

Hunting Indians: Globally Circulating Ideas and Frontier Practices in the Colombian Llanos

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At the end of the 1960s, just as anthropologists and clergy were stepping forward to denounce human rights violations against native peoples across the hemisphere, two episodes of violence against the closely related Guahibo and Cuiva peoples of the Colombian Llanos surfaced in the public eye. The first was the December 1967 massacre of sixteen Cuivas at La Rubiera Ranch near the Venezuelan border. The perpetrators' forthright admission of a horrifying ambush and their professed ignorance of both the evil and the criminality of their actions provoked widespread shock and exposed the virulence of racism on the frontier. Then, in 1970, the Colombian military cracked down on a brief armed rebellion by members of a Guahibo agricultural cooperative in Planas, in the department of Meta. A national controversy emerged over charges of extrajudicial killings, torture, and corrupt use of power by the Colombian Administrative Security Department's Rural Security Service of the Eastern Plains (Servicio de Seguridad Rural de los Llanos Orientales, Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad, or DAS Rural) and the VII Brigade of the Colombian Army. By making the La Rubiera massacre and the Planas Affair into public spectacles, Colombian rights advocates were finally able to generate outrage over the violent actions of settler society in indigenous communities.

The La Rubiera massacre and the Planas militarization differ in critical ways. One was carried out by private individuals, the other was backed by state agencies, and the state prosecuted the former for their crimes but exonerated the latter. Yet their origins and relationships to ongoing dispossession of indigenous communities overlapped. The Llanos region of Colombia—the

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broad plains east of the Andean highlands that stretch across the territories of Arauca, Casanare, Meta, and Vichada¹—was self-consciously managed as a frontier. Silvio Duncan Baretta and John Markoff studied Latin American cattle frontiers, including the Llanos, as “regions [that] attracted, produced, and supported specialists in violence” (Baretta and Markoff 1978: 588).

This study of violence on the frontier echoes their conclusion that “centers and peripheries formed each other” (587) by showing how these two violent incidents were grim enactments of frontier-making strategies. By situating these two seemingly contrasting episodes as consequences of frontier making, I identify the role of globally circulating practices, knowledges, and fantasies in reproducing ways of life and ways of death on the frontier. Part One will describe these two incidents and the communities that suffered them. Viewing these atrocities in light of current theories of the frontier opens up a cascade of questions. What ideas made these events possible? How were those ideas embraced in policies conceived in Bogotá and enacted in the Llanos? How were Colombian elites encouraged to import these ideas and practices by their interest in economic accumulation, ties to the United States as a global power, and desire to participate in a global modernity? And what do answers to these questions reveal about the ways multiple frontiers are connected?

As described in Part Two, the Colombian elites who facilitated the Llanos frontier sought to replicate violent overseas models of conquest and settlement like the American West. Within them, violence is structured by strategies, military doctrines, policies, and cultural schema, which are themselves tools for managing and characterizing both the rebel and the savage. The counterinsurgency training received by the Colombian Army was a synthesis of the experience of generations of Indian and colonial wars. Meanwhile, the policies and stories of the settlement frontier cultivate the practice of Indian-hunting even as colonial elites recoil from those who do the actual killing. The long-standing circulation of these practices and ideas interconnected Latin America and the United States in the common project of conquering the indigenous populations within their declared borders, and controlling and profiting from the territories conquered.

From a greater distance, this analysis reveals a world-spanning net of colonialisms² that trade knowledges and practices among frontiers: racial

¹ These territories are presently departments of Colombia, but they had lesser administrative statuses in the past. Casanare was governed as a “national territory” from 1863, took several legal forms including as a province of Boyacá, and in 1953 came under administration by the Jefatura Civil Militar based in Yopal. Separation from Boyacá came in 1973 with the creation of the national intendency of Casanare (“Reseña Histórica,” <http://www.casanare.gov.co/?idcategoria=1175>). The Comisaría Especial of Arauca attained its present boundaries in 1924. Meta was created as a national intendency in 1909; its eastern territory (beyond west longitude 70°) was separated to form the Comisaría Especial of Vichada in 1913 (Rausch 1993: 266, 225, 227).

categorizations, governmental policies, missionary societies and their secular and developmental counterparts, and anthropological and geographical schema for understanding (and often misunderstanding) the nature and actions of indigenous peoples. Together, these elements comprise what Ana Tsing (2003: 5105) calls the “globally traveling project” of frontier making, a toolkit for radically transforming indigenous territories. Part Three looks at the ideas of human inequality, limited moral responsibility, and justifications for violent control of indigenous peoples that came together to authorize, excuse, and shape these violent events. The La Rubiera massacre was made possible by dehumanizing racism and settler masculinity, and by the acceptability of “savage” violence on the “wild frontier.” Ironically, another frontier transformation enabled the courtroom spectacle in which the killers were brought to trial: consolidation of state power over the frontier entailed the assertion of a single legal and moral standard across the entire national territory. Yet even as urban Colombians sought to distance themselves from the “backwardness” of La Rubiera, the highest levels of the Colombian state were incorporating comparable practices into training for counterinsurgency warfare. Despite all denials, frontier violence was, and is, a decidedly modern phenomenon.

PART ONE: THE INCIDENTS IN CONTEXT

At the center of our story are the Guahibo and Cuiva, which are part of a linguistically defined cluster of indigenous communities that also includes the Hitnu and Guayabero (Davis 1988: 17). The Colombian Llanos took part in the kaleidoscopic reshuffling of identities that followed the post-Columbian demographic collapse. In much of the South American interior, these changes hit large, sedentary, and highly organized societies hardest. As Laura Rival (2002: 31) describes for the Napo-Curaray Valley in the Ecuadorian Amazon, “The main river banks became depopulated, ... social units became smaller, more atomized, and dispersed over greater areas, and ... social forms, rituals, and institutions that required large, sedentary populations to exist simply disappeared.”³ In the Llanos, the sedentary Achagua people bore the brunt of missionization, forced labor recruitment for the colonial estates and missions, Spanish slave raids, and associated slaughter. By contrast, the Guahibo “had no strong identity as cultivators to impede their movements,” and “appear to have learned early to keep away from the foreign invaders” (Morey and Morey 1973: 241, 238). The Guahibo thereby made themselves the relative survivors of this historical ordeal, numbering around eighteen thousand in the late

² The colonial situations involved in this exchange include areas of settler colonialism, cattle frontiers (Baretta and Markoff 1978), resource frontiers (Tsing 2003), occupied territories, and traditional overseas colonies of empires.

³ Parallel descriptions are offered by Salomon and Schwartz (1999: 448), and Alexiades (2009: 10–15).

nineteenth century, while the Achagua by and large disintegrated as a people (ibid.: 240).⁴

Jesuit missionaries introduced horses and cattle to the Llanos during the colonial period, leaving behind a new cattle-centered culture of “*llaneros*” (Rodríguez 1992). These local residents of European, American, and African ancestry incorporated Guahibo and Achagua hunting, building, boat-making, and agricultural practices into their livelihood along with elements of native vocabulary and religion (Rausch 2007: 6). In the nineteenth century, some of the Guahibo turned to part-time settlement and farming, thereby replicating the earlier coexistence of indigenous settlers and nomads. Augusto Gómez López describes a division among Llanos indigenous groups by the early twentieth century: The “‘nomadic and savage’ lived in age-old warfare [*guerra secular*] with the colonists while the ‘horticultural and sedentary’ groups ... established relations of disadvantageous interchange with the colonists” and others (1991: 340).⁵ Only at this time did the newly sedentary Guahibo and nomadic Cuiva become distinct peoples. Over time, this division hardened into a sense of fundamental difference.

For reasons I will discuss, tens of thousands of new settlers came to the Llanos in the fifty years following 1920. The new settlers included mestizo migrants seeking new homes, “professional colonists” who established ownership of land solely to resell it, and large proprietors (*hacendados*) who ended up with possession of the vast majority of land.⁶ The massive migration into the Llanos transformed the region to the disadvantage of the indigenous peoples. The colonists’ growing numbers and claims made conflict over territory, if not its violent excesses, inevitable.

La Rubiera: Treachery on the Border

La Rubiera—a recently established cattle ranch in Arauca, located near the Caño Negro River that forms the border with Venezuela—was the scene of the killing of sixteen unarmed Cuivas on 26 December 1967. The tragedy was compounded into infamy when its perpetrators admitted their participation, but claimed ignorance of the illegality of taking Indian lives. In time, the incident would become internationally known through news stories and critical writings on the situation of indigenous peoples in the Americas, all of which invariably emphasized the perpetrators’ position: “We didn’t know that killing Indians was a crime.”

