé que fuera al fin lo que me hizo sentir una tristeza, y terminar este glorioso día de Abril en mi cuarto, leyendo al Inca Garcilazo.*
14. *Tamalitos comidos en la mano, perros calientes, Bacardi, cerveza, y por encima de todo esto la hermosura de la ciudad y la maravillosa impresión que regresando de Europa nos formamos de estar en un pueblo feliz, un pueblo que puede reír y gozar, que come y puede hablar. Ah, la hermosura de la vida americana de América, pueblos libres y en paz, dotados de tantas maravillas por la naturaleza.*
 15. *Al decir lo Indio, expresamos lo Americano. Al despreciar lo indio, menospreciamos lo que debía unir a nuestros pueblos.*
 16. Letter to the Marechal Petain, dated 21 November 1940 by Dr. Paul Rivet. Archivo de Gregorio Hernández de Alba, Bogotá (no page numbers).
 17. *Este buen Dr. Rivet, cuando dejara tanto rancor tonto conmigo. Conmigo que tantas pruebas de adhesión y tan valiosos servicios le he prestado. Lo único que gana [indecipherable] de ciertos hombres es la meloseria, el cepillo. Más mucho más que la lealtad probada y los servicios aún vitales.*
 18. Letter to the Marechal Petain, dated 21 November 1940 by Dr. Paul Rivet. Archivo de Gregorio Hernández de Alba, Bogotá (no page numbers).
 19. Letter to Germán Arciniegas, Minister of National Education, 8 May 1942, Archivo de Gregorio Hernández de Alba, Bogotá. It has also been transcribed by Perry (1994).
 20. Smithsonian Institute Notebooks: unpublished manuscripts of fieldwork. Archivo de Gregorio Hernández de Alba. Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, Bogotá.
 21. Smithsonian Institute Notebooks. Archivo de Gregorio Hernández de Alba, Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, Bogotá.
 22. Fondo Ministerio del Interior, Caja 1581, letter to Humberto Valencia Paz, Jefe Zona Agropecuaria del Cauca Popayán, dated 29 October 1959 from Gregorio Hernández de Alba. Archivo General de La Nación.
 23. Letter from Gregorio Hernández de Alba to Señor Juez, 85 de Instrucción Criminal, dated 16 January 1950. Archivo de Hernández de Alba, Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, Bogotá.
 24. Fondo Ministerio del Interior, Caja 1591, Folder 12356. Copy of Decree.
 25. Fondo Ministerio del Interior, Caja 1591, Folder 12356. Copy of Decree.
 26. Oficina Internacional del Trabajo Programa Ampliado de Asistencia Técnica R.6./OIT/TAP/ Colombia R.6. Informe al gobierno de Colombia sobre el problema indígena en el departamento del Cauca. Encuesta preliminar a la aportación eventual de asistencia técnica dentro del marco del Programa Andino. OIT Ginebra, 1959.
 27. Archivo General de La Nación, Fondo Ministerio del Interior, Caja 1581, Folder 1536.
 28. Some activists and indigenous leaders were harassed, arrested, and tortured by the army and the police (considered as one branch of the state) in the 1970s. However, these actions carried out by one branch of the state were perceived as illegitimate by the other branches of the state such as the National Agrarian Institute and the Division of Indigenous Affairs. Intellectuals such as Victor Daniel Bonilla wrote in the leading newspapers about the arrests and assassinations of indigenous leaders, creating awareness in the public at large of the illegitimacy of such actions.
 29. The correspondence between Hernández and his various representatives is extensive. See Archivo General de la Nación, Fondo Ministerio del Interior, Caja 166 Carpeta 01370 and Caja 1581.

Archives

Archivo de Gregorio Hernández de Alba, Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, Bogotá.
 Archivo General de la Nación, Fondo Ministerio del Interior, Santa Fé de Bogotá.

Interviews

Bogotá, twice in November 1999 with Carlos Hernández, son of Gregorio Hernández de Alba.

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