

# Cherished Consumers:

Global Connections, Local Consumption, and  
Foreign Commodities in Nineteenth-Century Colombia

Ana María Otero-Cleves

Draft

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## CHAPTER IV

### *Machetes, Axes, and Foreign Tools:* Knowledgeable Consumers, Active Citizens

In 1891, the Intercontinental Railway Commission sent a group of engineers to Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Colombia to test the waters for an international railway in South and Central America.<sup>1</sup> Their mission led them to travel extensively throughout the region, departing from New York to Quito and then to Ibarra, in Ecuador, and to Ipiales, Pasto, Popayán, Cali, Medellín, and Cartagena, in Colombia. Due to the nature of their task, these professionals encountered a myriad of people and witnessed their different labor conditions. Among what they saw were the tools preferred by natives for their daily tasks. “The machete is an article of personal furniture used by countrymen throughout Spanish America as universally as pocket-knives among us,” they reported; “Collinsville in Connecticut is reputed the best make, and is the only source of supply.”<sup>2</sup>

They were neither the first nor the last foreigners to notice this preference. American officials residing in Puerto Rico, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico also spoke of the fondness for the Collins machete in Latin America. John D. Hall, the United States consul in Puerto Rico in 1894, could not help but show his admiration for the popularity of the American tool. “A machete bearing the name of ‘Collins’ is a current passport for the standard of merit in that article, and it enjoys a well-established and deservedly good reputation that nothing can break down,” Hall wrote in his report.<sup>3</sup> Equally struck by the success of this commodity among popular classes was the United States consul in Mexico, who in 1896 declared that “the famous ‘Collins’ machetes and axes are favorites here still, although Germany sends

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<sup>1</sup> *Report of the International American Conference Relative to an Intercontinental Railway Line*. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1890).

<sup>2</sup> *Report of the International American Conference Relative to an Intercontinental Railway Line*, 99.

<sup>3</sup> Bureau of Foreign Commerce, *Consular Reports: Commerce, Manufactures, Etc.*, vol. 46, September, October, November, and December, 1894 168–171 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1894), 196.

an exact imitation; but no peon will use this if he can get the ‘Collins.’”<sup>4</sup> But it was Henry Isaac Sheldon who forewarned in 1897 that in Nicaragua, “curiously enough, the machetes are all made by one man, a Mr. Collins of Hartford, Connecticut, and the natives will buy no others.” Although “European makers sen[t] out machetes stamped Collins,” Sheldon observed, locals could “tell the genuine steel by glancing across the blade when turned up to the light, and they will take no other.”<sup>5</sup>

Colombia was not exempt from this trend. By the turn of the century a trade commissioner for the U.S. Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, declared that “the universal tool in Colombia is the machete, which is always carried by the people of the country districts.”<sup>6</sup> Official reports, travelers’ accounts, and newspaper advertisements give weight to the commissioner’s observations. In 1897 the United States consul in Barranquilla cited the Collins machete as exemplifying how in the region “United States tools of all kinds are preferred to European ones,” being “better finished, lighter, and more convenient, but at the same time (...) also more expensive.”<sup>7</sup> Colombian peasants knew the Collins and, like their Latin American peers, could not be easily tricked into buying low-priced European imitations that, although cheaper, would not last as long as the American brand. When it came to machetes, Colombians were knowledgeable consumers.

Their knowledge about this and other hardware tools was not transferred from above or received from abroad. It was acquired in practice. While subaltern consumers’ choices might have been limited by their narrow purchasing power, this did not preclude men and women from appropriating foreign tools, expressing their dissatisfaction over certain agricultural implements, and seeking different alternatives to access the ones they liked and preferred.<sup>8</sup> It was their place in the country’s productive and market economy that consolidated their expert knowledge about these foreign commodities. Peasants and muleteers used machetes to clear the land,

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<sup>4</sup> Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of Manufactures, *Monthly Consular and Trade Reports*, vol. 89, 340 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1909), 191–92.

<sup>5</sup> Henry I. Sheldon, *Notes on the Nicaragua Canal* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Co., 1897), 52.

<sup>6</sup> Bell, *Colombia. A Commercial and Industrial Handbook*, 176.

<sup>7</sup> Bureau of Foreign Commerce, *Commercial Relations of the United States with Foreign Countries during the Years 1896 and 1897* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1898), 866.

<sup>8</sup> On the theoretical implications of the concept of “appropriation” for cultural and social studies of consumption see Chapter VI, especially its conclusions.

grow their crops, and travel around the country; artisans, bogas, and small landholders, to defend their honor, their lives, and their property. And no less critical, reiterate their citizenship. Soon, foreign tools, especially the machete, began to reshape their collective identities and underscore popular consumers' contribution to the nation's material improvement and progress —not only as part of the country's labor force but as consumers themselves. As such, popular consumers became not only critical agents in the global market, active and productive citizens.

#### CAPITAL GOODS, CONSUMER GOODS

P. L. Bell wrote in 1921 of Colombia that “the Negroes of the coast and river valleys (...) live in a very primitive manner, to say the least (...) with no modern furniture or conveniences of any kind whatever, and their principal article of purchase is the commoner grade of cotton cloth; this and an occasional machete are about all the foreign-made goods taken by these people.”<sup>9</sup> Surely, Bell's cavalier attitude toward the country's population resembles a great share of accounts on consumer practices given by foreigners who had visited the country since its transformation into an independent republic a century earlier.<sup>10</sup> Bell's depiction of Colombia's inhabitants as primitive is not uncommon. What is surprising is that despite thinking them uncivilized, the North American acknowledged that inhabitants of the coast and the river valleys consumed at most two types of foreign objects: cheap cotton cloth and machetes.

Similar remarks were made by many, mostly by outsiders who left an extensive registry of the country's geography and its diverse population. This was true of Bell's contemporary Francisco Javier Vergara y Velasco, who published in 1901 *Nueva Geografía de Colombia*. In his work, the geographer and cartographer portrayed Chocó's black population's living conditions and made mention of the

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<sup>9</sup> Bell, *Colombia. A Commercial and Industrial Handbook*, 42.

<sup>10</sup> To name just a few, Charles Stuart Cochrane, *Journal of a Residence and Travels in Colombia during the Years 1823 and 1824*, 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1825); John Potter Hamilton, *Travels through the Interior Provinces of Colombia*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1827); John Steuart, *Bogotá in 1836-7 Being a Narrative of an Expedition to the Capital of New-Granada, and a Residence There of Eleven Months* (New York: Harper & Bros, 1838).

little possessions they had. “The needs of such beings are few,” Vergara y Velasco noted, “they live naked until they are eight or ten years old, the age at which women marry, who only wear a piece of *bayeta* and are extraordinarily fertile.” Thus, he explained, new families form promptly “since they only need a canoe, an ax, a machete and a pot.” With such tools, the geographer told his readers, locals clear the land, build their houses, and harvest their food.<sup>11</sup> Almost fifty years earlier, the geographer Felipe Pérez had given similar descriptions of how machetes and axes were used, but in his case, by Indians of Caquetá — a territory in the country’s southeast forested lowlands. Quoting Agustín Codazzi’s chronicles while part of the Chorographic Commission, Pérez noted that in Caquetá, “the Indian thinks he is rich and happy once he possesses a woman companion, a canoe, a dog, an ax, a machete, a knife, a bow, the *bodoquera*, some hooks, a cast net, and a pot of poison.”<sup>12</sup> His brother, Santiago Pérez, also a member of the Chorographic Commission, made comparable remarks about freedmen of color of the province of Barbacoas, which he visited with Codazzi in 1853. “Hunting, fishing, some cultivation of corn, sugar cane, and bananas, give enough to these inhabitants, who do not know other *necesidades*, not even to be dressed,” Pérez noted. “A machete and an ax to clear the land or to carve out their *barbacoa*, an *atarraya* to fish in the neighboring streams, and a canoe to navigate them, a drum and a marimba for their bacchanals, are all the goods that these inhabitants have,” the writer concluded.<sup>13</sup>

Axes, machetes, and brush knives were not only an integral part of the subjects described with prejudice by lettered men as peripheral —that is, men and women who inhabited the riverbanks, the lowlands, or the forest. They were also vital for peons and peasants who worked the fields and produced export crops, artisans who crafted manufactures, and almost everyone who traveled throughout the territory.<sup>14</sup> As I will argue below, it was precisely its versatility that largely

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<sup>11</sup> Francisco Javier Vergara Velasco, *Nueva geografía de Colombia: escrita por regiones naturales* (Bogotá: Imprenta de Vapor, 1901), 427.

<sup>12</sup> Pérez, *Geografía Física i Política de Los Estados Unidos de Colombia. Comprende La Geografía Del Distrito Federal y de Los Estados de Panamá i Del Cauca*, I:482.

<sup>13</sup> Santiago Pérez, “Apuntes de Un Viaje Por El Sur de La Nueva Granada En 1853,” in *Museo de Cuadros de Costumbres: Biblioteca de “El Mosaico,”* ed. José María Vergara y Vergara (Bogotá, Colombia: F. Mantilla, 1866), 375.

<sup>14</sup> Bell, *Colombia. A Commercial and Industrial Handbook*, 176.

explains the immense reception that the machete had among the popular sectors in the second half of the century. However, before addressing the uses and meanings of this and other “agricultural” tools, it is crucial—at least from a methodological point of view—to study where they came from and how popular consumers acquired them. The latter, since the origin, price, quality, and the forms of acquisition of commodities define not only their trajectory but their social, cultural, and political meaning in a given context.<sup>15</sup>

A good place to start is to turn, once again, to the country’s import statistics. As seen in the previous chapter, textiles were, by far, the most important line of imports to Colombia throughout the nineteenth century. The second and third most significant types from the 1830s to the beginning of the twentieth century were, respectively, foodstuffs and beverages, and metal goods—the latter a category that included machinery, tools, railings, nails, cauldrons, sewing machines, and cutlery, to name just a few.<sup>16</sup> However, it is worth noting that in the first half of the nineteenth century, a significant portion of metal manufactures were consumer goods—such as pots, pans, and cutlery—and tools of various types. As the economic historian José Antonio Ocampo has noted, it is probable that the participation of consumer goods in the total of metal imports into the country did not change much throughout the century. Indeed, the increase of imported metal manufactures from 1830 to 1910 was instead due to the development of transportation, especially railways, the emergence of modern mining enterprises in Antioquia, and the development of textile industries in some cities.<sup>17</sup>

It is impossible to know exactly all the types of iron and steel products imported since, as stated in the previous chapter, customs data recorded weight and not the quantity of cargo.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, because official import records did not differentiate between capital goods and consumer goods, their data on “iron and steel commodities” has to be broken down to unearth the share of smaller tools and commodities that ended up buried by other data (i.e., rails, manufactured iron, and

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<sup>15</sup> Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value.” See also, the Introduction of this book.