⁴ One reserve for surviving Achagua was created between 1966 and 1984, and housed some 184 people (Gómez López 1991: 257); the Summer Institute of Linguistics estimated their total population at four hundred in 1994 (see Ethnologue entry at http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=aca).

⁵ The translations of this and subsequent Spanish texts are my own, unless otherwise noted.

⁶ Dieter Brunnschweiler calculated that in Meta 393 large cattle ranches (of over 1000 hectares) amounted to 71 percent of agriculturally productive land in 1960 (1972: 40).

It began, however, as a deception in December 1967.⁷ Marcelino del Carmen Jiménez, a nineteen-year-old Colombian ranch hand, told the Cuivas living at Manguito, the ranch of Marcelo Tapias in the Capanaparo region of Venezuela, that they should come across the border and up to the La Rubiera Ranch, where a feast of sweet breads, pastries, rice, and fresh beef awaited them (Jiménez, González Cobreces, Antuko testimony). Jiménez and Anselmo Aguirre Nieves, a fifty-five-year-old animal breeder of Venezuelan nationality, had already agreed to kill the Cuivas (each describes the other as the initiator of the plan; Jiménez, Aguirre testimony). On Christmas afternoon the pair arrived at La Rubiera, where they conversed with ranch manager Luis Enrique Morín. The three circulated the story that Cuivas were coming to steal the cassava and kill the ranch's cattle. However, fellow perpetrator Elio Mercedes Torrealba (a Venezuelan ranch hand) testified that Jiménez had told the La Rubiera ranch hands of his deceptive invitation. The ranch hands organized an ambush, and María Gregoria Nieves López, a thirty-three-year-old mother of three, was to offer a meal to the Cuivas when they arrived (Nieves testimony).

The fateful visit came on 26 December, when eighteen Cuivas—five men, five women, seven children, and one baby—arrived by river and climbed up to the ranch. One of the survivors recalled, “Once we arrived, we wanted to go back, but Marcelino told us we would be expected at the meal” (Ceballos testimony, 335). Upon Morín's orders, Nieves served the visitors knowing full well the conspiracy against them and that her fellow workers waited inside the house with guns, knives, and machetes (Nieves testimony, 315). The visitors spoke with her, asking if sweets and soap were to be given to them. Nieves recounts that she gave no answer. At Jiménez' signal, the six men and one woman emerged and attacked the Cuiva with gunshots, machete blows, and punches.

Just two of the eighteen Cuivas present survived—Antuko and Ceballos Chain, two men delayed at the riverside tying up the group's boats, successfully evaded the attackers and hid among the trees (Martínez 1998: 245).⁸ They

⁷ The following narrative is based on the testimony of participants in and survivors of the massacre. All materials cited form part of Anexo 1 of Gómez López (1991: 294–337), and also appear as Anexo No. 1 of Gómez López (1987), which is both more readable (due to typography) and available online at: <http://www.flacsoandes.org/dspace/bitstream/10469/558/4/TFLACSO-07-1987AJGL.pdf>; and <http://www.flacsoandes.org/dspace/bitstream/10469/558/3/TFLACSO-08-1987AJGL.pdf>. Page numbers cited here are from the former source. The documents are sourced to Expediente La Rubiera, Juzgado Segundo, Ibagué. All but one consist of the testimonies of individuals related to the massacre, identified here by their last names. The “Villamizar filing” is a letter sent on 15 January 1967 by Eloy Villamizar, chief of the Arauca group of the Rural Security Services of the Eastern Llanos, within the DAS Rural, to the judge as a preface to testimony, photographs, and physical evidence. Two other reconstructions were published. One, a piece by Colombian journalist Germán Castro Caycedo (1976), dated 11 May 1972 and filed from Villavicencio, was based on court testimony and interviews of the perpetrators. The other, by Argentine author Tomás Eloy Martínez (1998), was written in 1977 and based primarily on interviews with Cuivas, including the survivors.

witnessed the carnage, and later recalled, “Four of the six [*sic*] women fell dead from gunshots while still at the table; the seven children also passed away [*se apagarón*] there. Only some men were able to run through the patio before falling near the trees” (ibid.: 246).⁹ Both men’s wives were among those massacred, and Ceballos also lost two sisters. In the morning they saw the bodies of the dead carried away attached to burros (Antuko, Ceballos testimony). While the survivors fled, the staff of La Rubiera burned the bodies of those they had killed; María Helena Jiménez recalled that one little girl, still alive, cried out, prompting Elio Torrealba to finish her off with a machete. The ranch hands mixed the bone fragments of their victims with bones of livestock so that no one would detect them (Villamizar filing, 297).

The massacre stands out for its horror, but is also remarkable because it quickly became the subject of a police investigation of genocide¹⁰ and a criminal prosecution for murder. The involvement of the rancher Marcelo Tapias, the priest Gonzalo Cobreces, and the Venezuelan authorities all propelled the serious official reaction. Prior to this, as I will detail, at least a century of mass killings of Guahibo and Cuiva had occasioned little judicial response. La Rubiera’s violence was not an aberration, but rather part of a pattern that requires explanation.

Planas: Counterinsurgency against an Indian Cooperative

During 1970, the Colombian military carried out a series of three operations in the region of San Rafael de Planas, Abariba, and Ibibi, in the northeast corner of the Intendancy (now Department) of Meta. The DAS Rural, infantry, cavalry, and air force were all brought to bear on Guahibo indigenous rebels and their presumed civilian base of support. Ultimately, the armed forces established “absolute control” over Planas, which they declared a military zone (Arango 1970; Pérez Ramírez 1971).

The targets of this mobilization were the Guahibo communities of eastern Meta, including those that had joined a local uprising led by Rafael Jaramillo Ulloa. Until February 1970, Jaramillo had not been a security threat but rather a savvy orchestrator of government resources for the economic and cultural survival of the Planas Guahibos and a co-founder of the Integral Agricultural Cooperative of Planas (Cooperativa Integral Agropecuaria de Planas).

⁸ There are several lists of the victims. Castro Caycedo (1976: 56) names fifteen: Luisito, age twenty; Cirila, forty-five; Chain, nineteen; Doris, thirty; Carmelina, twenty; Guafaro, fifteen; Bengua, fourteen; Aruse, ten; Julio, nine; Aidé, eight; Milo, four; Alberto, three; and Doris’ infant child whose name is not recorded. Antuko’s pre-trial testimony names sixteen: “Luisito, Chain, Ramoncito, ... Guafaro, Luisa, Doris, Bengua, Carmelina, Lilia Quintero. Girls: Carmelina, daughter of Doris; Daisi, daughter of Dionisia and niece of Luisa. Boys: Hiye, Arusi, Alberto Santana, Julio Guamare and Isidoro.”

⁹ Eloy Martínez’s account is unclear as to which of the two offered this narrative.

¹⁰ The subject of the Villimizar filing is “Investigación sobre el genocidio de 16 indios Cuivas perpetrado en la región del Capanaparo (parte colombiana).”

He acted as a sort of practical civics instructor, providing identity cards, teaching about the rights of citizenship, and encouraging formal denunciation of abuses. To facilitate such efforts, he assumed the post of police inspector for San Rafael de Planas, obtained collective title to an indigenous reserve,¹¹ and secured a stream of government support (primarily in the form of loans and training) for the Cooperative and its members (Pérez Ramírez 1971: 163–66; Sosa 2000). The Cooperative became a hub for social development, hosting a health post and a school, banning the sale of liquor, promoting traditional handicrafts, and subsidizing education locally and by sending one student to school in Meta’s capital, Villavicencio.

However, hostility against the cooperative grew as local landowners lost their source of cheap labor and the opportunity to profit by marketing the Guahibos’ crops. In February 1970 the conflict spun suddenly out of control. Marcos Machado, a wealthy landowner, led a band of armed police to the home of the Arteaga family, whom he accused of robbing his cattle and living on his lands, which were said to extend over 70,000 hectares. Unable to escape, Daniel Arteaga, a man in his sixties, was badly beaten with the butts of the attackers’ rifles. On his final trip to Villavicencio, Jaramillo made several unsuccessful attempts to get provincial officials to investigate the attack. Deeply frustrated, he returned convinced of the need to raise a rebellion in arms (Pérez Ramírez 1971: 168–70). The ranchers sought immediate government intervention, and unsurprisingly—given that VII Brigade officers were among the property owners in the area—they rapidly got it.

