

**Black Communities on the Colombian Pacific
Coast and the 'Aquatic Space':
A Spatial Approach to Social Movement Theory**

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Abstract

Spatial insights into the workings of social movements have received little attention in established social movement theory so far. Emphasis is usually placed on the temporal dimensions of social change, and most accounts of social movements examine only briefly the particular worldly place out of which a given movement emerges, before the more 'serious' analysis focuses on the movement structures and how it is inscribed in the wider global changes of history. This thesis argues that an approach to social movements via their specific geographies or, more analytically, their spatialities provides a deeper understanding of both a movement's particularity 'on the ground', and the ways in which social movement agency is articulated across different scales from the local to the global. Through a genealogy of spatial theorising it is shown how 'space' and 'place' matter in social movement theory and research. A place perspective is then offered on the social movement of black communities on Colombia's Pacific coast that has mobilised in the wake of the new Constitution of 1991 in the form of ethnic-territorial organisations that defend their rights to cultural difference as intrinsically linked to territorial control. Focusing less on the social movement structures *per se* than on the 'pre-geographies' or 'soils' out of which social movement agency emerges, this thesis advocates an ethnographic cultural geography and applies thick description and the voices of local people on the Colombian Pacific coast to unlock the 'aquatic sense of place' among rural black populations in this region. The 'aquatic space' as a particular set of spatialised social relationships in the Pacific lowlands is then examined and the ways in which it has been instrumental in the organising structures of rural black communities into community councils along river basins. These processes are further examined in the light of capitalist and state interventions that frequently mediate them, thus creating complex interactions between ethnic social movements, the state and capital.

The thesis concludes by arguing that such a place perspective on social movements, drawing on *both* resource-mobilisation theories and identity-oriented perspectives and grounding them in space, provides deeper insights into the workings of social movements than established social movement theory.

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Sometimes I remember a book by its acknowledgements. Surely not a great compliment to its deeper intellectual impact it has had on me, it may seem, but I like to read or flick through a book's acknowledgement section, as if it somehow revealed the *feelings* with which the book was written. Now writing the acknowledgements to this thesis myself, I appreciate the gratifying experience of 're-living' the process of research and writing of the last nearly four years, with people, friends and memories popping in and out of my mind. I loved this process, and I have come to love a great many people on the way; yet I shouldn't let this section become an emotional drain, but give it some 'structured coherence' worthy of this thesis. Of course, as I am writing these lines, it becomes obvious that my thoughts are drifting along the hot and humid shores of the rivers on Colombia's Pacific coast, picking up fragments of myself on the way, as I am nurturing these faraway thoughts, now back in Glasgow with the essential spirits of my *botella curada*.

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Axe!

CHAPTER 1

Geography, social movements, black communities and Colombian labyrinths: but what exactly is this PhD all about?

The sixth planet was a planet ten times as immense. There lived an old man who wrote enormous books. [...] 'What is this heavy book?' - the little prince asked. 'What are you doing here?' 'I am a geographer' - said the old man. 'What is this, a geographer?' 'A wise man who knows where the seas are, the rivers, the towns, the mountains and the deserts.' 'This is really interesting' - said the little prince. 'At last a true profession!'

Saint-Exupéry (1971:64-65)

So there you have it. We are 'wise men' (and women?!) exercising a 'true profession' that is characterised by the knowledge of location (the seas, rivers, towns, mountains and deserts). It is worthwhile bearing in mind these words of the 'old man', as I am trying to expand the meaning of the concept of geographical location, or rather to emphasise its link to the subjectivities of place in the analysis of the place-based cultural and political struggle of the social movement of black communities on Colombia's Pacific coast. To do this, I must know the *place* where the movement emerges, where the people who form that movement live, and what it means to them living in this place that is the Colombian Pacific coast. Because this place and the subjectivities, identities and passions that it generates with locals make a difference to the ways in which the movement organises and articulates itself. I will therefore provide a spatialised analysis of social movement practice in this thesis, in particular uncovering the geographies of the 'preconditions' of resistance (the pre-existing people, cultures, places), rather than focusing on the social movement *per se* and its structures, politics and strategies. As an organising category for these preconditions or 'soils' out of which a subsequent social movement emerges, I make use of the concept of the 'aquatic space' that conceptualises the everyday social relationships amongst black communities as profoundly conditioned by various aquatic elements that the specific environment in the Pacific provides. I propose an ethnographic cultural geography, applying extensive participant observation and deep ethnography as the privileged research methodologies, to uncover local meanings of place, and to show how these impact on the recent political organisation processes in the Colombian Pacific. It is then not only