<sup>16</sup> Ocampo, *Colombia y la economía mundial, 1830-1910*.

<sup>17</sup> Ocampo, 141.

<sup>18</sup> Bushnell, “Two Stages in Colombian Tariff Policy: The Radical Era and the Return to Protection (1861—1885).”

steel bars). According to *Estadística Mercantil de la República de Colombia* in 1891, 94 percent of all metal goods corresponded to the category of “iron and steel,” of which Great Britain was the primary supplier —with 47 percent. Iron and steel goods were followed only by lead with 3 percent, and copper and bronze goods with 1.8 percent. Of the 94 percent of “iron and steel” goods, 78 percent were imported in quantities that exceeded 100 tons. The top five classes that surpassed this figure were mostly heavy capital goods, including materials for piers, wire for fences, railings, and accessories, and steel and iron tubes.<sup>19</sup>

As hinted above, these figures illustrate how bulky capital goods had the ability to “hide” consumer goods and smaller capital goods in official statistics. Still, among those commodities that still exceeded 100 tons, it is possible to identify many goods that were intended, at least in part, for the consumption of the general population. Such was the case of 336 tons of nails, more than half of them now imported from Germany; of almost 235 tons of sewing machines traded in mainly from the United States (96 percent); of more than 130 tons of kitchen furniture (49 percent); 132 tons of “machetes” (47 percent) both brought mostly from Germany; and of at least 125 tons of agricultural tools and implements, half of them from the United States. The number of machetes —as we will later see—was not insignificant, especially if we consider that official statistics registered some of these commodities in other categories, such as “*calabozos y agüinches*” (6,8 tons) and “*herramientas para desmonte*” (7 tons), mainly from the United States (79 percent, and 82 percent, respectively). Taken together, these figures account for roughly 146 tones of machetes in one year. These commodities were followed in quantity by knives (82 tons), axes (57 tons), pickaxes (53 tons), and flatirons (62 tons). They, in turn, by a great variety of tools — including shovels, carpenters’ tools, locks and padlocks, hinges and screws, saws and handsaws, and drills — and other commodities for daily use, such as beds, cots, and cradles, not to mention pots and pans, guns and rifles, clasp-knives and scissors, and stoves and kitchenettes.

There was also some local production of machetes and other agricultural tools, some most probably manufactured with iron from or by the Pacho Foundry and La

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<sup>19</sup> *Estadística Mercantil de La República de Colombia, Correspondiente de Año de 1891* (Bogotá: Imprenta de Medardo Rivas, 1892).



Pradera in Cundinamarca, the Ferrería de Samacá, in Boyacá, and the Ferrería de Amagá, in Antioquia. There were also other worthy efforts in the State of Santander. According to Manuel Ancízar, in the 1850s, they were sixteenth *ferrerías* in the district of San Gil that “manufactured agricultural tools, machetes, nails, brakes, and locksmith works. They use nearly 2,000 quintals of iron a year from the Pacho mines.”<sup>20</sup> However, as was the case with textiles, while local companies were able to produce some commodities for local markets, they could not meet national demand for agricultural implements. As stated in 1903 by the United States Consul-General in Bogotá, Alban G. Snyder, “[t]he local manufacture of implements is of no consequence. Plow bars, planting bars, hoes, adzes, and coffee diggers are made, but of very inferior quality. Foreign tools are preferred and are not bought more because they are lacking for that purpose.”<sup>21</sup> To prove his point, Snyder provided the quantities of agricultural implements, tools, and machinery imported from the three principal countries through the custom-house at Cartagena for the year 1901. The Consul-General listed 37,198 pounds of machetes imported from the United States, 10,806 from England and 2,891 from Germany, and 17,444 pounds of axes for the United States, along with 704 and 1,408 pounds of axes from England and Germany, respectively.<sup>22</sup> These, along with coffee, mining, cotton-mill machinery, and shovels.

It is not intent to analyze each type of agricultural tool imported in the second half of the nineteenth century. I am especially interested in those tools that were part of the popular sectors’ daily life activities and whose primary purpose—at least at first glance—was to boost their productivity and support their role as economic subjects. I will focus on the machete and the tools that accompanied it in practice that accounted for a significant share of the iron and steel commodities imported from the 1850s until the 1920s. My decision is also based on two qualitative and no less noteworthy considerations. The first has to do with the continuous reference made by locals and foreigners to machetes and agricultural tools when describing the material conditions and everyday practices of peasants, peons, bogas, and muleteers

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<sup>20</sup> Ancízar, *Peregrinación de Alpha*.

<sup>21</sup> Consular Reports: Commerce, manufactures, etc, Volume 75

<sup>22</sup> Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of Statistics, *Monthly Consular Reports*, vol. LXXV (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904), 360–61.

throughout the nineteenth century. The second has to do with their citing of consumers' preference for a particular brand of machetes — “El Collins.” Indeed, as many scholars have shown, consumption practices can be better understood if we focus our analysis on the circulation of specific goods. The study of an American brand, Collins, offers an excellent case study for exploring how popular consumers became active agents in nineteenth-century Colombian trade, especially given that the Collins Company came to dominate the Latin American market for the next half-century.<sup>23</sup>

### KNOWLEDGEABLE CONSUMERS

Colombian popular classes' demands over the quality of foreign goods were not limited to textiles. In their consumption of machetes, the country's popular sectors demonstrated perhaps most comprehensively their active and exigent attitude toward foreign merchandise, imposing high demands on origin, brand, and quality. After all, it was an object they knew well; it had been around since colonial times. Their knowledge about all types of machetes was constructed through practice and inherited orally. As foreigners noted, when buying a machete in the mid-nineteenth century, peasants, *arrieros*, and peons passed their thumb along the edge, took the sharp object in their hands, felt its weight, and gently tapped the blade to hear sound of the steel. Most likely —as their descendants would do decades later—they breathed on its shiny surface, listened to the buzzing sound when they brandished the machete in the air, and finally bent it to see if it regained its straight shape.<sup>24</sup> There is no doubt that rural consumers knew machetes and why they should choose one design and type over another.

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<sup>23</sup> Ted Morello, “Alfanje de La Selva,” *Américas* 10, no. 3 (1958): 26–29.

<sup>24</sup> Morello., who claimed in 1958 that Collins dominated the Latin American market, also gave a depiction of how consumers choose their machetes. His are similar to those offered by foreigners a century earlier. “*Cuando un hombre va a comprar un machete, le pasa el pulgar por el filo, le toma el peso en la mano, golpea suavemente la hoja para oír el sonido del acero, arroja vaho en la brillante superficie, escucha lo zumbidos mientras lo blande en el aire y finalmente lo dobla en arco para ver si recobra su forma recta. En suma, le hombre de la América tropical – sea campesino, explorador o guerrillero – escoge con tanto cuidado su machete como si en ello le fuera la vida. Y puede que así sea.*” (p.3)

United States consuls —like John D. Hall, consul in Puerto Rico, and Henry Isaac Sheldon, consul in Nicaragua, cited above— were not the only witnesses of peons’ preference for certain brands of machetes and axes in the mid-nineteenth century. Canadian trade commissioner Major H. A. Chisholm, who gave a report in the 1920s about the state of the Colombian market, also mentioned such predilections. According to the major, there were three brands of machetes popular in Colombia, “one English (Martindale), one American (Collins), and one German.”<sup>25</sup> Yet what is noteworthy about Chisholm’s account is that he describes witnessing a peon buy a machete. Chisholm recalled how while he “was interviewing a Colombian merchant, a peon entered his store and asked for ‘a trumpet,’ and the merchant gave him a machete of the ‘trumpet’ trademark.” After Chisholm inquired further into the scene, “the merchant explained that as very few Colombian peons can read or write when they wish to purchase an article of a certain well-known brand, they ask for the trademark on it — not the maker’s name.” It was clear to the trade commissioner that peons were quite familiar with foreign brands and that they knew the products that they demanded: “these simple people may be seen daily in any store in the country asking for such articles as a ‘trumpet,’ ‘kettle,’ ‘alligator,’<sup>26</sup> ‘the arm with a dagger’<sup>27</sup>(...) and the merchant knows, of course, that his customer must have the machete (...) carrying the trade mark demanded, and that, moreover, he will have no other brand.”<sup>28</sup> Although, in this case, the peon was not buying a Collins machete, his attitude shows that he had a specific desire for a foreign product that he knew well.

As noted in the previous section, a fair share of machetes and axes came from the United States; Collins being the most know brand according to contemporary sources. Records of the Collins Company indicate that the firm —founded in 1826 by the brothers Samuel H. and David C. Collins— began to market its products to South America around the 1840s.<sup>29</sup> According to the company’s official history from

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<sup>25</sup> H. A. Chisholm, “Canadian Products for the Colombian Market,” *Weekly Bulletin*, August 1, 1921, 186. This was the official publication of Canada’s Department of Trade and Commerce.

<sup>26</sup> Most probably, Ralph Martindale & Co. make.

<sup>27</sup> Collin’s Trademark.

<sup>28</sup> Chisholm, “Canadian Products for the Colombian Market.”

<sup>29</sup> 31/10/22 4:33:00 PM<sup>29</sup> Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, Historical Manuscripts, Historical Memoranda, Collins Company Records, 1826–1950, box 3, folder 2.