Counterinsurgency techniques and modern weaponry were deployed against people armed largely with bows and arrows, as well as a limited supply of rifles and revolvers. Though a fog of denunciations, denials, and counter-accusations surround these events, the overall impact on the Guahibos is clear. This was “a military occupation of their territory” that incited fear and flight (Reyes Posada and Chiappe de Reyes 1973: 37). “When the violence began, the people of San Rafael de Planas fled to the forest and left their hamlets abandoned. Then the Army came and occupied some of our *malocas* [large dwellings for about ten families each],” reported local Guahibo spokesman Marcelino Sosa (Castro Caycedo 1971).

A handful of outspoken priests, influenced by liberation theology and encouraged by the Latin American Bishops Conference of 1968, sounded the alarm. On the basis of witness accounts, a self-appointed commission of clergy denounced massacres, unjustified detentions, and the torture of captives, including children, by the Army, the DAS Rural, and white colonists. A

¹¹ The Indigenous Reserve of Awalibá, San Rafael and Ibibi, was formally proposed by the INCORA land reform agency in Resolution 205 of 16 December 1968, and approved in Ejecutiva No. 059 on 24 February 1969. The territory was transformed into a Resguardo of 37,925 hectares on 28 January 1991 (Rojas Moreno et al. 1998: 58).

delegation of officials, soldiers, and the media visited the region and debated the situation. Colombia's National Congress even held hearings on the issue. The Latin American Peasants' Federation filed a complaint with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on 26 August 1970 (Davis 1988: 21; Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 1973).¹² Also that August, the national government's Coordinator of Indian Affairs issued accusations of torture, murder, and government collaboration with private violence (Davis 1988: 24–25). The inspector general (Procurador General) accused soldiers of perpetrating nine cases of personal injury, twelve cases of torture, and seventeen homicides (Pérez Ramírez 1971: 182). The following year, famed documentarians Marta Rodríguez and Jorge Silva released their film *Planas: Testimonio de un Etnocidio* (1971). Despite all of this, the charges leveled by the inspector general did not proceed to trial, and other than public scandal, the perpetrators faced little in the way of accountability.

A year and a half after the military intervened, thousands of Guahibos had yet to return to their homes. Their electrical generating plant had been taken by the police to a neighboring white community; the Cooperative was nonfunctional due to fear; and the school was shuttered (Castro Caycedo 1971). In 1973, sociologists Alejandro Reyes Posada¹³ and Clemencia Chiappe de Reyes found that barely five thousand Guahibos remained in the area, with each settlement holding a limited area, “surrounded almost completely by [mestizo] colonists” (1973: 61).

PART TWO: IDEAS AND PRACTICES OF FRONTIER EXPANSION

Theorizing the Frontier

Following in the footsteps of Jane Rausch, Catherine LeGrand, and Augusto Gómez López, this article examines the Llanos as a frontier. Frontier interactions have been central to the lives of many stateless and indigenous peoples over the past five centuries. It is crucial to understand the material and intellectual practices of frontier making in order to explain the violence faced by indigenous peoples in the course of these encounters. Classical definitions describe the frontier as a place where an expanding polity and society encounters people and landscapes it deems “wild” or “savage.” A recent anthology on Latin American frontiers problematizes these terms: “Frontiers ... are certainly not boundaries between civilization and wilderness, because those are nothing more than the value judgments of the conquerors.” Rather than bypass

¹² The case resulted in a flurry of administrative requests, but no final determination. Colombia maintained throughout that the charges against the DAS Rural and the Army were unfounded and that their actions were a legitimate response to armed rebellion. Once four internal government reports on the matter were turned over in 1973, the commission let the matter drop (Davis 1988: 17–40; Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 1973).

¹³ Posada was the Coordinator of Indigenous Affairs mentioned earlier.

“savagery” and “wildness,” I will instead focus on these terms and the ways “politics contended for ... the right to define [these] categories of people and to determine their access to ... resources” (Guy and Sheridan 1998: 10).

Studies of the frontier remain deeply marked by the thesis advanced by Frederick Jackson Turner (1920 [1893]). Turner proposed that mass participation in a settlement frontier came to define the United States, resulting in a democratic culture deeply distinct from that of its European progenitors. For Turner, the common conditions of “free land, opportunity, and common danger from Indians” (in David Weber’s [1986: 66] paraphrase), were more influential than preexisting cultural differences in shaping the common character of settler society. By contrast, historical studies in Latin American countries tend to put inequalities of class and hierarchies of race in a more central role. Since Spanish American societies simultaneously subordinated and included indigenous peoples, they cannot be described as an external factor that brought settler society together. Instead, Latin American historians are obliged to *narrate* the process of creating, maintaining, and profiting from this subordinated inclusion. The creation of racial hierarchies that subordinate indigenous peoples is at the heart of what Aníbal Quijano termed the “coloniality of power” (2000). Studies of Latin American frontiers also emphasize cross-cultural interaction, exchange, and missionization in places fully controlled by neither settlers nor indigenous peoples, places “where imperial or, later, national power was too weak to maintain stable patterns of coerced labor” (Guy and Sheridan 1998: 10).¹⁴ Such zones of instability, on the frontiers of most South American countries in the mid-nineteenth century, were not to last. In the late 1800s, power dynamics shifted in favor of settler societies; across Latin America, writes Erick Langer, “The story was one of invasion, conquest, killing, and forced integration of indigenous laborers into the national economies” (2002: 53).¹⁵ Colonization replaced coexistence in the Llanos and elsewhere.

In work spanning four decades, historian Jane Rausch has studied the Llanos region of Colombia through the optic of the frontier (1984; 1993; 1999; 2008; 2009). Her studies have examined the multiple institutions—Spanish and Colombian governments, “missionaries, municipalities, landlords, and *llaneros*”—on the settler side of the line that marks their encounter with indigenous cultures (2003: 253). Speaking self-critically, Rausch declared, “this approach is clearly unsustainable” and must be complemented by anthropological and historical consideration of native actions, choices, and cultures (ibid.). Augusto Gómez López’s hundred-year regional history, *Indios*,

¹⁴ Recent studies of Latin American frontiers are collected in Weber and Rausch (1994); Guy and Sheridan (1998).

¹⁵ For a broader survey of lowland South America, see Hill (1996), particularly his summary at 757–59.

colonos y conflictos (1991), offers a more balanced look at interethnic relations on the Llanos frontier, drawing on documentary sources, quantitative material, and interviews. Rather than the construction of the settler society, Gómez López emphasizes the “general confrontation between different and exclusive economic and sociocultural orders” in which the “progressive consolidation of [settler] occupation on the basis of private property” disarticulated Guahibo and Cuiva ways of life (ibid.: 261).

While Turner, Rausch, and Gómez López conceptualize the frontier as a primarily material process, Ana Tsing looks beyond demography and settlement to the social designation of a territory as wild, and the authorization of equally wild violence and extraction within it. In her work on logging in Kalimantan, Indonesia, Tsing reframes the frontier in anthropological terms: “By frontier I don’t mean a place or even a process but an imaginative project capable of molding both places and processes.” She reconceptualizes the resource frontier as a traveling bundle of practices and imaginaries, from the cowboy mystique to the evolutionary models of anthropology (2003: 5102; 2005).

For Tsing, frontier practices always interlock with the economic agendas of the metropolitan societies from which settlers come. On resource frontiers, the idea of wildness is conjoined with property, possession, and extraction. These knowledges and practices are tools that serve a purpose: “How does nature at the frontier become a set of resources? How are landscapes made empty and wild so that anyone can come to use and claim them?” (2005: 30). Rather than places of distant isolation and primal savagery, frontiers must be studied in their articulation with metropolitan societies and the ways people in them carry out accumulation by dispossession on behalf of larger circuits of capital and commerce (ibid.: 59–77; Harvey 2005: 137–82).

Local actors import and recreate frontier-making ideas and practices in new sites, deploying and remaking them for their own ends. Colonizing societies eagerly copy and share this bundle of ways of acting, of governing, of organizing commerce, of extracting wealth, and of understanding both settlers and indigenous peoples, molding each new frontier in the image of its predecessors. Just as capitalist accumulation has proved to not be primitive (in the sense of only occurring at the beginning of capitalism), a frontier can be re-made, even reapplied to the same territories and peoples by rebranding them as wild, uncivilized, and available to be dispossessed. The knowledges, narratives, and fantasies within the bundle include the redefinition of locals as a savage Other, the creation of a space of unrestrained settler violence, and the identity formation of risk-taking male entrepreneurs, among other characters, stories, and techniques.¹⁶ Critically for the violent episodes examined

¹⁶ On frontier fantasies, see Forrest (2011), and Tsing (2005).

here, these traveling ideas motivated, organized, and justified violence against those defined as wild Others.