characteristic of our 'true profession' as geographers to know where the seas and rivers are, but also *where* social movement agency emerges and what particular forms it takes on in specific places. The little prince would be enthralled at such a prospect.

Reflections of a 'wise man' on the social reality of protest at the beginning of the new millennium

Recent years have seen an increase in protest movements all over the world. This trend is characterised by a diversification of struggles, ranging from feminism, ecology, anti-racist, to land and ethnic struggles. In sociological terms it has been argued that a shift has occurred away from class-based to identity-based conflicts (Melucci 1989, Castells 1997), although the former do not disappear. More recently, globalising resistance networks have been formed that connect a large number of locally based social movements across space to address wider questions and to articulate their protests globally (Routledge 2001). Local problematics are increasingly regarded as intrinsically entwined with global issues on all kinds of scales. It is this entanglement of the local and the global, which some have referred to as 'glocalisation' (Robertson 1995, Beck 1998), that may be considered one of the outstanding characteristics of our 'condition of postmodernity' (Harvey 1989).

It is maybe social movements who best articulate the contradictions of late capitalism at the beginning of this new millennium. Theorising social movements is therefore not only an act of reflection on protest and social action, but also an examination of a changing social reality and its spatial constitution. This is perhaps why social movement research has recently attracted an increasing interest from throughout the social sciences. There is a common understanding among social movement researchers that these 'new' forms of protest require new theories of social action, both to explain the emergence and the development of social movements through time and space, and to reflect on their future potentials (McAdam *et al.* 1996, Alvarez *et al.* 1998).

Social movement theory has been a dynamic field of social inquiry that has experienced a number of paradigm shifts (and/or entanglements) since the Second World War. The most influential theoretical trend that established itself in the 1970s was resource-mobilisation theory (RMT), itself the synthesis of a number of theoretical currents that emerged in the 1960s. RMT, however, came increasingly under pressure in the 1980s, when its insufficiency at accounting for the cultural dimensions of social protest was critiqued. This cultural component was embraced in new ways of theorising social

movements that emphasised processes of identity construction, an approach that I refer to as identity-oriented perspective (IOP) in this thesis. This was also a ‘new’ arena in which anthropologists situated their inquiries. Yet, bar a few exceptions (e.g. Slater 1985), geographers and the particular geographies of social movements were conspicuously absent from social movement theory. This conceptual and methodological void has more recently been addressed in terms of conceptualising the ‘spatiality of resistance’ (Routledge 1997) and the ‘spatialities of social movements’ (Slater 1998).

This PhD should be understood as a further contribution to the geographical debates in social movement research. It acknowledges the ‘cultural turn’ in social sciences in general, and emphasises the need for a ‘geographical turn’ in social movement theory in particular (to use the ‘turning’ metaphor of Cook *et al.* 2000). Drawing on these debates, this PhD provides a spatial approach to the social movement of black communities on Colombia’s Pacific coast, striving to understand the particularities of place and culture out of which this movement has emerged, and which it in turn mobilises in its project of cultural politics. Applying deep ethnography, I reveal the particular sets of historically formed spatialised social relationships in play along the river basins of Colombia’s Pacific coast, conceptualising them in terms of the ‘aquatic space’, and detailing them as the spatial preconditions for social movement mobilisation and organising. These spatial preconditions can be considered as the ‘soils’ out of which the movement emerges, and what it draws upon in its strategies and concrete articulations of resistance.