1926, “In 1845 the demand for axes was greater than could be supplied and in that year the Company began to make machetes for the foreign trade.” By then, Collins realized that “men care not where a tool comes from if it is better than that which they possess, and doors had begun to open in all lands for Collins products.”<sup>30</sup> By the 1860s, Collins was considered by contemporaries “the largest establishment in the world for manufacturing axes and edge tools.”<sup>31</sup> According to an 1872 account, “[i]n the West Indies and in South America, it is almost impossible to sell an axe or a machete bearing any other [name]; those tropical people are suspicious of Americans, but think themselves quite safe when they see the familiar stamp.”<sup>32</sup> Whether South American consumers were suspicious or not, by the turn of the century, their liking was undeniable. As a connoisseur of the Latin American market, Ernst B. Filsinger stated in 1919, “The imitation [of the Collins brand] has often been placed in stock by dealers who have sought to make a larger profit than was afforded by the American article, but they were compelled to abandon the sale when the natives returned the imitation with the complaint that it was far inferior to the one they had been accustomed to use.”<sup>33</sup>

“El Collins” or “El Collin”—as the machete became known in Latin America and Colombia—gradually gained esteem in the region for other reasons besides its exceptional quality. Company officials maintained a fluid correspondence with their agents in the region, who, in turn, transmitted their customers’ suggestions concerning product design. It was standard for “natives” to try the machetes out, according to the Collins Company’s official history; “[s]oon strange, often very crude, native-made implements, wooden models, or outlines traced on paper, began to come in, with the question: ‘Can you make one like this?’” The Collins Company went on to follow these models exactly, even “if the hand-made blade from some native smithy was queer in shape and perhaps did not seem to hang just right in the

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<sup>30</sup> Collins Company, *One Hundred Years: A Brief Account of the Development of the Collins Company in the Manufacture of Axes, Machetes and Edge Tools and in Commemoration of Its 100th Anniversary: 1826-1926*. (Collinsville, Conn.: The Company, 1926), 17.

<sup>31</sup> Horance Greeley et al., *The Great Industries of the United States: Being an Historical Summary of the Origin, Growth, and Perfection of the Chief Industrial Arts of This Country* (Hartford: J.B. Burr & Hyde, 1872), 124.

<sup>32</sup> Greeley et al., 142.

<sup>33</sup> Ernst B. Filsinger, *Exporting to Latin America: A Handbook for Merchants, Manufacturers and Exporters* (New York; London: D. Appleton and Co., 1919), 49.

hands of the workers at Collinsville”; the company “took it for granted that [the customer] knew what he wanted and gave it to him.”<sup>34</sup> Such was the extent of consumers’ contributions that the Collins machete’s number-one design was based on a sketch sent from Cuba in 1850.<sup>35</sup> It is also believed that the Collins Company, whose first and primary product were axes, started to produce machetes as a result of the diversified needs of the South American nations: Nicaraguans’ desire for a wider blade tool to cut thick bush, Puerto Ricans’ preference for vermillion-painted blades, and Colombians’ need for a light machete for harvesting coffee, among others.<sup>36</sup>

Contemporaries acknowledged the company’s ability to fashion products, especially for their customers. On his address to the Boston City Club, November 20, 1913, Curtis Guild —an American journalist, soldier, businessman, diplomat, and politician from Massachusetts and by then, “the Ambassador of the United States to the Russias” — addressed his fellow “businessmen” about the Russian trade and its benefits to the U.S. “I have mentioned some of the American staples which we are already exporting to Russia,” he said. However, he thought that Americans were still too careless about the need to study the export trade carefully,

We make a line of a staple goods, let us say American calicoes, and pack them in the well-known dry-good cases, and ship them down — we will say — to the United States of Colombia. (...) Well, you go there, and you will find that in order to get those calicoes ashore you have to take a small package done up in water-tight wrapping and pack it into a canoe. Now try to pack an American dry-goods box into a canoe, and you will see why we do not sell American calicoes in Colombia. *We make goods that are suitable for us and try to sell them to the foreign nations. We should not try to force other people to buy what we like to make. We should try to make what they want to buy* (Applause).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Collins Company, *One Hundred Years: A Brief Account of the Development of the Collins Company in the Manufacture of Axes, Machetes and Edge Tools and in Commemoration of Its 100th Anniversary: 1826-1926*, 25.

<sup>35</sup> Collins Company, 26.

<sup>36</sup> Anne Biernacki, “The History of a Company Town” (unpublished manuscript), Torrington, 23 Dec. 1974, Connecticut State Library, Hartford, F104.C64 B54 1974, p. 12.

<sup>37</sup> *Boston City Bulletin*, Vol. VIII, January 1, 1914, no.4, 17. (My emphasis)

Curtis' claims echoed many of those made by his contemporaries and studied in the previous chapter. However, to get his point across on the importance of not imposing their views on foreign consumers, the Ambassador then turned to the Collins Company's experience in Latin America,

Some people have discovered the value of that principle. For example, we tried for years to sell American hatchets and axes to Latin America. We could not understand why they did not want to buy these admirable implements, the lightest and best in the world. *Then a Connecticut firm, Collins & Co., decided to manufacture an implement never used in the United States and absolutely useless here, the machete.* So we made the machete which they did want to buy, and you will find them today, not only in the hands of the natives when engaged in agriculture, but when engaged in settling their little quarrels, public or private. (...) *Thus, common sense secured the cream of the Latin American market* (Applause)<sup>38</sup>

Curtis Guild's comments were shared by many. Indeed, since the last decades of the nineteenth century, the machete was perceived as a commodity designed explicitly for the native population of Latin America. The report of the U.S. Consul-General Samuel Kimberly about the United States' trade with Guatemala in 1893 is also a reflection of this opinion. While comparing "American vs. European markets," Kimberly complained that European products were preferred in the region, despite the fact American manufactures were superior in quality. This was especially true for the article of the largest consumption, "cotton woven goods," he noted. But there was an exception. "Here it would not be amiss to hold up as an example worthy of imitation by others the American house of Collins, manufacturers of edge tools, whose wares, especially brush knives, are known and appreciated by every intelligent planter in Spanish America," the consul reported.

Although this brand of machetes was expensive—a point to which I will return later—Kimberly claimed that "Collins goods are making a good inroad upon these markets by the house pursuing the simple principle of (...) adopting such shapes and forms as the people of each section are accustomed to, but always

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<sup>38</sup> *Boston City Bulletin*, Vol. VIII, January 1, 1914, no.4, 17. (My emphasis)

improving them somewhat — never enough to arouse the suspicion of the consumer that it is an entirely new departure.” In a tone widely shared by the U.S. consuls of the time when describing Latin American consumers, Kimberly turned to what he identified as natives’ irrational behavior over foreign commodities to explain their preferences. “Among other things, I have seen Collins axes made in shape to suit the Indian prejudices, which are highly appreciated by the Indian who has once used them.”<sup>39</sup>

Reports from the Collins Company’s president to shareholders also give an idea of the company’s attitudes toward both its agents and consumers and how this impacted the ability to accommodate new and foreign consumers. For instance, while the company sold to commercial houses from New York, it also recruited agents to sell Collins’ products to more distant markets. Some of these agents had worked with the company for over 20 years and had extensive knowledge of the local and foreign markets. According to the company’s president, Samuel W. Collins, one agent visited the factory “every month to confer with us and to see [if] the shapes and sizes are right to suit the customers.” Another agent, who had visited Havana and gathered important information about the Cuban market and competitors there, spoke “the Spanish language,” something that by 1867 was “very desirable and almost a necessity now that we have much business with Spanish customers.”<sup>40</sup> That the company’s directors considered agents the natural intermediaries between the firm and the final consumer is evinced in Collins’s 1867 statement that “with the agents we have, they selling our goods [have] acquired a good reputation and a responsible position, they have their active participation in the business and knowledge which is (...) very important for us.”<sup>41</sup> The agents’ expertise was put to good use, no doubt, not only to meet the needs of the North American market but also to understand the demands of foreign consumers.

Among these foreign consumers were Colombia’s popular sectors. This is confirmed not only by the North American consuls, but in commercial

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<sup>39</sup> United States of America and Bureau of Manufactures, *Monthly Consular and Trade Reports* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1905), 60–61.

<sup>40</sup> Report of Samuel W. Collins to shareholders, Collinsville, 1 Oct. 1867, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, Historical Manuscripts, Historical Memoranda, Collins Company Records, 1826–1950, box 3, folder 2, fol. 158.

<sup>41</sup> Report of Samuel W. Collins to shareholders, Collinsville, 1 Oct. 1867, box 3, folder 2, fol. 158.

correspondence, advertisements in local newspapers, and commercial directories. On November 25, 1864, Estevan Márquez, a merchant from Barranquilla, wrote to the New York company Lanman & Kemp — a patent medicine house studied in the last chapter — placing an order of “machetes No. 163 of the Collins factory.” Márquez, who appears to have been a regular customer of Lanman & Kemp, asked the company to sell in New York 43 tons of *palo de mora* (*maclura tinctoria*, also known as dyer’s mulberry) on his behalf and pay his order with its proceeds.<sup>42</sup> Other letters written to Lanman & Kemp prove that the Collins’ tools were well-known in other parts of the country. On August 19, 1878, writing from Ocaña, José D. Jacome asked for “2 boxes of 2 dozen each of axes; 2 boxes of 4 dozen each of machetes No. 222 — 14 inches; and 2 boxes of 5 dozen each of machetes No. 254 — 12 inches; from the Collins company.”<sup>43</sup> Like many have done before him, Jacome sent coffee, hides, and bills of exchange to pay for his orders. Collins’ machetes were also notorious in the State of Tolima. A year after Jacome’s request, on March 26, 1879, Aguirre & Compañía of Neiva wrote to the New York merchants ordering twelve Smith & Wesson revolvers and asking Lanman & Kemp “if it is not an inconvenience, to please send us as soon as possible samples, catalogs, and lists of current prices of various hardware items, with drawings and other data that are accurate to place many orders with the success we want.” In particular, they wrote, catalogs “of the many articles that are produced there [United States] with more advantage than in Europe and of which we could do a business with good results.” Finally, they noted, “the tools from the Collins factory are also known throughout this Republic, and with good information from you we could place some orders (...) in return of cinchona bark.”<sup>44</sup>

Advertisements in local newspapers also reveal how these commodities were sold around the country. In 1877 *Francisco Botero, Arango e Hijos* announced in the *Boletín del Comercio* that they had in their store “the famous American machetes and

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<sup>42</sup> Estevan Márquez (Barranquilla, Colombia) to Lanman & Kemp, November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1864, *Lanman & Kemp Collection*, Accession 2328, Series I Foreign Correspondence, Box 20.