Beyond specifying the transnational circulation of frontier ideas, I want here to amplify our theoretical grasp of the frontier. Where Tsing stresses the shared “wildness” of peoples and animals on the frontier, I emphasize the racialization of indigenous peoples and animalization of hunter-gatherers (or putative hunter-gatherers) as pests. Where Turner speaks of a “regression” of frontiersmen to primitive life ways and warfare, I see a careful organization of permissible settler and state violence on the periphery. To make a frontier is to reproduce forms of knowledge on new terrain. The knowledges organizing the Llanos frontier included anthropologies of indigenous inferiority, a moral geography that permits excessive violence against certain peoples in certain places, and techniques and doctrines of counterinsurgency warfare.

The Llanos Frontier as an Aspiration of Colombian Elites

Across many decades of frontier expansion, Colombian officials and elites envisioned the colonization of outlying territories as a step towards becoming a fully modern nation. They defined the modernity they sought in terms of racial whitening, economic vitality, and integration into global circuits of capitalism and consumption (Appelbaum 2003: 13). Elite thinkers looked to colonization to achieve these goals by spreading relatively white populations into indigenous areas, where they would produce and export new products and thereby create new wealth. Their aspirations had a competitive aspect: Colombia and its various regions were participants in a race to become more modern than their neighbors.¹⁷ While seeking to bring the country into the future, this quest also revives past episodes of violence as models for establishing control over the frontier. In the remainder of this Part Two, I will show how settler violence against indigenous people and counterinsurgency are connected to both government policy in Bogotá and wider circulations of frontier practices.

Colombian frontier managers sought to draw on models of settler colonialism in practice elsewhere. In internal correspondence in 1910, a frontier government official listed a global set of examples: “The Honorable Minister knows that countries such as Argentina, Mexico, Congo and Australia owe their growth and advancement first of all to the rural colony.” The letter continued with a request for arms shipments citing the “entirely savage state” shared by such places (quoted in Gómez López 1991: 342). In the 1920s and 1930s, the influential *Centenarios* group of intellectuals and politicians portrayed the Llanos frontier as an arena for new wealth and modernity. The Llanos’

¹⁷ These Colombian aspirations were paralleled by other actual and attempted emulations across Latin America. For a description of how Argentina modeled itself as “a truly successful frontier settler economy,” see Salvatore (2008). For Costa Rican aspirations to copy the Argentine and Texas cattle frontiers, see Edelman (1992).

“immensity ... awaits the arrival of the conquistadors, that is to say, of ourselves,” wrote *Centenario* Luis Eduardo Nieto Caballero (in Rausch 1999: 32).

Motivated by these visions, Colombian state planners worked to enable new colonization in the Llanos. The cattle frontier underwent rapid change as a new reliable road connection from Bogotá to Villavicencio connected the Llanos to densely populated central Colombia. New infrastructure, in-migration of those displaced by La Violencia,¹⁸ the concession of *tierras baldías* (nominally government-held lands on the frontier) as land grants, and a favorable market in commodities (most importantly, meat, cacao, and coffee) all attracted new settlers to the region. Meta’s population skyrocketed from 11,671 to 51,674 in the two decades from 1918 to 1938 (Rausch 2007: 104); and nearly doubled from 1955 to 1964, when it reached 165,530 (Brunnschweiler 1972: 19). These arrivals pushed the Guahibo out of some lands they had long inhabited, such as the western Meta river valleys. Simultaneously, modernizing Colombian elites (encouraged by the internal security doctrine) moved to extend national government control over the entire territory, bringing police, judicial, and military functions into the previously indirectly governed region. Frontier making was also advanced by private actors, including settlers, land speculators, oil corporations, and missionaries.¹⁹

Renewed Frontier Violence

During this period of expansion, writes Augusto Gómez López, “The hunting and extermination of the Indians had a resurgence, especially directed towards the nomadic groups” (1991: 278–29). Unlike in previous centuries, these attacks were not designed to recruit a slave labor force, but rather “to occupy land, establish crops and found ranches.” Both ranchers and officials “armed flying squads of peons to hunt the indigenous with the pretext of defending the herds” (Barbosa Estepa 1992: 57). Local officials often headed the “hunting parties” and affirmed the existence of “express orders from the Colombian government for the extermination of the Guahibos” (Oficio 1913, quoted in Gómez López 1991: 344–45). Gómez López, Reyes Posada and Chiappe de Reyes (1973), and Barbosa all concur that indigenous

¹⁸ La Violencia was a mid-century civil conflict that claimed some two hundred thousands lives. Its character in the Llanos had more populist features than elsewhere, as I discuss briefly below.

¹⁹ A fuller exploration of the Planas Affair, perhaps with access to oral historical or military sources, could clarify the roles of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (a U.S.-based missionary organization) and its local representative Sophia Muller, and the influence of oil prospects. The Institute’s radio and air transport networks, contract with the Colombian government, and influential military contacts made it into “a circumspect, autonomous arm of the [Colombian] state” (Stoll 1981: 66). Muller, a rival and opponent of Jaramillo and the Cooperative, was expelled from Guahibo territory after the crackdown. Bernard Arcand reports secondhand that “the SIL ... is said to have been eager to provide scouts and interpreters for the army during its repression” at Planas (1981: 83). The documents I consulted in my research add nothing to the suspicions raised by him, Stoll, and Colby and Dennett (1995: 392–95).

communities' practical use of desired lands and willingness to defend them motivated the ranchers' violence.

Frequently, attacks on indigenous people were not so much warfare as massacres, carried out as the literal hunting of men, women, and children. To engage in such a hunt was known by the local terms *guahibiar* and *cuiviar*, depending on the "game" of the murders. The practice of hunting Indians gained national visibility in José Eustasio Rivera's pseudo-documentary novel *La vorágine* (1924; translated as "The Vortex," 1935), whose narrator travels the Llanos. There he encounters both ranchers and Guahibos, declaring the latter "primitive, nomadic peoples [who] have neither gods nor heroes nor country, neither past nor future" (1935: 141).²⁰ These human hunts attracted the outraged attention of visitors, foreign writers, and government officials visiting the region, as in this letter sent by military officer Buenaventura Bustos in 1912: "The 'civilized' decimate them with bullets and pursue them without mercy, wheresoever they are, because they have an intimate conviction, and this they say without Christian shame, that they can murder savages as if they were killing beasts. Such iniquity ... has a place there because perhaps there is no law which protects the savages" (in Gómez López 1991: 343). Whatever the character of denunciations in Bogotá, local residents saw the hunts as state-approved, if not official policy.

Reported massacres of Guahibo date back to 1785, and *llaneros* raided nomadic Guahibo communities for slaves in the nineteenth century. In 1870, following Indian raids which destroyed the settlement of Manare, Venezuelan *hacendado* Pedro del Carmen Gutiérrez orchestrated a massacre by inviting 250 Guahibos to a feast, during which 243 were killed (Arcand 1972b: 9; Rausch 1993: 209–10). From that time up to the La Rubiera massacre, the record of sporadic mass killings of Guahibo and Cuiva is unbroken.²¹

For the Cuiva, these attacks were a recurrent horror. Ethnographer Bernard Arcand details several accounts, including one in Cravo Norte on 20 July 1966, when six white settlers opened fire as they were welcomed to a neighboring Cuiva settlement. After the shooting, settlers set alight Cuiva dwellings and butchered the corpse of a murdered man who had been too crippled to flee their attack (Arcand 1972a: 105–7; see also Arcand 1981).²² In 1972,

²⁰ A description of *La Vorágine* appears in Wylie (2009). María Mercedes Ortiz (2005) discusses its portrayal of the Guahibo. It illustrates violence against them, but it embraces stereotypes, including of indigenous people as pests, and provides an unsympathetic picture of their bodies and lives. For instance, it describes elder women as "naked, old and withered, repulsive" and "like so many mummified gorillas" (Rivera 1935: 137).

²¹ For a lengthy review of deadly violence by settlers against indigenous peoples in the Llanos, see Gómez López (1991: 342–63).

²² There was a police response to the Cravo Norte killing, but the killers were released "for lack of evidence" (Gamma IV Press 1973).

Arcand observed, “In the last twenty years, everyone has seen either a friend or a close relative being killed by the whites” (1972a: 106).

The Guahibos and Cuivas had limited options in the face of this violence. Mobility was an advantage for defense and they knew how to survive through hunting and gathering, but they were forced to cut back on their nomadic way of life as resources became scarce. Some spent time working for settler farms and ranches, others engaged in trade in animal pelts. The climate of violence and disempowerment left them vulnerable to fraud, abuse, and unfavorable terms of trade. The Planas agricultural cooperative and the Cuivas’ working relationship with sympathetic rancher Marcelo Tapias illustrate the kinds of survival strategies that resourceful indigenous communities turned to in this difficult period.