In many ways, I employ here a less common research strategy and narrative in the analysis of this movement. Although I have researched the movement’s structures, its negotiations with the government and the increasing interaction with globalising resistance networks, and will make constant references to these research findings throughout this thesis, I will focus my analysis on the sense of place and local aquatic identities as important spatial preconditions for social movement mobilisation. My narrative style follows this analytical strategy in that it flows like the rivers of the Colombian Pacific coast, meandering through the local aquatic imaginaries of the tropical rain forests. Privileged representation is therefore given to the voices of local peasants and fishermen over the often institutionalised discourses of urban movement leaders.¹

¹ I use the term ‘fishermen’ throughout this thesis, as the fishing activities amongst rural black populations on Colombia’s Pacific coast are almost exclusively undertaken by men, even if women may occasionally engage in certain fishing practices as well.

In order to place these developments into their geographical, historical, socio-economic and spatio-cultural context, though, I will discuss in this introductory chapter some of the outstanding moments and features of Colombia's (official) history and societal development. I will then briefly outline how Colombia's new Constitution of 1991 has provided a favourable legislative context for black ethnic-territorial mobilisation on the Pacific coast. The latter is articulated by, amongst others, the Process of Black Communities PCN (Proceso de Comunidades Negras), a social movement that I introduce later in this chapter.²

*Colombia: into the labyrinth of Macondo*³

All my work corresponds to a geographic or historical reality. It is not magical realism and all these things which are said. When you read Bolívar, you realise that all the others have, in some way, a documented base, an historical base, a geographic basis which is proved with 'The General'.

García Márquez (quoted in Pearce 1990:4)

Colombia is a country of an exuberant tropical geography and very diverse regions (Guhl 1975). It is located in the north-western part of South America, bordering with Panama to the north, Venezuela to the east, Brazil and Peru to the south-east and Ecuador to the south (Figure 1.1). Colombia is also the only country in South America that borders with two oceans, the Atlantic Ocean on its Caribbean coast to the north and the Pacific Ocean to the west. Prominent in Colombia's geography is the mountainous region of the west, where three mountain ranges of the Andes, the Western, Central and Eastern Cordillera, cut the country and define its climatic variations. Deep valleys separate the ranges, notably those of the two great rivers, the Cauca and Magdalena.

² As I have mentioned before, this PhD does not intend to discuss social movement *structures* in great detail, since I am mainly concerned with uncovering the preconditions for social movement mobilisation. Therefore, a more detailed analysis of the PCN will appear in future publications.

³ Macondo is the fictional community on Colombia's Caribbean coast created by Gabriel García Márquez, the Colombian literature Nobel prize-winner in 1982, in his novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1970). It has become a symbol of 'magical realism', the literary trend associated with the 'boom' in Latin American fiction in the 1960s and 1970s. Yet, Colombia itself often seems to take on Macondian dimensions in which the boundaries between the 'magic' and the 'real' get blurred, and I certainly found my own personal Macondo in my fieldwork site, Guapi. The image of the 'labyrinth' in this section's title is taken from García Márquez's book *The General in his Labyrinth* (1991), a novel that recreates the liberator Bolívar's last journey. This imagery has also been used by Jenny Pearce in her book *Colombia: Inside the Labyrinth* (1990), the principal English-language source which I have used in the analysis presented in this section. Other sources include: Pécaut (1973, 1993), Leal Buitrago (1984, 1995), Díaz Uribe (1986), Sánchez and Peñarando (1986), Guzmán Campos and others (1986), Pizarro (1987), Leal Buitrago and Zamosc (1991), and Leal Buitrago and Dávila (1991).



Figure 1.1 Map of Colombia
Source: adapted from Wade (1997a:28)

This region covers 26 per cent of the country's land mass, but 80 per cent of the population lives there. It is also the centre of the country's economy. To the east, there is a low-lying flat region made up of huge savannahs (*llanos orientales*) to the north and extensive rain forests to the south. Less than two per cent of the population lives in these areas.