<sup>43</sup> Jacome, José D. & Hermano. Ocaña, Colombia, May 1878-December 1879 [Business correspondence and orders] ; 39 items, *Lanman & Kemp Collection*, Accession 2328, Series I Foreign Correspondence, Box 1. 19th August, 1878.

<sup>44</sup> Aguirre y Compañía (Neiva, Colombia) letter to Lanman & Kemp, March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1879, *Lanman & Kemp Collection*, Accession 2328, Series I Foreign Correspondence, Box 1.



axes from the Collins company.”<sup>45</sup> The same year *El Mensajero Noticioso* of Medellín called for artisans to buy Collins handsaws and an “assortment of North American tools,”<sup>46</sup> including iron door hinges, locks, bit braces, latches, screws, and padlocks. Other shopkeepers took advantage of the country’s political environment to promote this type of merchandise. Once the civil war of 1876-1877 ended, a merchant from Medellín invited artisans to return to work by placing an advertisement titled “Peace and Work.” “Now that peace has been achieved,” the advertisement read, “[we are] offering a complete assortment of magnificent tools for artisans,” including Collins axes of all sizes, angle brackets, smoothers, hammers, scissors, and fret saws, among many other commodities.<sup>47</sup>

Since customers still favored the Collins machete due to its durability and lightness, agents and commissioners of German and English merchants were compelled to announce regularly that they would replace their competing machetes if they broke. Keuffel & Esser, a New Jersey-based company, was one of the companies that offered this guarantee in Bogotá by 1887.<sup>48</sup> Like Keuffel & Esser, other brands of machetes were also advertised in newspapers and weeklies. An advertisement in San Juan de Córdoba’s *El Noticioso* in 1889 grabbed the attention of its readers by declaring in capital letters, “No more Collins!!” and urging them to purchase instead machetes of the credited house of Ralph Martindale & Co., from Birmingham. As an incentive to buy this brand, the merchant also guaranteed to replace any ax or machete if needed.<sup>49</sup>

As we have seen in Chapter II, the Colombian population throughout the nineteenth century was predominantly rural. It is highly probable that close to 60 percent of the economically active population in Colombia might have needed for their everyday activities a good machete, especially due to its ability to be used in a great variety of tasks. However, unlike what happened with cotton textiles, foreign machetes were not cheap and were sought by peasants, laborers, and small landholders for their quality. According to John Bidlake, the United States consul in

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<sup>45</sup> *Boletín de Comercio*, (Medellín), 20th July, 1873.

<sup>46</sup> *El Mensajero Noticioso* (Medellín), 1 June 1882.

<sup>47</sup> *Boletín del Comercio* (Medellín), 4 Aug. 1877.

<sup>48</sup> *Directorio General de Bogotá* (Bogotá: Casa editorial de M. Rivas & Ca., 1888).

<sup>49</sup> *El Noticioso* (San Juan de Córdoba), 16 Nov. 1889.

Barranquilla, the cost of a Collins machete in 1883 was \$10.50, while German machetes sold from \$8.50 to \$8.90.<sup>50</sup> Despite the price difference, as reported by the consul, the former was preferred. When we consider this in light of the wages in 1886 for Colombia's skilled and unskilled workers—compiled by Agricultural Department head Carlos Michelsen Uribe and included in the British Foreign Office's report on Colombian trade—it is possible to conclude that a Collins machete was worth more than two months of labor for rural workers and at least twenty days for those who worked in towns. In both cases, it was not an insignificant amount.<sup>51</sup>

It is worth corroborating Michelsen Uribe's observations with other sources, especially since there are still no specific studies of rural wages for nineteenth-century Colombia.<sup>52</sup> According to United States consul Thomas Dawson, weekly wages for agricultural laborers in Barranquilla in 1884 ranged from \$4.84 to \$20.15—that is, from \$0.14 to \$2.87 daily.<sup>53</sup> His colleague E. Richard Esmond reported similar evidence that same year to the Department of State: “The rates for every class of labor in [Antioquia],” he argued, “vary only in the expertness of one laborer over another, independent of the vocation, whether mining, mechanical, or agricultural. Price per day, from 4 reals to 1 peso (32 to 80 cents), and if away from their homes board included.”<sup>54</sup> These figures are similar to those provided by historians today. For instance, Frank Safford estimates that the great mass of agricultural and unskilled urban labor earned between \$70 and \$75 per year—roughly \$0.20 daily.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Bureau of Foreign Commerce, *Commercial Relations of the United States with Foreign Countries during the Years 1896 and 1897*, 866. Money figures are in US dollars.

<sup>51</sup> According to the report, the daily wages for skilled and unskilled laborers were as follows: mason, \$0.80; bookbinder, \$0.70; saddler, \$0.80; printer, \$0.80; shoemaker, \$1.20; carpenter, \$1.60; smith, \$2.00; upholsterer, \$2.00; watchmaker, \$4.00; baker, \$0.80; painter, \$1.00; town laborer, \$0.50; rural farm laborer, \$0.15. Great Britain, Foreign Office, “United States of Colombia: Report on the Trade of Colombia,” in *Reports from H.M. Diplomatic and Consular Officers Abroad on Trade and Finance*, Annual Series 53 (London, 1886), 4.

<sup>52</sup> There is, however, a detailed study of urban wages, Miguel Urrutia, *Precios y Salarios Urbanos En El Siglo XIX* (Bogotá: CEDE- Universidad de los Andes, 2007).

<sup>53</sup> United States. and Department of State., *Labor in America, Asia, Africa, Australasia, and Polynesia: Reports from Consuls of the United States in the Several Countries of America, Asia, Africa, Australasia, and Polynesia on the State of Labor in Their Several Districts, in Response to a Circular from the Department of State* (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1885), 172.

<sup>54</sup> United States. and Department of State., 177.

<sup>55</sup> Safford, “Foreign and National Enterprise in Nineteenth-Century Colombia.”

Evidently, the working classes' income was substantially low, and the economic effort made to buy a foreign machete was not at all negligible. Yet, as we have seen in previous chapters, in nineteenth-century Colombia, wages were not paid solely in money—even if workers sometimes preferred this form of payment, as shown in the records of the coffee hacienda Santa Barbara in Cundinamarca and La Carolina in Antioquia. Because they often did not have enough liquid capital, *hacendados* and mining companies made other arrangements to pay their workers, such as payment in food, goods, land, or housing.<sup>56</sup> Machetes were certainly imported by commercial houses run by Antioqueño entrepreneurs who also participated intensely in mining and coffee production. Such was the case for the trading house Ospina Hermanos in Medellín—run by the sons of the country's former president, Mariano Ospina Rodríguez—that imported in 1885 from Europe, along with porcelain dolls and silk handkerchiefs, a 75-kilogram box of machetes.<sup>57</sup> These could have been given to peons as their wages or simply as tools to carry out agricultural or mining activities.

Still, not all those occupied in agricultural tasks were paid workers; some were tenant farmers. As Catherine LeGrand has shown, many *hacendados* and producers, in order to tie labor to their land, signed different types of tenancy contracts with peasants. In exchange, the latter were allowed to grow their own food crops, raise cattle, or keep part of the farm's crops.<sup>58</sup> And they could use their surplus to acquire the products they most needed in the village market or town fairs. Peons and peasants could also engage in agricultural activities as independent workers. An inhabitant of the Atlantic coast, for instance, could live on a plot of land where he grew plantains, sugarcane, bananas, and yucca, among other crops. If he settled close to a river, he could also have a fair supply of fish and furnish his family with

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<sup>56</sup> Deas, "Una Hacienda Cafetera de Cundinamarca: Santa Barbara (1870-1912)." Most of the literature on the working conditions of farmers and mining-sector laborers focuses on recruitment procedures rather than means of payment. On labor relations in nineteenth-century Colombia, see Renzo Ramirez Bacca, *Historia laboral de una hacienda cafetera: La Aurora, 1882-1982* (Medellín: La Carreta Editores, 2008); Salomón Kalmanovitz and Enrique López E., *La agricultura colombiana en el siglo XX* (Bogotá: Fondo de Cultura Económica: Banco de la República, 2006). On mining, see María Mercedes Botero, *La ruta del oro: una economía exportadora. Antioquia 1850-1890* (Medellín, Colombia: Fondo Ed. Univ. EAFIT, 2007).

<sup>57</sup> Ferro Medina, "Arrieros antioqueños: Empresarios de a pie," 1054–55.

<sup>58</sup> LeGrand, "Labor Acquisition and Social Conflict on the Colombian Frontier, 1850-1936."

meat by hunting wild animals when needed.<sup>59</sup> “His only necessity for money,” the United States consul in Barranquilla stated in 1885, was “to provide salt, rum, tobacco, clothes, and the machete, a long knife which he uses for every purpose, from picking his teeth to cultivating his lands.”<sup>60</sup> The money needed to obtain such commodities was gained by cutting wood for the Magdalena River steamers, catching and drying fish for the city markets, or cultivating his grounds in excess of his own requirements.

A somewhat similar situation prevailed in the State of Antioquia. The ground’s “natural fertility” made it easy for the laborer “to possess a garden spot sufficient to produce the necessaries of life, with but little taken from his wages to accomplish the same.”<sup>61</sup> Indeed, it was usual for small-scale coffee growers to cultivate maize, kidney beans, cacao, plantains, and rice, to name a few crops, both to meet their basic needs and to have a surplus to sell at the nearest market.<sup>62</sup> Almost every family in the region kept “a few hens and a pig to fatten, the pig being their only savings bank”; the earnings from their sale were “not used for living expenses, but in reducing the little store debt or reinforcing the clothing of the family.”<sup>63</sup> Although few small-town stores’ inventories survive, local newspaper ads and the country’s import trade structure suggest that foreign goods made their way to smaller towns and villages. That foreign machetes reached diverse provinces proves that there was a demand for these products in nineteenth-century Colombia.