Counterinsurgency in Colombia

The final contribution of Colombian government policy to frontier making was deployment of the military in domestic operations. The period known as “La Violencia” in Colombia (primarily from 1948 to 1953, but persisting afterward) pitted Liberal and Conservative Party affiliates in a violent conflict that is usually remembered as a fratricidal disaster at the national level. In the Llanos, however, guerrilla movements had the flavor of a peasant uprising rather than a partisanship gone awry. In 1952 and 1953, bands of Liberal guerrillas in the llanos coalesced behind a revolutionary “Second Law of the Plains” seeking an egalitarian society with broad access to land (Gilly 1965: 160–64; Palacios 2006).

Amid La Violencia, parts of the Colombian military moved to intervene and reorient the armed forces toward the goal of militarily defeating Liberal-affiliated guerrillas and other armed opposition groups. Colonel Gustavo Sierra Ochoa formulated a counter-guerrilla doctrine based on small, mobile units, “total control of the civilian population,” and “control of food” (quoted in Nieto Ortiz 2010: 50).²³ The Vargas Battalion, co-founded by Sierra Ochoa and Major Eduardo Roman Bazurto, trained paramilitary units in four towns across Meta (ibid.). However, General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla took power in a coup in June 1953, and thousands of guerrillas surrendered their arms in a government-backed amnesty shortly thereafter (Palacios 2006: 160–63; Santos and García Villegas 2001: 234–35). Sierra Ochoa’s vision was temporarily shelved, while its author was elevated to governor of Caldas Department. Roman Bazurto retired to live as a rancher, organized armed “self-defense units,” and successfully pressed for the creation of a new mounted force of the National Police, the DAS Rural (Ramsey 1997a: 115; *El Tiempo* 2003).

²³ Sierra Ochoa published his vision as *Las Guerrillas en los Llanos Orientales* (1954).

As was the case for the Centenarios' drive to open the Llanos, the Colombian military's reorientation towards counterinsurgency followed foreign models, particularly those outlined by the United States. These efforts were shaped with the help of the government of John F. Kennedy, who framed his presidency in terms of a "New Frontier," projecting the narrative of U.S. westward expansion onto new arenas. One face of the New Frontier was the Army Special Forces, whose troops conducted, and prepared allied militaries for, counterinsurgency. These "Green Berets," favored by the president, were steeped in "the resonant images of American frontier mythology: the adaptation of a few brave individuals to a wilderness to redeem it from savagery" (Hellmann 1997: 141). In Latin America, the Kennedy administration trained and equipped national militaries behind the mission of "internal security": eliminating domestic insurgents rather than confronting external enemies (U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff 1961; Chomsky 1996: 57–61).²⁴

The U.S. military establishment compiled knowledge from a series of frontier and colonial conflicts under the broader category of *special warfare*. At the newly upgraded Special Warfare Center at Fort Bragg, in North Carolina, Green Berets were trained on the United States' Indian Wars. Military instructor Lieutenant Colonel Donald V. Rattan carefully compared General George Crook's 1871 campaign to "subdue and effectively rule the Apache Indians," concluding: "The current USA [Command and General Staff College] antiguerrilla doctrine and the methods used by General Crook are virtually identical. If these methods worked against such a foe as the Apache, they will work as well against any known present-day guerrilla force" (Rattan 1960: 23, 27).

Colombia adopted United States policy, priorities, strategies, and military skills through the tight military-to-military connections that had been built and managed by the United States since 1939. Internal security was the watchword of the Colombian Special Survey Group (1959–1960), and became the sole focus of the rapidly expanding U.S. Military Assistance Program for Colombia in 1961 (U.S. Army. [Deputy Chief of Staff for Military Operations] [1965]: 24; tab E, page 2, hereafter cited as "Colombia File"). A CIA Special Survey Team headed by Brigadier-General William P. Yarborough brought U.S. counterinsurgency strategies to Colombia in February 1962.²⁵ Their principal hosts were the units formed by Sierra Ochoa and Roman Bazurto, the "early soldier innovators" of Colombian counterinsurgency (Ramsey 1997a: 114). Yarborough's team concentrated its efforts on the recently formed VII

²⁴ U.S. military assistance to Latin America, previously focused on traditional defense, had begun to shift to this mission under President Eisenhower in 1960, partially in response to the Cuban Revolution. However, several scholars have argued that Kennedy's role was transformative (e.g., Rabe 1999: 7, 127–31).

²⁵ Yarborough was commander of the Special Warfare Center at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

Brigade in Villavicencio²⁶ and its allies in the plainclothes cavalry (“Rurales”) of Colombia’s secret police, the DAS (Colby and Dennett 1995: 391–95)—precisely those forces later implicated in the Planas Affair. Later that year, the Colombian military translated the U.S. Army Field Manual on irregular warfare (1961; translation, Colombia. Ministerio de Guerra 1962), which “became the operative model for confronting proto-communist guerrillas” (Nieto Ortiz 2010: 132). Both the manual and the survey team urged soldiers to regard “the civilian population as one of the principal objectives of irregular warfare” (Colombia. Ministerio de Guerra 1962: 79, quoted in Nieto Ortiz 2010: 133). The methods, essentially those deployed in Planas, were described as follows: “The close relationship between the civil population and the irregular force may demand enforcement of stringent control measures. In some cases it may be necessary to relocate entire villages, or to move individuals from outlying areas into population centers. It may be necessary to relocate ... those who are hostile and can evade control” (U.S. Army 1961: 14).

The use of open warfare in rural areas combined with the concentration of a hostile population within controlled, militarized spaces (“strategic hamlets”) was a legacy of a series of frontiers, handed down from early New England colonies to the American West to the Philippines and now to Colombia and Vietnam (Colby and Dennett 1995: 358–59; Drinnon 1980: 368–69). The Indian Wars and their analogues around the world became the textbook examples for counterinsurgency. In doctrine and practice, counterinsurgency conflated the savage Indian, the traitorous rebel, and the subversive communist. Where Native Americans who did not submit to being contained on reservations had been termed “hostiles,” troops in the Philippines and Vietnam (and more recently, Iraq and Afghanistan) called opposition-controlled areas “Indian country” (Drinnon 1980: 368–69; Dunbar-Ortiz 2004; Painted Crow 2007). The major innovation of the 1960s was to systematically train conventional armies in guerrilla-style, irregular warfare, a move with precedents in American-occupied Philippines, British-occupied Malaya, and French-occupied Indochina and Algeria (McClintock 1992: 214–29). In Planas, these techniques would come full circle and be deployed upon indigenous communities seen as a communist threat.

PART THREE: THE MORAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE FRONTIER: FROM INDIAN WARS TO COUNTERINSURGENCY

Practices of frontier management, whether massacres, enslavement, or missionization, presume a conception by the dominant society of the kind of humanity indigenous peoples possess. These anthropologies, whether popular or

²⁶ The VII Brigade began operating on 1 August 1958, based in Villavicencio (<http://www.cuartadivision.mil.co/?idcategoria=204168>). It incorporated the Vargas Battalion, which had already been focused on counter-guerrilla operations since the height of La Violencia.

scientific, place conceptual limits on the kinds of relationships that are possible with native peoples. There is also a geographical component to these ideas, delimiting “wild places” in which severe violence can legitimately be deployed and lawless gains made legal. Frontier making involves, then, the creation, reproduction, and fabrication of anthropological and geographical knowledge; that is, of ideas about people and places that allow frontier colonization to proceed in a new setting. As Tsing theorizes: “Built from historical models of European conquest, *frontiers create wildness* so that some—and not others—may reap its rewards.... They confuse the boundaries of law and theft, governance and violence, use and destruction” (Tsing 2005: 27, my emphasis). In this part of the article, I relate Planas and La Rubiera to the narratives of wild places and wild peoples that circulate as a colonizing society considers, invests in, and militarizes a frontier.

Scholars and critics of colonialism have long examined the establishment of distinctions in the moral worth of the colonizer and colonized. Recent comparative work on the English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese colonial ventures in the Western Hemisphere has emphasized commonalities in drawing these distinctions, among other cross-cultural similarities (Elliott 2006; Seed 2001). Moreover, the foundational role of these distinctions in the emergence of the social construction, and later the scientific discourse of race has been widely explored (Quijano 2007; Silverblatt 2004). Patricia Seed argues, “The source of this unmistakably delineated boundary between Europeans and Indians was the originally Christian belief in the moral demarcation isolating humans from animals,” although Englishmen and Iberians “interpreted the essence of human (as opposed to animal) status in culturally distinct terms” (Seed 2001: 116). Colonizers found “savagery”—understood by Englishmen as reliance on hunting and by the Spanish as “cannibalism, human sacrifice, sodomy, and worship of idols”—everywhere in native societies, even where no evidence for these traits existed. Seed traces the persistence of such foundational fictions in colonial societies’ perceptions of native peoples to economic interest: “Nomads could lose their land under English rules, and idolaters and pagans could be deprived of their rights to minerals and labor under Iberian conventions” (ibid.: 115). Colonial societies reified and biologized these distinctions into racism against indigenous peoples (Martinot 2003: 12, 20–74).