The Pacific lowlands, the region under study in this thesis, lie to the west of the Occidental Andean range and extend for some 1,300 kilometres from Ecuador in the south to Panama in the north. They cover an area of almost ten million hectares of tropical rain forest which contains one of the world's highest levels of biodiversity. They are inhabited by around 1.3 million people, some three per cent of Colombia's total national population. A region geographically separated from Colombia's interior by the Western Andean mountain range, it has variously been described as the 'hidden littoral' (Yacup 1934) or the 'periphery of the periphery' (Granda 1977) due to its physical and economic marginality in relation to the rest of the country. Of interest to the Spaniards during colonial times for its rich alluvial gold prospects, the region's economic picture has typically been of a 'boom-and-bust' economy imposed on a subsistence economy since the mid-19th century, in which during relatively short time spans natural products are exploited intensively responding to external demands, before a decline in demand leads to a rapid decrease and collapse of these economies. Both the 'ivory nut' (*tagua*) and the rubber exploitation on the Pacific coast in the first half of the 20th century are typical of these boom-and-bust cycles, while local people continued to practice a subsistence economy of fishing, agriculture and gathering for their everyday needs. Since the 1960s the region has been an important source of the country's timber supply, which has led to high levels of deforestation that pose a threat to traditional life styles of local populations in many areas. More recently, the region has attracted strategic attention in national development plans with view to conserving and exploiting its biodiversity, for example, by pharmaceutical industries.

Colombia's ecological and geographical diversity is matched by its ethnic composition. According to the last census in 1993, 532,233 indigenous people live in the country (DANE 1993). They belong to 81 different indigenous groups and make up 1.6 per cent of the nation's total population of 33,109,840. There are furthermore an estimated 25 per cent of Afro-Colombians, the remainder being made up of a mixed mestizo population.⁴ The country is currently passing through a highly critical moment of political

⁴ Yet, see my later discussion in Chapter 5 on the unreliability of racial population data in this census.

instability. Its escalating internal armed conflict has been likened to civil war dimensions. Powerful guerrilla groups effectively control over forty per cent of the national territory and also large parts of the lucrative illegal drug traffic. Right-wing paramilitary groups have extended their areas of influence, leaving terror and intimidation in their wake. The leaders of an emerging civil society are targeted by selective killings from right-wing death squads, and the state is too weak or unwilling to safeguard its population. There are currently some two million internally displaced people in Colombia, who have mostly fled their rural homes after having been subject to intimidation and threats to their lives. These people arrive in the larger cities, where they contribute to the chaotic conditions of the urban space, as they have to adapt to new surroundings that may never become theirs. The cruelties and atrocities of Colombia's internal conflict seem to surpass all imagination, but one must remember that civil war, armed uprisings and bloody repression have a long tradition in Colombian history. In fact, Colombia in the 19th century has been described as a 'country of permanent war' (Sánchez & Peñaranda 1986). Following the Wars of Independence from Spain (1810-1816), there were eight general civil wars, fourteen local civil wars, countless small uprisings, two international wars with Ecuador and three coups d'états. These wars were never ended in decisive victories, but merely provided short breathing spaces before renewed fighting took place.

Responsibility for these wars lay with the two political parties that formed in the mid 19th century, and which still dominate Colombian politics in a hegemonic way today; the Liberal Party founded in 1848, and the Conservative Party founded in 1849. Allegiances to the two parties were sworn by the rural and the urban poor, who expected some kind of favour or reward in return from the local landowner or politician. There were no discernible differences in their respective politics at first. The penetration of the two parties into popular consciousness, though, polarised society to the extent that people believed that differences really did exist. As the first party conflicts ensued, ordinary people witnessed how their families and friends were killed under the banner of one or other of the parties. As this pattern was reproduced on countless occasions, loyalties and hatreds were born with deep personal roots, and bipartisan clientelist structures and 'hereditary party identification' (Zamosc 1989:106) were mobilised in successive civil wars. Different from many other Latin American countries, Colombia's internal wars were only rarely fought by the army and more usually by ordinary people in the countryside who rallied behind the interest of the local land-holding oligarchy, thus creating profound bonds

of personal allegiance. These clientelist structures are still today one of the outstanding characteristics of Colombia's party political system (Leal Buitrago & Dávila 1991), which, as I will explain in Chapter 6, has also had a profound impact on local organising structures of black communities on Colombia's Pacific coast.