So far, we know that there was widespread demand for foreign machetes and that peons, laborers, and artisans were familiar enough with the products’ quality

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<sup>59</sup> Parsons, *Antioqueño Colonization in Western Colombia*, 69–95.

<sup>60</sup> United States. and Department of State., *Labor in America, Asia, Africa, Australasia, and Polynesia: Reports from Consuls of the United States in the Several Countries of America, Asia, Africa, Australasia, and Polynesia on the State of Labor in Their Several Districts, in Response to a Circular from the Department of State*, 174.

<sup>61</sup> United States. and Department of State., 177.

<sup>62</sup> Parsons, *Antioqueño Colonization in Western Colombia*, 69–95.

<sup>63</sup> United States. and Department of State., *Labor in America, Asia, Africa, Australasia, and Polynesia: Reports from Consuls of the United States in the Several Countries of America, Asia, Africa, Australasia, and Polynesia on the State of Labor in Their Several Districts, in Response to a Circular from the Department of State*, 179. It is possible that expenditures were subject to a household economy and therefore that the acquisition of a machete was subject to household strategies, much in the sense that Jan de Vries has argued for eighteenth-century Europe. De Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present*.

and durability, so much so that they chose one brand over the other. We also know that, although expensive, foreign machetes were preferred and, more important, that popular consumers were willing to make a financial effort to acquire them. And, no less important, we know that there were different alternatives—town fairs, shops, credit, wages—to do so. What remains to be determined is what these products meant for their consumers. In other words, what did it mean for a Colombian peasant to own a foreign machete in the mid-nineteenth century? And more importantly, how did their consumption relate to their role as citizens?

#### MACHETES, CONSUMPTION, AND POPULAR IDENTITY

The cultural and social meaning of objects is one of the major concerns of those who study consumption and material culture. Still, many have warned us about the risk of forgetting that the utility of the object is itself critical for understanding why some consumers prefer one object over the other. To understand in depth the significance of the foreign machetes and axes in the Colombian market, we must consider the tool's function and form as well as its cultural appropriation by the popular classes. As we will see, these were both essential in nineteenth-century Colombia. A good place to start is to resort to the legal regulations that classified these machetes and knives depending on their functions. The Resolution 23 of 1895 for matters of import duties grouped these items into four categories. The first was for "*calabozos, agüinches y otros machetes para desmontar*" and the "*machetes o cuchillos del monte*" no more than 40 centimeters long.<sup>64</sup> The second category was assigned to those knives for the "arts and crafts," such as bookbinding and shoemaking, and used for any kind of

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<sup>64</sup> According to a 1848 dictionary, "calabozo" was an iron instrument used for topping and pruning trees." see: Ramón Joaquín Domínguez, *Diccionario nacional o Gran diccionario clásico de la lengua española: el más completo de los léxicos publicados hasta el día* (Madrid: Establecimiento tipográfico de Mellado, 1848); For the definitions of calabozo and agüinches in nineteenth-century Colombia, see: Rafael Uribe Uribe, *Diccionario abreviado de Galicismos, Provincialismos y Correcciones* (Medellín: Imprenta del Departamento, 1887), 313 According to Uribe Uribe "con el nombre de agüinche ó güinche se designa en Antioquia, y no sé si en otras partes, un instrumento curvo de dos filos, encabado en un palo delgado. Sirve para desmochar las malezas de los prados y aun para arrancar de raíz las más menudas ó perjudiciales; y el modo de manejarlo para ello es esgrimiéndolo á toda la extensión del brazo. Con poco acuerdo propone el Sr. Ruperto S. Gómez, antioqueño, reemplazar á agüinche por calabozo, que es herramienta muy diferente en la forma y en el uso."

activity other than *desmonte*. In the third grouping were the so-called *peinillas* or “small machetes” that, according to the famous general Rafael Uribe Uribe’s *Diccionario abreviado de galicismos, provincialismos y correcciones de lenguaje* (1887),<sup>65</sup> were worn on the belt by almost every man of the middle or lower classes. These were followed by swords for the militia —whose importation as “weapons of war” was prohibited— table knives and knives with silver, ivory, or mother-of-pearl handles.<sup>66</sup> Of the mentioned above, the *machete para desmontar* and the *peinilla* were the knives and machetes most commonly used in the country. “The machete outranks all other agricultural implements in volume of sales,” P. L. Bell stated, “In Antioquia no man of the middle or lower classes is without his “peinilla” (in its leather sheath), as the “banana knife” is called there.”<sup>67</sup>

From the mentioned resolution it is possible to infer that peasants, laborers, muleteers, and peones used these tools mostly to clear the land, for agricultural purposes, and although sometimes prohibited, as weapons. Indeed, the machete — along with the ax— was the principal tool of the rural population for performing a great range of agricultural work, such as clearing the land, weeding, and harvesting crops. Long machetes were also widely used in the rubber-gathering industry, tobacco farms, and sugar plantations.<sup>68</sup> As many observers suggested, this ubiquity owed much to the state of farming in Colombia. In his address for the inauguration of the *Sociedad de Agricultores Colombianos* on March 31, 1878, Salvador Camacho Roldán, a renowned Colombian politician and entrepreneur, reviewed the critical state of the country’s agriculture.<sup>69</sup> Among the many difficulties, he noted that Colombian farmers, with very few exceptions, did not use plows or fertilize their land. In general, according to Camacho Roldán, they lacked any technical

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<sup>65</sup> Uribe Uribe, *Diccionario abreviado de Galicismos, Provincialismos y Correcciones*.

<sup>66</sup> “Resolución 23 de 1898: sobre clasificación de machetes y cuchillos,” *Complemento de las instituciones políticas y jurídicas de los pueblos modernos: anuario de legislación universal*, eds. Vicente Romero y Girón, and Alejo García Moreno (Madrid: E. Maroto, 1895) 2: 536.

<sup>67</sup> Bell, *Colombia: a commercial and industrial handbook* 176.

<sup>68</sup> For the machete as work tool, see, among others, *Informe Del Ministro de Hacienda de La República de Colombia al Congreso Constitucional de 1892* (Bogotá: Imprenta de “La Nación, 1892).

<sup>69</sup> Salvador Camacho Roldán, “Discurso pronunciado por Salvador Camacho Roldán, 31 de marzo de 1878,” quoted in Adolfo De Francisco Zea, *Juan de Dios Carrasquilla, hombre de ciencia* (Bogotá: Academia Colombiana de la Historia : Academia Nacional de Medicina, 2004).

knowledge.<sup>70</sup> Accounts of this nature were not limited to locals; consuls offered similar ones since the midcentury. The U.S. commissioner of agriculture reported in 1876 that in Colombia, “the processes of agriculture are rude; there is no attempt at the rotation of crops; farm-machinery is very rough and primitive; wooden plows of the old Roman pattern are used for scratching the surface of the soil. Yet, owing to almost inexhaustible fertility of the soil, crops are abundant for home consumption.”<sup>71</sup> Ten years later, the perceptions of both locals and foreigners had not changed much. The United States consul in Barranquilla noted in 1886 that “no land is in need of agricultural implements more than this, inasmuch as a crooked stick is often seen to take the place of a plow.”<sup>72</sup> In 1888, the British Foreign Office published a report on agricultural conditions in Colombia that reiterated the backwardness of the country’s agricultural techniques. According to this document, knowledge of anything resembling scientific agriculture was confined to the few prosperous landowners residing in the capital and larger towns. However, “they seldom put what they have learned into practice.” There were two iron factories in Bogotá that made simple mule-powered machines with iron rollers; the cheapest cost from \$500 to \$600 and was therefore beyond most small sugar growers’ means.<sup>73</sup>

Similar observations were still heard at the turn of the century from those who, like Camacho Roldán, were involved in Colombia’s agricultural projects. In 1911 Phanor J. Eder, an experienced manager of large plantations and cattle ranches in Colombia stated that agriculture as a science was still unknown in the country. The common method for planting and growing maize was, according to him, restricted to burning weeds and brush and then planting seeds in holes made with a stick. Sugarcane was still processed mainly via little hand mills made out of tree trunks, horse-powered vertical mills, and mills driven by waterpower. According to Eder, two areas were exceptions to this: the Sabana de Bogotá, where plows and

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<sup>70</sup> De Francisco Zea, 84.

<sup>71</sup> United States of America, Department of Agriculture (hereinafter D.A.), *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture of the Operations of the Department for the Year 1876* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1876) 84.

<sup>72</sup> United States and Bureau of Foreign Commerce, *Reports from the Consuls of the United States*, vol. 20, September–December, 1886 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1886), 302.

<sup>73</sup> Great Britain, Foreign Office, “Report on the Agricultural Condition of Colombia,” in *Diplomatic and Consular Reports on Trade and Finance*, Annual Series 446 (London, 1888), 7–8.

harvesting machinery of American manufacture were being employed, and the large-scale sugar plantations of the Cauca Valley.<sup>74</sup>

These reports demonstrate that agricultural machinery in Colombia was owned only by the wealthy and that demand for such machinery depended on how the country's agriculture was developing. By the end of the century, coffee was grown on smallholdings in Antioquia, Tolima, Santander, and Cundinamarca, worked by a farmer and his extended family.<sup>75</sup> Evidently, because of the size of many of these parcels, peasants could not afford any of the "labor-saving modern appliances" with the exception, in some cases, of locally produced hand-operated *despulpadoras* (small machines used to separate the coffee beans).<sup>76</sup> Still, the machete was still the best alternative for *desmonte* (forest and land clearance) needed for the land colonization involved in coffee growing and livestock grazing.