In the Llanos, the racial distinction between settlers, on one hand, and Guahibo and Cuiva, on the other, once centered on open denials of Indian humanity. This attitude could be seen in the aphorism, *el indio no es gente, ni el casabe es pan* (The Indian is not a man, nor is *casabe* bread).²⁷ A DAS Rural officer called upon to arrest perpetrators of massacres in the region characterized them in this way: “The Indian is immoral, lazy, brave and savage....

²⁷ *Casabe* is an unleavened bread made from cassava flour.

Everyone knows that an Indian is an Indian. That they kill and rob the cattle of the colonists. The Indians need help, but they don't know how to do anything" (DAS Rural Chief in Cravo Norte, quoted in Gamma IV Press 1973). Colonel José Jaime Rodríguez, who headed the VII Brigade at the time of Planas, categorically denied the credibility of Indian witnesses to abuse because "Indians are liars by nature" (Arango 1970). As we will see, settlers often (mis)interpreted indigenous actions in terms of animal-like instinct rather than human strategic choices.

However, these anthropologies of colonial difference are insufficient on their own to organize the process of conquest and territorial acquisition. For this, the moral and racial boundary between colonizer and colonized must be complemented by the right of the former to cross into the territory of the latter and exercise violence upon them. The usual moral and legal restrictions applying to civil life, and even those governing warfare, have to be relaxed or escaped in the context of frontier colonization. One approach is to naturalize the violence of settlers as a kind of "reversion" to savagery. In Turner's story of the U.S. frontier, "The wilderness masters the colonist." He names the life settlers lead, and the violence that settlers do, as the product of Indian culture and the land itself: "It [the wilderness] strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the moccasin. It puts him in the log cabin of the Cherokee and Iroquois and runs an Indian palisade around him. Before long ... he shouts the war cry and takes the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion" (1920 [1893]: 4).

This arrangement creates a third term beyond the civilized colonist and savage colonized: a savagely violent colonizer who does the work of acquiring territory. An equivalent role is played by the counterinsurgent fighter who allegedly emulates combat without restraint, "adopting the insurgent enemy's tactics while abhorring 'his' supposed lack of moral scruples" (Lane 2008: lxv). We can see this figure in the self-fashioning writings of the conquistadors, and later the militiamen of the Indies.²⁸

Just as Turner's thesis spoke to a defining narrative in U.S. culture, Colombians continued to see the conquest as a model for their frontier expansions. In the investigations of La Rubiera and Planas, we will see how Colombians and Americans continued to see frontier regions as experiencing and reliving a violent past, where the presumed vulnerability of life and savagery of the enemy justified murderous behavior. This combination of an anthropology of inequality and a geography of immorality keeps "savage" peoples on the distant edges of state control subject to direct violence impermissible elsewhere, and impermissible when done to others.

²⁸ For a representative example, see Bernardo de Vargas Machuca's 1599 *The Indian Militia and Description of the Indies*, which was described in its recently published English translation as "the first known manual of counterinsurgency, or anti-guerrilla warfare" (Lane 2008: xi).

In what follows, I delve into these anthropologies and geographies of the frontier, with an emphasis on the *misunderstandings* generated by these schemas for knowledge about the world. I consider, in turn: how the animalization of Cuiva and Guahibo as cattle-destroying pests occluded the strategic nature of their actions; how the perpetrators of the La Rubiera massacre had more complicated motives than their defense suggested; how the narrative of a swashbuckling frontier elides the shared outlook with metropolitan elites; and how counterinsurgency's conflation of the Indian, rebel, and communist exacerbated the violence in Planas.

Controlling Invaders and Hunting Pests

The idea that the indigenous “kill and rob the cattle of the colonists” because “an Indian is an Indian” is a perfect illustration of how racialized systems of knowledge produced cross-cultural misunderstanding. In fact, cattle raiding in the Llanos was far from an instinctual process. Víctor Daniel Bonilla describes a long period of coexistence, intermarriage, and hospitality between at least some *llaneros* and their indigenous neighbors under the Law of the Llano, promulgated by Simón Bolívar in the early 1800s. Within this understanding of customary law, cattle were marked by brands (which the indigenous people largely respected), and no fences were placed upon the savanna (Bonilla 1972: 65–67; Rausch 1999: 150–51). The twentieth-century wave of new ranches and herds disrupted this equilibrium in Arauca, Casanare, and Meta. The new large-scale trade contrasted with the pre-existing *llanero* way of life,²⁹ and came at the expense of bloody conflict with indigenous populations (Gómez López 1991). Augusto Gómez López writes of the disastrous consequences for the Guahibo and Cuiva: “The advance of men and of cattle ... imposed ever more restrictions on the spatial mobility of nomadic groups, whose adaptive and reproductive systems demanded seasonal migration.... The colonizing advance progressively impeded native access to zones of hunting and fishing. The resulting shortage was resolved by the hunting of [wild roaming] cimarrón cattle, as well as by assaulting the herds” (1991: 341).

Ranchar Julio Enrique Pérez Pinto recounted these raids in 1968: “The various tribes—that is the fierce ones, for there are also tame ones—kill cattle in quantities many times greater than they can carry and consume, leaving the cattle crippled³⁰ without even touching them” (quoted in *ibid.*: 275). Gómez López's explanation for this is ecological and territorial: “The advance of extensive cattle ranching constituted a threat to the reproduction

²⁹ Adolfo Rodríguez distinguished between traditional *llaneros*, who were “working the Llano” through environmentally situated, small-scaled cattle herding, and new methods of “working the herd (*trabajo de Hato*),” in which cattle are raised for outside consumption to the detriment of the environment (1992: 82–83).

³⁰ It is unclear whether the Gómez's transcription *desagarretadas* means *desjarretadas* (crippled, hamstrung) or *agarrotadas* (stiff).

of hunter gatherers,” who responded with hostility. “Consequently, the nomad assaults were not solely for the purpose of capturing cattle for consumption, but rather, more for the goal of destroying the herds that were occupying their territories” (ibid.: 341–42).

In many settlers’ eyes, though, this purposeful defense of territory was instead “the useless and absurd waste of their most precious good” (Ortiz 2005: 174). In testimony and through Rivera’s *La Vorágine* they railed against this “senselessness,” describing it as the irrational natives’ instinctive predation of cattle. Luis Enrique Morín, who orchestrated the ambush at La Rubiera asserted, “For me, Indians are animals like deer or iguanas, except that deer don’t damage our crops or kill our pigs” (*New York Times* 1972). Many settlers, wrote ethnographer Bernard Arcand, “openly state their conviction that the Indians are more animals than human” (1972b: 20). According to Marcelino Sosa, a Guahibo from Planas, settlers labeled their indigenous neighbors “lazy, brutes, irrational, savages, filthy, dishonest, etc.” (2000: 59).

Still, settler violence is not reducible to their “ignorance” of the humanity of the Guahibo and Cuiva. Aspects of human interaction were not absent, but rather *denied* by perpetrators of the massacres. First, the *llanero* culture had come out of a history of racial integration, of sexual and social mixing. Second, the victims of the massacres were often, as at La Rubiera and Cravo Norte, well known to the perpetrators. Indigenous people and settlers conducted business, arranged labor, conversed, and became lovers. In Cravo Norte, the creole and mestizo killers would be welcomed because of longstanding relations of employment and seeming sympathy (Arcand 1981). Third and finally, the “herd-destroying menace” trope was applied to all Indians as a race. The killers at La Rubiera could therefore offer this justification to explain the killing of known, invited Guahibo farmhands as if they were invading nomadic raiders.

Of Motives and the “Innocent Massacre”

The investigation of the La Rubiera massacre fell to Eloy Villamizar,³¹ chief of the Arauca group of the DAS Rural. On 13 January 1968, Villamizar, two other law enforcement officers, the Venezuelan priest who reported the incident, and two Cuivas (including massacre survivor Antuko) traveled to La Rubiera (Villamizar filing, 295–301). Antuko served as a guide to the inspectors. According to Villamizar’s report, those identified as perpetrators denied participating in any massacre and insisted, “In these parts, no Indians from any tribe had come around for more than a year” (Villamizar’s paraphrase, 296). By 9:30 that night, though, the first confession came, from Pedro Ramón Santana Mandivelso, “who described the massacre and admitted taking part with a

³¹ This followed initial work by the Venezuelan Technical Police (Villamizar filing).