The presidency of General José Hilario López (1849-1853) inaugurated 37 years of Liberal government. A federalist liberal constitution was drawn up in 1863 that renamed the country the United States of Colombia. By diffusing power to the regions, however, regional armies and oligarchs disputed power in almost forty rebellions and uprisings. When power reverted to the Conservatives in 1885, they passed an authoritarian centralist constitution in 1886. This is seen by some as the first attempt at a national political project by the land-owning class (Pearce 1990). It considerably strengthened the powers of the president and restored the role of the Catholic Church in education and as an element of social order, previously undermined by the Liberal government. The years between 1885 and 1930 saw a period of Conservative hegemonic rule and came to be known as the Conservative Republic, although political negotiations between the parties ensured that some Liberal politicians occupied government posts in order to diffuse the more radical elements in both parties. Nevertheless, against the backdrop of a deep economic crisis in 1899, when world coffee prices fell dramatically, Liberal leaders resorted once again to war in what was to become one of the longest and most destructive of Colombia's civil wars, the Thousand Day War (*Guerra de Mil Días*) from 1899 to 1902. Facing a Conservative-controlled central army, Liberals resorted to rural guerrilla warfare. More than 100,000 people died, and the country emerged politically and economically so devastated that it could do little to prevent the US-induced separation of Panama from its territory in 1903. Because of a split in the Conservative Party that could not decide on a single candidate in the 1930 election, the Liberal party emerged as the winner and established once again a period of Liberal hegemonic rule, albeit, as on previous occasions, a certain power sharing was accommodated for by granting some government posts to Conservative politicians.

While a bipartisan oligarchy monopolised wealth and political power in this way, the mass of the people lived in poverty. These tensions came to the forefront in the mid-1940s, when the populist Liberal candidate for presidency, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, openly addressed these issues and mounted a challenge that went beyond party politics to confront the class conflict. Yet, the Liberal Party was divided, and the Conservatives profited from

this split to win the election in 1946. Nevertheless, Gaitán's populism and his mass politics found wide-spread popular support as it provided a real challenge to the elitism of Colombia's 'oligarchic republic'. For the oligarchy, who was more interested in defending their personal and economic interests than in any specific party affiliation, populism equalled revolution. Industrialists were already very suspicious of the spread of unionisation to the private sector. The state's repression of popular mobilisation was responded to by even more demonstrations and strikes. Social unrest seemed on the verge of exploding. By the end of 1947 political violence had claimed 14,000 victims during that year. On 7 February 1948, Gaitán led a silent protest march of 100,000 people through the streets of Bogotá to demand minimum guarantees for human life of the President. Two months later, on 9 April, Gaitán was assassinated during a rally. That day people spontaneously rose up in a collective fury in what is known as *El Bogotazo*, looting and destroying everything that represented the dominant power structures. From there, violence spread into the countryside, people once again taking up arms and running virtually amok. This was the beginning of a period of ten-year collective slaughter of the worst kind - it became known as *La Violencia*. Between 1948 and 1958 some 200,000 people were killed in the most atrocious ways imaginable:

The government sent police and soldiers to cut off testicles, slash pregnant women's bellies, and throw babies in the air to catch on bayonet points - the order of the day being 'don't leave even the seed.' [...] It was a war of incredible cruelty and it became worse as it went on, feeding the lust for vengeance. (Galeano 1997:103)⁵

After ten years of unabashed national 'bleeding', a political solution was sought for with a party pact that created the National Front in 1958. Under this pact political power would alternate every four years during a period of 'peaceful coexistence' of 16 years until 1974. This hegemonic power sharing arrangement, however, did not open up any space for political articulation and participation beyond the two dominant parties.