For these reasons, the popular sectors used machetes far more than other agricultural tools. Isaac A. Manning, the U.S. consul in La Guaira (Venezuela), in his address to the Pan American Commercial Conference in February 1911, noted the versatility of the machete in Colombia and its ability to substitute for agricultural tools that the peasant and laborer could not afford: "I have seen the machete in use where a hoe, a modern plow, a scythe, a brush hook, an axe or a saw would have been far better, and in every way a more effective implement for the work. One will find the farmer cutting down weeds in his corn field and cotton with a machete where the modern corn and cotton grower uses a plow or cultivator."<sup>77</sup>

Paradoxically, it was the backwardness of the country's agriculture that ensured the

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<sup>74</sup> Eder, *Colombia*, 140.

<sup>75</sup> Parsons, *Antioqueño Colonization in Western Colombia*; Deas, "Una Hacienda Cafetera de Cundinamarca: Santa Barbara (1870-1912)"; Charles W Bergquist, *Coffee and Conflict in Colombia, 1886-1910* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1986); Marco Palacios, *Coffee in Colombia, 1850-1970: An Economic, Social and Political History* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002); LeGrand, *Frontier Expansion and Peasant Protest in Colombia, 1850-1936*.

<sup>76</sup> Bureau of the and American Republics, "Colombia: Trade for the Year 1895," in *Monthly Bulletin Of the Bureau Of the American Republics* (Washington, D.C., 1896), 770. On *despulpadoras* see; Absalón Machado Cartagena, *El Café: De La Aparcería al Capitalismo* (Bogotá, Colombia: Tercer Mundo Editores., 1988), 106; Roger Brew, *El Desarrollo Económico de Antioquia Desde La Independencia Hasta 1920* (Bogotá, Colombia: Banco de la República, n.d.), 354. See also ; London Christopher E., "The Cultural Politics of Technical Change in Colombian Coffee Production" (Master's thesis, Cornell University, 1994), 40-50.

<sup>77</sup> Pan American Commercial Conference, ed., *Proceedings of the Pan American Commercial Conference, February 13-17, 1911*. (Baltimore: Munder, Thomsen Press, 1911), 32.



Colombian peasantry's enormous demand for one specific imported tool: the machete.

Machetes were indispensable to expanding the agricultural frontier. In the second half of the century, entrepreneurs and colonos cleared large areas of public lands to produce export crops. In his much-cited work *Los trabajadores de tierra caliente* (1899), Medardo Rivas documented the “heroic” efforts of agricultural entrepreneurs who ventured into Cundinamarca’s plateau and the lowlands of the Magdalena River valley to “*tumbar el monte*” and turn the land into pastures or tobacco crops.<sup>78</sup> Rivas—who dedicated his book “to the unknown martyrs of work; to the unhappy day laborers who died, ignored by all, in the work of civilization”—described in detail when Pedro Navas Azuero, a lawyer and member of the *Escuela Republicana*, led laborers through hostile terrain,

An arrogant young man, white with big eyes and a large black mustache, dressed only in pants and a striped-blue shirt, open chest, and bare neck, carries a *machete de rozar* on his shoulder. He guides a squad of laborers by a narrow path in the middle of the forest, all armed with axes and machetes, each one carrying *calabazos* full of *guarapo* to quench their thirst. (...)

Work begins. Peons form a line and start *la tala de la montaña*. The small trees yield submissively to the blow of the machete; the stubble falls miserably as the crowd does to dictators; but the cumulative giants, the *Diomates* and the *Guayacanes*,<sup>79</sup> fearlessly resist the ax, and they end up falling with a roar that scares the jungle animals and that echoes in the mountains.”<sup>80</sup>

This was but one representation of colonos’ work, here lead by a white setter. However, colonos were driven by their own experiences, needs, and determination. In some areas, colonization became a reaction to slavery by slaves, to the loss of their communal lands by the indigenous people, to economic depression, and to political

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<sup>78</sup> Rivas, *Los trabajadores de tierra caliente*, 244.

<sup>79</sup> South and Central American trees typically with strong dense hard wood.

<sup>80</sup> Rivas, *Los trabajadores de tierra caliente*, 58.

quarrels, among other factors. As Catherine Le Grand has noted, “the frontier became a kind of refuge where families driven from their homes could satisfy their basic needs with a certain degree of independence.” Migrations, that began after 1850 gained momentum “thanks to the expansion of export agriculture and the concomitant expansion of the transport network.”<sup>81</sup> As a result, peasants reacted to the incentive of free land and new markets in the agricultural export regions — mainly in the western regions and on the Atlantic coast. However, few frontier settlers had property titles, which led to multiple legal claims and violent confrontations among colonos and agricultural entrepreneurs over land use and land ownership. Without a machete and an ax as their companions, colonos and peasants would not have transformed the Colombian landscape as they did in the second half of the nineteenth century. And without such transformation, their claims over public land ownership —where the exercise of their rights as citizens took form in practice— would have taken another course.

Not all the settlers migrated because of export agriculture. With the formal abolition of slavery in 1851, the movement of blacks and mulattoes to the lowland forests increased as many formerly enslaved people resisted their owners’ attempts to persuade them or forced them to stay on the haciendas. In turn, they decided to pursue autonomy and economic independence by cultivating public lands. However, as Claudia Leal has shown, in the Pacific lowlands, black people struggled to achieve and maintain their economic independence through other means, such as “access to mines by renting them out, buying them, or seeking unclaimed placers, which allowed them to choose how and when to mine.”<sup>82</sup> Others collected the seeds of vegetable ivory palms and latex from rubber trees for local and export trade. Both independent mining and extraction of natural resources allowed them to maintain their independent status. Black people were able to control “a broad territory that provided materials for building houses, canoes, and tools, as well as soils in which to grow food and animals they could hunt and fish for their tables.”<sup>83</sup> Travelers and

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<sup>81</sup> LeGrand, *Frontier Expansion and Peasant Protest in Colombia, 1850-1936*.

<sup>82</sup> Leal, *Landscapes of Freedom: Building a Postemancipation Society in the Rainforests of Western Colombia*, 61–62.

<sup>83</sup> Leal, 61–62.

visitors witnessed firsthand how black forest peasants used machetes and axes to accomplish such tasks.<sup>84</sup>

A similar sense of autonomy —understood as the possibility to defend their independent livelihoods against wage servitude— was evidenced in the second half of the century in the bogas of the Magdalena River.<sup>85</sup> Bogas carried machetes on their waists to protect themselves from the hazards of their expeditions. In the late 1890s, French engineer and explorer Jorge Brisson recounted how bogas used the machete to navigate the Atrato River. In the Ciénaga Aguaclara, north of Quibdó, bogas were “often obliged to make way for the canoe with a machete to get rid of the palisades and branches of trees that have fallen through.”<sup>86</sup> Brisson also mentions how he and his entourage used machetes to open their path to the Cararé River expedition. “The trail is dry, but thick almost everywhere, and you can see that it has not been grazed for many years; it is hard not to lose the trail, and you need to use a machete (*y hay que machetear*).”<sup>87</sup> The labor was taken up mainly by the peones that accompanied the expeditionary.

Because of the country’s geography and the poor state of its roads, the machete and the ax were crucial tools for traveling in many regions. Reference made by travelers to these implements as part of the inventory to commence their expeditions is almost ubiquitous. In the 1850s, Manuel Ancízar noted, for instance, that during his excursions to *Otro Mundo* in the Province of Vélez, eight leagues northwest of Canipauna, “there was no path, and it was necessary to open one with a machete.”<sup>88</sup> Elsewhere, he explains how the members of the commission were able to descend a steep slope by creating temporary steps with their machetes, a technique copied from the miners from Muzo in the Western Province of Boyacá. Foreign and local visitors noted the need to “*abrir trocha con un machete*”<sup>89</sup> in their travels through Colombia’s territory, especially in the most inhospitable regions.

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<sup>84</sup> Jorge Brisson, *Viajes por Colombia en los años de 1891 á 1897*, (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1899).

<sup>85</sup> McGraw, *The Work of Recognition: Caribbean Colombia and the Postemancipation Struggle for Citizenship*.

<sup>86</sup> Brisson, *Viajes por Colombia en los años de 1891 á 1897*, 113.

<sup>87</sup> Brisson, 207.

<sup>88</sup> Ancízar, *Peregrinación de Alpha*, 63.

<sup>89</sup> Ernesto Restrepo T. “Un Viaje al Darién” in *El Repertorio Colombiano*, No. XI and XII, (November and December, 1887) 386.

Axes and machetes were not only used in complex expeditions. On the contrary, muleteers, peasants, and peons carried these commodities to travel through the national territory and visit local markets and nearby towns. Although there are no direct testimonies about this common practice, letter men and women, who traveled in the second half of the nineteenth century, did leave copious accounts. In *Viaje del Atlántico a Bogotá*, José Antonio García y García, Ministro Plenipotenciario of Perú, explained to his contemporaries what to expect in a journey from Cartagena to the country's capital in the 1860s. "On the day and at the appointed time, [the traveler] finds at the door of the Hotel an unpleasant horse (...), a mule, or donkey for the load, and a muleteer, black or mulatto, covered with his *ruana*, with his bag with provisions on his back, and the sharp and long *macoco* (long and sharp machete that men of this country always carry when they travel) on his arm, to cut his way through the branches and defend himself from animals."<sup>90</sup>

While the popular sectors used machetes and axes in their everyday lives to cultivate the land, expand the agricultural frontier, fight for their autonomy, and travel along rivers and roads throughout the country, they also used these tools to protect their honor and defend themselves, their families, or their property. Furthermore, for many men, they were a tool to reinforce their masculinity in a rural society and hence, an object they turned to defend it.<sup>91</sup> At least in the eyes of the costumbrista writer Manuel María Madiedo, confrontations between bogas, inspectors, and smugglers on the banks of the Magdalena River occurred, almost without exception, with a machete in hand. In Madiedo's short story titled *El contrabandista*, each guard had his machete, as did the smuggler, primarily to defend themselves from the dangers of their daily activities.<sup>92</sup> In another story, Madiedo describes a machete fight between bogas, a fight that began because one of them

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<sup>90</sup> José Antonio García y García, *Un Viaje Del Atlántico a Bogotá* (Impreso por Ponton i Barrera, 1863), 18.