22-caliber rifle” (296–97). After further confessions, DAS Rural officers arrested five of the perpetrators and they later captured two more. Reportedly, Marcelino Jiménez hiked five days to a police outpost where he was charged (*New York Times* 1972).

What stands out in the La Rubiera case is, of course, the claim by the murderers that they had no idea that what they were doing was wrong. As Jiménez put it, “If I had known that killing Indians was a crime, I would not have wasted all that time walking just so they could lock me up” (ibid.). Indeed, several perpetrators not only freely admitted their role in the La Rubiera massacre, but in earlier mass killings.³² The perpetrators’ defense rested on precisely this vision of innocent, amoral cruelty; the defendants needed the jury to believe that it really was a game for them. As we have seen, authorities’ blind eye to past Indian-hunting offered some legitimacy. The defendants’ cooperation was cited as evidence of the central defense contention, “None of the defendants ... had been aware at the time they were doing wrong.... The government was unfairly trying to apply twentieth-century laws to ignorant men from a lawless land” (ibid.). Initially, the argument was successful, and the defendants were acquitted by a three-man jury on the grounds of “invincible ignorance” (ibid.).

Yet their dehumanization of indigenous people was not as simple as it seemed. Marcelino Jiménez had previously been restrained from harassing the Cuivas by his employer’s orders. The priest Gonzalo González Cobreces testified that his previous employer, Marcelo Tapiás, had fired the young man for his “irresponsibility and dirty tricks [*malas mañas*]” (332). Jiménez then set up a little ranch for himself near the house of his co-conspirator Anselmo Aguirre. In his testimony, Jiménez noted that he enticed the Cuiva to La Rubiera to get them out of the country: “I convinced the Indians to move to La Rubiera so that they could all be killed, as in Venezuela we could not kill them, and some would get away alive” (327).

The defendants, then, were not ignorant of norms of conduct in interacting with indigenous people. Nor, as we have seen, did they ingenuously implicate themselves, and indeed they made crude attempts to conceal and deny their crimes. While racism was undeniably part of their motive, its use as a defense, in the form of an invincible ignorance, simply does not hold water. The men’s concealment, at least, seems to have contributed to the trial judge ruling the jury’s verdict contrary to the evidence (*New York Times* 1973). The second trial, held in the highland city of Ibagué, found each of the male defendants guilty and sentenced them to twenty-four years in prison on 6 November 1973 (Castro Caycedo 1976: 64).

³² Anselmo Aguirre testified, “In 1945, I killed fourteen Indians” in cooperation with seven others after his sister was killed by indigenous people. Elio Mercedes Torrealba also took responsibility for killing six Indians and described further killings by his uncle.

Jiménez also had personal reasons for targeting the Cuiva living at Manguito. Twice he had sought to take a young Cuiva woman by the name of Lilia,³³ whom the priest reported, “he wanted to consider as his spouse, as his woman,” from their settlement. The Cuivas, together with Father González and Marcelo Tapias had rebuffed his attempts, which combined threats and promises (González Cobreces testimony, 332). Father González thus contends that the fatal invitation was “in reprisal against those who had intervened in his relations with Lilia, and in reprisal against Marcelo Tapias, whom the Indians help and consider one of their closest friends and protectors” (333). Two years earlier, records Tomás Eloy Martínez, Jiménez met the Cuiva woman Guafaro, one of the massacre victims. He “managed to drag her to the Colombian border, submitting her to prostitution, slavery, and torment,” which she finally fled on foot (1998: 240). Jiménez and his co-conspirators must be shorn of both their ignorant innocence and their supposed certainty in believing the Cuiva to be simply subhuman. While this is not the place to consider the various psychological and psychosexual mechanisms of genocide and frontier masculinity,³⁴ it is necessary to put the authorization for this violence into a larger context.

Keeping Murder on the Margins: The Moral Geography of Frontier Colonialism

If “invincible ignorance” worked as a defense strategy for the accused, it also served to keep urban Colombians blameless. Rather than detach the killers at La Rubiera from the larger society, it is more productive to examine how this detachment and their recourse to violence are an integral part of the frontier project. In doing so, we see how conventional understandings of the frontier—knowledge structures that are shared across class and geography—obscure self-awareness of this larger system by making the frontier seem geographically and temporally distant.

Consider the coverage of the La Rubiera trial in the *New York Times*. The piece, a feature story titled “Colombia Trial Bares Life (Everyone Kills Indians) on Plains,” opens as follows: “Out on the llanos, the vast prairies that stretch across Colombia and Venezuela from the Andes to the Orinoco, lawlessness still reigns as it did in the old American West. Swashbuckling cowboys and primitive Indians compete for life and over notions of right with the fast gun and the flashing machete. Evidence that untamed life on the prairies has changed little since the time of the conquistadors was provided in a courtroom here last week...” (*New York Times* 1972).

³³ Only Antuko’s testimony includes a “Lilia Quintero” among the victims at La Rubiera. Other accounts mention a “Cirila” instead, but Castro Caycedo’s record of the victims’ ages lists hers as forty-five (1976: 56).

³⁴ See, for example, Tsing (2005: chs. 1–2); and Smith (2005).

This is a tale of time travel, the perfect encapsulation of regarding people on the frontier as living in the past. Colombian journalist Germán Castro Caycedo's account of the trial uses the same tropes. He names the perpetrators as "six cowboys who had never visited a city and who learned to read and write in jail" and prefaces their story in this manner: "The passages of savage violence that follow seem to be ... the fruit of the rudeness in which a different man from that of the rest of Colombia (the *llanero*) is raised, in contrast with our 'civilization,' under whose laws this trial is being carried forward" (1976: 52, 53).

The "old American West" and "time of the conquistadors," as portrayed in these accounts, are at once real and mythical times, heavily laden with narrative templates for frontier life. The Indian killer and the "savage" Indian are integral parts of these frontier narratives, and their encounter is mediated by passions, economic drives, and even lawlessness produced as much in the metropolis as on the frontier. This temporal placement resonates with the "denial of coevalness": the placement of "savage" societies into a past Time in which they are "*not yet* ready for civilization" (Fabian 2002: 25, his emphasis). These ideas of time, identified by Johannes Fabian as central to nineteenth- and twentieth-century anthropology, were already latent in Spanish colonial descriptions of the societies they encountered in the Americas (Mignolo 1995).³⁵

By claiming that Indian killers live in the era of conquest, contemporary narrators placed them in a "savage" position alongside their indigenous victims. By the time of the trial, the killers had learned, "There is not there [in the Llano] civilization like here [in Villavicencio]," as Pedro Ramón Santana, one of the perpetrators, put it. Santana described himself as "one who has lived far away from the world, totally absent." María Helena Jiménez likewise reported "becoming civilized" during her time in jail. The civilization of which they spoke was defined by signing one's name, by reading and writing, and, most importantly, by understanding that killing an Indian was a crime (Castro Caycedo 1976: 62–64). Yet the titling of the land rush, disregard for Indian ways of life and territorial rights, and contempt for both the indigenous and *llaneros* as inherently backward and violent clearly ran throughout the larger society. By calling the frontier a place outside of its own time, the twentieth-century discourse of the frontier dreams up a morality-free space for settler violence. The narrative allows metropolitans to look down upon frontiersmen, and for frontier colonists to place themselves outside the law. Modernity exoticizes violence against indigenous people even as its economic and state structures enable it.

³⁵ Walter Mignolo argues that Spanish colonial views about indigenous peoples as outside "the boundaries of humanity" were part of an "ordering that was not yet openly chronological, but it became clearly so in the eighteenth century" (1995: xi).

Counterinsurgency Comes to Planas

Rafael Jaramillo Ulloa and the Planas Guahibo could have reasonably expected their uprising to be an entryway into politics rather than an invitation to militarize their region. Major political actors in Colombia had freely flowed between party politics, the ballot box, and the battlefield since the end of the colonial period, a fluidity that was common across Latin America (Adelman 2010). More recently, the peasant guerrillas of La Violencia provided examples of political action through force of arms. Liberal guerrilla Dumar Aljure remained a local power broker as well as the head of an irregular armed force in western Meta until he was finally killed by Colombian troops in April 1968.³⁶ On the basis of these experiences, local rebellion could be thought of as a potential tool for securing either greater autonomy or redress from the national government.

Under new conceptions of internal security, however, the Planas rebellion was not politics, but dangerous sedition. The Colombian government's initiative to criminalize and defeat pockets of political rebellion dovetailed with U.S. Cold War counterinsurgency doctrine. Even in the absence of a communist uprising, "U.S. strategy will be directed toward [the] elimination," of localized uprisings "lest [they] provide a communist foothold and escalate into active insurgency" (U.S. National Security Council. Special Group [Counter-Insurgency] 1962: 10). This "preventative" approach authorized counter-guerrilla actions against apolitical rural bandits and Liberal-aligned self-defense groups as well as communist guerrillas in the mid-1960s (Rempe 2002: 29).³⁷

When ranchers in the Planas region pressed for government intervention, their request resonated with the priorities of Washington, Bogotá, and local military commanders. The military quickly cast Jaramillo and his associates as dangerous, disloyal, and perhaps communist guerrillas. Landlords accused Jaramillo of being a communist while the Army charged that he told the indigenous people that the Colombian government had fallen and Venezuela had invaded (Pérez Ramírez 1971: 168–70). The lack of established communist insurgents in the region did not deter the drive to treat Jaramillo and the Guahibos as an internal enemy.

The repression of the Planas rebellion unfolded in a textbook sequence drawn directly from U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine. The first operation, "Cordiality," used persuasion and so-called "civic action" methods in an

³⁶ Richard Maullin's (1968) account of Aljure's fall argues that he, like Jaramillo, failed to navigate the government's turn towards a comprehensive crackdown on independent armed actors.

³⁷ An internal Pentagon report noted, "Too frequently, insurgency problems of Colombia have been associated with what is more correctly classified as rural violence" (Colombia File [1965]: 3). Similar assessments appear in the U.S. National Intelligence Estimate (1965); and Ramsey (1997b [1964]).

unsuccessful bid to bring Jaramillo Ulloa's rebels out of hiding. It was soon followed by the open warfare of "Operation Control." Finally, infantry, cavalry, and the air force joined in "Operation Cavalcade" (Arango 1970; Pérez Ramírez 1971). Once the military was deployed, they worked alongside the DAS Rural and civil authorities, all of who were based in mestizo communities and took the settlers' perspective for granted. Colonel José Jaime Rodríguez argued the army's presence was suddenly necessary because while "before, an Octavian peace had reigned, it was disturbed," leaving aside the long list of violent acts committed against Guahibos in the region (Pérez Ramírez 1971: 173). Alejandro Reyes Posada and Clemencia Chiappe de Reyes report that some colonists "served as guides to the military patrols, pointing out as guerrillas certain indigenous individuals with whom they had some personal dispute," among other ways the *hacendados* "used the Army." Their report indicates that both soldiers and colonists sometimes executed the signaled Guahibos on the spot. Large landowners, dissatisfied with the initial "civic action" approach, lobbied to escalate the military intervention. They attracted national government attention and won the deployment of an anti-guerrilla cavalry battalion from Yopal, "with instructions to liquidate the guerrilla rapidly" (1973: 37, 38).³⁸

A tragic consequence of an approach that targeted the Planas Guahibo as guerrillas was the military's treatment of Guahibo *capitanes* as military leaders, when the term had long been used to mean a local-level leader or representative. According to a 1971 newspaper account cited by Gómez López (1991: 364), at least five *capitanes* were executed while others were imprisoned and tortured. They were not replaced for fear of persecution. The Guahibo of Planas endured tactics that grew out of Indian wars elsewhere, applied to them as rebels, but carried out by soldiers whose anti-Indian racism was also apparent.

CONCLUSION

As they make territories into frontiers, governments promote the ideas and orchestrate the practices of colonization. As we have seen in the Colombian case, frontier making deploys concepts of human inequality, uneven application of morality, and violence in the service of traditional state objectives like territorial control, the expansion of commerce, and the projection of government power. These technics of frontier making came together in the Llanos through a variety of means: the emulation of successful frontier expansions, the circulation of narratives about the Wild West and the conquistadors, and deliberately organized efforts at colonization and military training. The cases explored in this

³⁸ For corroboration of the landlords' influence, via President Lleras Camargo, see Pérez Ramírez (1971: 78–80), summarizing Colonel Rodríguez.

article illustrate how multiple frontiers are linked by crosscutting ideas and practices of interpretation, administration, control, and violence.

The Cuiva at La Rubiera were treacherously killed *as Indians* in an extension of the long history of dehumanization of indigenous peoples. The pattern of human hunting of which their deaths were a part was a predictable consequence of metropolitan policies and worldviews. It is at once the cutting edge of deliberate invasion and the abject, irrational practice of the backward colonist. On the other hand, the Guahibo cooperative members who fled their homes at Planas or faced torture by the VII Brigade were hunted *as insurgents* in a tradition of warfare that was shaped in Indian Wars and informed by racism, but generalized to armed political opponents.

La Rubiera was not the last massacre of these indigenous peoples, merely the first successful prosecution of massacre perpetrators. In April 1975, DAS Rural agents allegedly took part in killing four Guahibo men, a woman, and a child; the victims' bodies were quartered and thrown into a river (Proyecto Nunca Más 2000). In May 2003, three simultaneous acts of violence—a triple homicide, a public rape of three girls, and the rape and dismemberment of the womb of a pregnant sixteen-year-old—were carried out in the Betoyes Guahibo indigenous reserve. The perpetrators at Betoyes included Colombian Army soldiers and paramilitary fighters (Fichtl 2003; Bolletino 2008). The rise of paramilitary violence was foreshadowed by the involvement of private individuals in the Planas crackdown, and encouraged by William Yarborough's counterinsurgency training team.³⁹ In the 1990s, leftist guerrilla forces also became a comparable threat to indigenous peoples across Colombia.⁴⁰

La Rubiera and Planas became national scandals through the combined efforts of indigenous leaders, anthropologists, priests committed to liberation theology, and concerned citizens to remove the geographical and racial limits to moral outrage. By mobilizing outrage in a novel way in response to these tragic events, Colombia's indigenous people suddenly gained access to a potentially powerful new tool to add to their already diverse repertoire of survival skills. Indeed, the transmission of these stories can be seen as a dry run for an emerging indigenous rights regime in international affairs. Christian Gros writes, "For an entire generation, Planas was converted into a determining moment for coming to consciousness of the indigenous problem" (1991: 288).

Human rights monitoring is one broad ethical challenge to violence in Colombia, but it has had limited practical success. The names of indigenous

³⁹ In a secret supplement to his report, Yarborough encouraged training civilians for "paramilitary, sabotage, and/or terrorist activities against known communist proponents" (U.S. Army Special Warfare School 1962).

⁴⁰ A compendium covering the years 1974 to 2004 found that paramilitaries were responsible for the murders of 688 indigenous people in Colombia; landlords and drug traffickers for 101; state actors for 174; and guerrilla groups (overwhelmingly the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) for 416 (Villa and Houghton 2005: 53; annual breakdowns at 36, 38).

victims of human rights abuses continue to be recorded alongside others in denunciations of killings, torture, and unlawful detentions. Yet their situations are recorded and examined on an equal basis as that of others, leaving no doubt that the still-frequent killings of indigenous peoples are crimes. Many of the ways that this violence is made reasonable and excusable, however, remain to be undone.

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Abstract: In the mid-twentieth century, renewed colonization of the Llanos region of Colombia brought escalated violence to the closely related Guahibo and Cuiva peoples. This violence was made public by two dramatic episodes that became international scandals: a December 1967 massacre of sixteen Cuivas at La Rubiera Ranch, and a 1970 military crackdown on an uprising by members of a Guahibo agricultural cooperative in Planas. The scandals exposed both particular human rights abuses and the regional tradition of literally hunting indigenous people, and provoked widespread outrage. While contemporaries treated these events as aberrations, they can best be explained as the consequence of policies that organize and manage frontiers. Both events took place in a region undergoing rapid settlement by migrants, affected by cattle and oil interests, missionaries, the Colombian military, and U.S. counterinsurgency trainers. This paper draws on archival research to trace the events involved and explains their relation to globally circulating policies, practices, and ideas of frontier making. It illustrates how Colombians eager to expand their frontier in the Llanos emulated and adapted ideas of human inequality, moral geographies that make violence acceptable in frontier areas, economic policies that dispossess native peoples, and strategies of counterinsurgency warfare from distant sources. Ironically, their quest for modernity through frontier expansion licensed new deployments of “archaic” violence. The Llanos frontier was thus enmeshed in an interchange of frontier-making techniques that crisscrosses the world, but particularly unites Latin America and the United States.