<sup>91</sup> Scholars have shown the link among agricultural workers between masculinities and machetes as a tool for both work and self-defense. See, for instance, for another time period and place, Steve Marquardt, "Pesticides, Parakeets, and Unions in the Costa Rican Banana Industry, 1938-1962," *Latin American Research Review* 37, no. 2 (2002): 3-36.

<sup>92</sup> Manuel María Madiedo, "El contrabandista," in *Museo de cuadros de costumbres: Variedades y viajes*, vol. I (Bogotá: Biblioteca Banco Popular, 1973), 310-20.

accused another of being a braggart.<sup>93</sup> Some of these confrontations took place at fairs or festivals. General Joaquín Posada Gutiérrez regretted that at the traditional *Fiesta de San Onofre* in Cartagena province during the first half of the nineteenth century bloody collisions frequently occurred because of the “excesses on these plebeian bacchanals.” And when fights started, “the vile and cowardly machete,” Posada Gutiérrez stated, “has changed its name: it is no longer called a machete but a *peinilla*, and dismembering a man or cutting off his head, is now called *peluquearlo*.” He then bitterly protested how “the canteens of *currulao* or *mapalé* [Afro-Colombian dances] celebrate in their wicked songs the feats of the *peluqueros* and the agony of the victims, and when any verse impresses the dancers shout enthusiastically: Long live freedom!”<sup>94</sup>

Contemporaries’ association of machetes with violence portrayed in nineteenth-century literature — that, it is worth noting, was not devoid of racial prejudice—became a reality in the judicial records. However, unlike Madiedo’s and Posada’s short stories, references to machetes in court proceedings were not restricted to one social or racial type. In 1889 the *Tribunal Superior del Distrito Judicial de Cundinamarca* studied the case of Nicanor and Nepomuceno Restrepo for the murder of Rafael Patiño. According to the expert (*perito*), interviewed by the judge about the weapons that caused Patiño’s death, “he believed that the head wound had been caused with a *peinilla* or machete, and the arm wound with a knife.”<sup>95</sup> Other testimonies confirm the use of these bladed weapons in personal assaults. In their testimony of the aggression committed against a citizen of the Circuit of Guaduas in 1887, María Luisa Lozano testified that the assailants had sharp weapons and that during the attack, the men involved “raking-up the *peinillas*” Salustiana Santos claimed that the aggressor Gervasio Parado went out into the street carrying “a *peinilla* hanging on his waist and a club.”<sup>96</sup> In 1889 in Beltrán, a

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<sup>93</sup> Manuel María Madiedo, “El Boga,” in *Museo de Cuadros de Costumbres: Biblioteca de “El Mosaico,”* ed. José María Vergara y Vergara (Bogotá, Colombia: F. Mantilla, 1866), 3–7.

<sup>94</sup> Joaquín Posada Gutiérrez, “Fiestas de La Candelaria En La Popa,” in *Museo de Cuadros de Costumbres: Biblioteca de “El Mosaico,”* ed. José María Vergara y Vergara (Bogotá, Colombia: F. Mantilla, 1866), 85.

<sup>95</sup> República de Colombia, *Registro Judicial de Cundinamarca*, Bogotá, 25 of September, 1889, Year III, Number 81, p. 666.

<sup>96</sup> República de Colombia, *Registro Judicial de Cundinamarca*, Bogotá, 25 of June 1889, Year II, Number 72, p. 585.

town on the Magdalena River and just three miles from Ambalema, Tomás Pinto Gómez was charged with attacking the *Juez Municipal*, who was transporting the prisoner Antonio Pinto. According to the judge, “with a bare peinilla in his hand (*peinilla desnuda en la mano*) and in a hostile and threatening attitude, [Pinto Gómez] addressed the patrol,” making it impossible to apprehend the prisoner.<sup>97</sup>

While machetes were essential to defending honor and property, they were also needed by peasants and peones to protect the homeland, fight for a political cause, or attack political opponents. Indeed, as historians have noted, in nineteenth-century Colombian civil wars were fought in a scattered and unstructured manner and often with ragged troops poorly armed.<sup>98</sup> Among the government forces and the rebels, precarious weapons proliferated, such as knives, bayonets, machetes, spears, sticks, and stones. As historian Juan Carlos Jurado has argued, the weapons used in civil wars reveal the type of society that fought with them, that is, a peasant and agrarian society in which the tools of agricultural labor were converted into weapons when needed.<sup>99</sup> Multiple accounts of the civil wars bear witness to the use of machetes to face opposing forces —so much so that Colombian law prohibited the importation of machetes in times of civil unrest by the end of the century.<sup>100</sup>

María Martínez de Nisser, who left a written record of her experience in the civil war of 1840, registers that “spears, machetes, and a few firearms” were given to the troops to prevent the departure of ministeriales, or those who supported the government of President José Ignacio de Márquez.<sup>101</sup> The National Guard also equipped its troops with machetes by mid-century. For instance, on September 24, 1851, a colonel in Socorro forwarded to the nation’s treasurer “13 machetes and 2 jackets of the troop’s uniform,” left over from a previous shipment.<sup>102</sup> Years later,

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<sup>97</sup> República de Colombia, *Registro Judicial de Cundinamarca*, Bogotá, 25 of Auguts 1890, Year IV, Number 114, p. 942.

<sup>98</sup> Malcolm Deas, “Pobreza, guerra civil y política: Ricardo Gaitán Obeso y su campaña en el Río Magdalena en Colombia, 1885,” in *Del poder y la gramática y otros ensayos sobre historia, política y literatura colombianas* (Bogotá: Taurus, 2006), 121–73.

<sup>99</sup> Juan Carlos Jurado Jurado, “La guerra como negocio y los negocios de la guerra civil de 1851,” *Análisis Político* 26, no. 78 (2013): 111–40; Carlos Eduardo Jaramillo and Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Colombiana, *Los Guerrilleros del novecientos* (Bogotá: CEREC, 1991).

<sup>100</sup> Bureau of the and American Republics, “Colombia: Trade for the Year 1895,” 770.

<sup>101</sup> María Martínez de Nisser, *Diario de Los Sucesos de La Revolución En La Provincia de Antioquia En Los Años de 1840-1841* (Medellín, Colombia: Fondo Editorial Universidad EAFIT, 2012), 42.

<sup>102</sup> AGN, Documentos Militares, T4, D6, fols. 202–23 (1851).

amid a new civil war, the liberal general Juan José Nieto addressed the “republican soldier” on October 18, 1861, encouraging him to defend the State of Antioquia. “The rifle and the machete have been placed in our hands,” Nieto claimed in his *Proclama desde el cuartel general en Islitas*, “have no other destiny than to defend the cause of the Federation. (...) Long live the Federation. Long live the brave battalion “Padilla.”<sup>103</sup>

Conservatives also left a record of machetes in times of civil war. The *Antioqueño* Juan Pablo Restrepo recalled the events in Manizales by the end of the 1876-77 civil war — a reaction to the secularization of public education taken by the openly Liberal government of the time. In an article titled *Después del 5 de Abril* published in *El Repertorio Colombiano*, and without hiding his disdain for the liberal soldiers, Restrepo reminisced the events that took place the day after the capitulations of the defeated the government in 1877. “Immediately, and as the army entered, a real looting in the city began.” The following day these aggressions were drawn-out to the fields and district’s *haciendas*. “Individuals in the streets had their hats, *ruanas*, *carrieles* (shoulder bags), and even trousers taken from them. If they resisted, they were given *peinillazos* and even shot.”<sup>104</sup> Houses and haciendas were looted. “Carpenters, blacksmiths, and all craftsmen’s tools were stolen or sold to Liberals at miserable prices,” he complained. Throughout this harrowing event, as narrated by Restrepo, black soldiers from the Cauca region “mistreated multitudes of citizens with their machetes.”<sup>105</sup>

There is also evidence that the police confiscated machetes from civilians a year after the 1893 bogotazo.<sup>106</sup> On April 3, 1894, the minister of government was informed that the police had seized in Bogotá from the room of Jesús A. Concha “30 machetes and some (...) girdles with the inscription ‘*Viva el Trabajo*.’”<sup>107</sup> Machetes even helped women to cope with economic difficulties during war. Such was the case for Carmen García, who in 1902 pawned to María González two machetes in

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<sup>103</sup> “Proclama desde el cuartel general en Islitas (Estado de Antioquia)”, octubre de 1861, Juan José Nieto, in *Registro Oficial* (Bogotá, 1861) no. 22, 95.

<sup>104</sup> *El Repertorio Colombiano*. Numero XX, February 1880, p. 83.

<sup>105</sup> *El Repertorio Colombiano*. Numero XX, February 1880, p. 97.

<sup>106</sup> David Sowell, “The 1893 Bogotazo: Artisans and Public Violence in Late Nineteenth-Century Bogotá,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 21, no. n.1-2 (1989): 267–82.

<sup>107</sup> AGN, Sección República, Fondo Policía Nacional, T5, fol. 797 (1894).

Ibagué.<sup>108</sup> However, it was Peregrino Rivera Arce, an artist and an engraver who became a soldier in the *Thousand Days' War* (1899-1902), who left us one of the most vivid recollections of machetes' notorious role in Colombia's civil wars. In his album *Recuerdos de Campaña*, Arce left "documentary drawings" of the cruelty of war.<sup>109</sup> Among his most noteworthy representations are two sketches: "*Una carga al machete*" (Figure 10) and "*Croquis de un soldado muerto a machete*" (Figure 11). In the first, the liberal artist depicts a soldier from the *Batallón Libres de Ocaña* overpowering another man with a machete. The soldier lying on the ground covers his face in a last attempt to stop the deadly assault. In the other image, a *Sketch of a soldier killed by machete*, a dead man (killed with a machete, as Arce's annotation next to the drawing confirms) is immortalized by the artist. The peasant soldier is depicted as only one of the many casualties of the war.

Because of the cruelty of civil wars — so vividly depicted by Rivera Arce— letter men underscored the importance of equipping national troops with adequate uniforms and modern weapons in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Agustín Núñez, a *Cartagenero* politician and prolific commentator of legal codes, made such claims in his annotated edition of the *Código Militar de los Estados Unidos de Colombia* (1881). When commenting on the requirements of military uniforms, Núñez was vehement about the urgency of modernizing the troops. "It should not be allowed that [enlisted men] (...) appear in peasant clothes (*vestidos de paisano*), sometimes only wearing, for all distinctive, the quepis and an ordinary machete or *peinilla* that it is nothing like the sword," he claimed. "The officer on duty must pay for his complete uniform, with epaulettes, sword, and belt."<sup>110</sup> Núñez echoed in considerable measure mid-nineteenth-century politicians', writers', and journalists' descriptions of troops. Like them, he refers to their peasant clothing and the machetes hanging on their waists as traits of the lower ranks. Such reference is hardly uncommon. By the time of Núñez's remarks, the machete and the *peinilla* had become representative

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<sup>108</sup> Archivo Histórico de Ibagué, caja 339, fols. 412–14 (1902), as cited in Jaramillo and Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Colombiana, *Los Guerrilleros del novecientos*, 147–49.

<sup>109</sup> Beatriz Gonzalez, *Artistas en tiempos de guerra: Peregrino Rivera Arce*. (Bogotá: Museo Nacional de Colombia, 1999), 11.

<sup>110</sup> Colombia and Agustín Núñez, *Código militar de los Estados Unidos de Colombia: expedido por el Congreso y sancionado por el poder ejecutivo federal en 20 de mayo de 1881 (Ley 35)* (Bogotá: Imprenta á cargo de T. Uribe Zapata, 1883), 47.



objects of the peasantry of Western Colombia. Both part of the *arriero's* attire, along with his drill pants, long-sleeved flannel shirt, linen *ruana*, *alpargatas* (hemp sandals), and *carriel*.

Midcentury literature also espoused such representation. It not only showed how the machete was evocative of the country's peasantry but also something that is inherited and cherished by the rural population. In 1855, the writer and politician Juan de Dios Restrepo—under the pseudonym Emiro Kastos—wrote a short story about his *compadre* (close friend) Facundo, a *gamonal* (village chief) of Antioquia who only inherited from his father a machete and a horse. Poverty was not an obstacle for Facundo, who “with some small savings he had (...) loaded his horse with a small provision of food, put on his waist a good machete,” and went on to colonize little by little the inhospitable terrain of the Cordillera Central.<sup>111</sup> Restrepo's story speaks of the machete as a tool that peasants owned throughout their lives, as part of their identity; Facundo used it from childhood to adulthood. But the story also speaks of the machete as a tool to protect the honor and life of its owner. It was thanks to his machete that Facundo was able to defend himself against a “gang of seven blacks.” Restrepo's story is also a story of Facundo's economic rise as a *colono* (settler), where not only the machete but the ax were his constant companions. Once Facundo stopped working in the mines, Restrepo recounts, he “bought a *terreno selvoso* in a hot valley, took hold of an ax, and began to cut down mountains with the courage of a titan.”<sup>112</sup>

To the extent that the machete became part of the popular sectors' attire and a token of self-identification, it also became a sign of social distinction among the popular classes. As evidenced in the chronicles of the time, not all machetes were of the same quality and characteristics, nor were their sheaths. Such differences were memorialized by the costumbrista writer José David Guarín in *Un día de San Juan en tierra caliente* (1866). Somewhat condescendingly, Guarín tells the story of a *bogotano* who left the capital to visit, for the first time, a town celebrating its patron saint San Juan. After describing the particularities of each *calentano* who joined the festivities, he noted: “There you have it: what they all carry is a machete, tucked under the

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<sup>111</sup> Emilio Kastos, “Mi Compadre Facundo,” in *Mi Compadre Facundo y Otros Cuadros* (Bogotá, Colombia: Editorial Minerva, 1936), 59–60.

<sup>112</sup> Kastos, 61.

shell of their [mare or horse] saddle. Its tip and its handle are trimmed with silver. This designates the quality of the man who wears it.”<sup>113</sup> Unsurprisingly, this foreign commodity found its way into many other activities and practices of peasants' daily life. Dances with machetes, or *baile a golpe de machete*, became a custom in the coffee region, a tradition that is still practiced today. Machetes were also used to craft musical instruments that accompanied local celebrations and maintained ancestral traditions. In the Patía Valley, in the southeast of the Colombian Pacific, for instance, Afro-descendant communities manufactured their own violins (*violines patianos*) with their machetes, using guadua and horsehair, leather, *totumo*, or wood. Priests prohibited these instruments by the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>114</sup> And as has been noted, machetes and peinillas even slipped into the nineteenth-century language to name their use: *machetear*, *peluquear*, *peinar*.

By the turn of the nineteenth century, the popularity of the machete was unquestionable. It came to represent the *arriero's* strength, the boga's autonomy, and the peasant's bravery. It was an object with the popular classes throughout their lives and an instrument by which they were identified and self-identified. However poor a man was in nineteenth-century Colombia, he could use the machete to cope with his work, defend his honor and property, and even engage in lively entertainment. This largely explains the demands made by these social groups over the machete and their need to become sharp and sensitive consumers in the national and international market. But, furthermore, this multifunctional tool —that commodity that they valued so much —was decisive in defining their place as citizens in the still young republic.

#### A MATERIAL APPROACH TO CITIZENSHIP

The historiography of consumption and material culture has explored the relationship between objects and everyday life, consumption, and processes of identity formation, and material culture and resistance in imperial or colonial

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<sup>113</sup> José David Guarín, “Un Día de San Juan En Tierra Caliente,” in *Museo de Cuadros de Costumbres i Variedades*, vol. II (Bogotá: Imprenta a cargo de F. Mantilla, 1866), 206.

<sup>114</sup> Paloma Muñoz, “Las almas de los violines ‘negros’” (PhD Thesis, Anthropology, Universidad del Cauca, Popayán, Colombia, 2016).

contexts, to name just a few dimensions.<sup>115</sup> In the last two decades, however, the political dimension of consumption has moved increasingly to the forefront in historical studies — an emphasis highly relevant to the studies of citizenship in nineteenth-century Latin America.<sup>116</sup> Indeed, in societies with low literacy levels, as was Colombia and most Latin American countries, recent studies on citizenship have shown the importance of exploring in greater depth how the exercise of citizenship, people's claims, and struggles over their rights, and even the formation of national identities, took place in various spaces and practices that surpassed republican constitutional frameworks. As has been explored in Chapter I, the marketplace was one such place, and the practices that went with it were critical to forming citizenship in the second half of the nineteenth century.

By looking closely at the popular sectors' place in the national market and economy — not only as part of the country's labor force but as individuals interested in the consumption and adoption of foreign commodities — we can gain new insights into nineteenth-century everyday practices of citizenship. As we have seen, although peasants' and laborers' options as consumers were limited by Colombia's economic and geographic conditions, men and women were able to express their dissatisfaction over foreign products if needed and sought various alternatives to access the commodities they liked and preferred. They did so, above all, through objects that were intimately close to their lives and daily subsistence.

Hence, historians embrace a commodity like a machete as a participant and agent in crafting peasants, arrieros, peones, and bogas' ideas of citizenship; a process whose range and rhythm varied according to consumers' own cultural, social, and economic experiences. Even if schematically, it is worth noting the extent to which machetes played a role in shaping citizenship on the ground. Foreign machetes were tools that allowed members of the popular sectors to recognize the national territory. With these tools, men and women could travel through the republic, visit fairs and regional markets, and engage in commerce with other free citizens beyond their

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<sup>115</sup> Trentmann, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*.

<sup>116</sup> Such connection between politics and consumption has been proposed for studies on Europe and North America. See, in particular, Kroen, "A Political History of the Consumer". See also, Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*. For the Latin American case, the literature that studies the connection between consumption and politics has focused mainly on the twentieth century.

hometowns. There is no doubt that on these journeys and in these places, peasants, peons, and small landholders forged shared experiences about their place in the nation.<sup>117</sup> Machetes also allowed them to explore the national territory — or at least an extension of it — and recognize firsthand its characteristics, peoples, and resources.

Furthermore, and as demonstrated throughout the chapter, machetes were indispensable for the expansion of the agricultural frontier, vital for developing the country's export economy and Colombia's integration into the global market. Thanks to machetes and axes, colonos acquired new lands and cultivated new crops. With these tools, peasants protected, if needed, their property from third parties. Indeed, their claims over their property rights were not only limited to the courts. In several instances, *colonos* resorted to violent confrontations to protect their interests and rights as citizens. But more importantly — as it has been studied in Chapter I — this foreign tool allowed the popular sectors — whether bogas, peasants, or settlers — to fight for their economic autonomy as part of their struggle for political recognition in mid-nineteenth century Colombia. This explains why in not few cases machetes were also raised in defense of the republic and the values it protected — liberty, equality, and fraternity. As historian Hilda Sabato has argued, in nineteenth-century Latin America, “as guardians of popular sovereignty, citizens had the right and the obligation to defend freedom and bear arms in the face of any abuses of power.”<sup>118</sup> Machetes were, consequently, central to this form of political participation that manifested itself, among other corporate bodies, in subalterns' active presence in the national guards or the militia.<sup>119</sup>

Through the study of agricultural tools, the mutual relationship between popular consumers' world of goods and everyday politics in mid-nineteenth century Colombia takes on even greater relevance as it substantiates the tension between hegemonic notions of citizenship and subaltern practices of citizenship. To the extent that the popular sectors became part of the market economy, both as critical consumers of foreign goods and active producers of export commodities, they

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<sup>117</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

<sup>118</sup> Hilda Sabato, *Republics of the New World: The Revolutionary Political Experiment in Nineteenth-Century Latin America*, 2018, 12.

<sup>119</sup> Sanders, *Contentious Republicans: Popular Politics, Race, and Class in Nineteenth-Century Colombia*.

conformed to the idea of citizenship promoted by the country's elites. They were, after all, productive citizens. However, machetes and axes also gave economic independence to many — including bogas, colonos, small miners, and black peasants— who sought their recognition as citizens through the pursuit of economic autonomy, on the one hand, and freedom, and equality, on the other hand. This, in not few cases, against the desires and expectative the ruling elites.

Draft