It was also during the phase of *La Violencia* that the first guerrilla movements emerged that later consolidated themselves. Vieira (1989) has proposed a periodization of the Colombian guerrilla phenomenon in three phases: 1) a period of a liberal guerrilla ascendancy (1949-1953), associated with the first half of *La Violencia*; 2) a period of a communist guerrilla ascendancy (1955-1958); and 3) following the Cuban revolution of

⁵ The implications of the historical experience of such atrocities are felt today with the escalating paramilitary violence in the country and the abominably shocking ways in which rural peasants are assassinated.

1959, the emergence of guerrilla groups of diverse tendencies (1962-1989). The last period has been subdivided by Pizarro (1991:413) into a phase of emergence and consolidation of guerrilla groups (1962-1973), a phase of internal crisis and division (1973-1980), and a phase of recomposition and boom (1980-1989). It can be claimed with some confidence that today in 2001, Colombia's most powerful guerrilla, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) are at their absolute peak in terms of political, territorial and economic power. They have negotiated from the government a demilitarised zone in the south east of the country, where currently the so-called 'peace process' takes place between the highest government officials and the leaders of this revolutionary movement. However, at the same time right-wing paramilitary groups have spread throughout the country, knowingly supported by the Colombian army, to crush the leftist guerrillas. Such a military project seems impossible, but they are spreading terror throughout the rural areas where they arrive and accuse local peasants of collaborating with the guerrilla. If Colombia was considered to be 'on the edge of chaos' in 1989 (Leal Buitrago & Zamosc 1991), then this edge has crumbled since then, with the country falling into the abyss of total civil war. Reflecting on the possibilities of an emerging civil society articulating itself within this context of internal war, one would today still have to wholeheartedly agree with Pizarro's analysis in 1993:

The guerrilla movement has not been a suitable instrument for social and political change, nor has it contributed to the expansion of democratic spaces. On the contrary, in Colombia the 'chronic rebellion', perceived by the elites as a potential threat, real or imaginary, has served as a justification for the maintenance and even the increase of democratic restrictions throughout decades. Internal war and authoritarian restrictions have mutually reinforced one another. (Pizarro 1993:156; my translation)⁶

Although the Colombian political situation has been described by some as a "tangled knot" and "one of the most complex in Latin America" (Pearce 1990:3,4), which this dissertation is neither about nor able to disentangle, it has been necessary to draw out these major political developments in Colombia's 'labyrinthine past' and its more recent history, in order to understand the emergence and the potentials and restrictions for social mobilisation in the country. Black communities, the subject of this study, are exposed to

⁶ "El movimiento guerrillero no ha sido un instrumento idóneo de cambio social y político ni tampoco ha contribuido a la ampliación de los espacios democráticos. Por el contrario, en Colombia la 'insurgencia crónica', percibida por las élites como una amenaza potencial, real o imaginaria, ha servido como justificación para el mantenimiento e, incluso, el incremento de restricciones democráticas a lo largo de varias décadas. Guerra interna y restricciones autoritarias se han retroalimentado mutuamente."

these processes just like any other social group. And it was at the end of the 1980s, when the country was ‘on the edge of chaos’, its political system plagued by a weak state, a chronic governing crisis and a superposition of multiple violences, exacerbated by the powerful drug cartels, that a light at the end of the tunnel seemed to be discernible. This light would crystallise, it was hoped, in the new Constitution of 1991.

Black communities and the Constitution of 1991

I believe that we are acting, thinking, conceiving and trying to go on making not a real country, but one of paper. The Constitution, the laws ... everything in Colombia is magnificent, everything on paper. It has no connection with reality.

García Márquez (quoted in Pearce 1990:11)

Colombia’s new Constitution of 5 July 1991 replaced the previous one still in force since 1886. According to President César Gaviria, it constituted an “institutional revolution” and a “peace treaty, a navigation map for the 21st century” (Pizarro 1993:151). Drawn up by a Constituent Assembly that was popularly elected in December 1990, it was to democratise the state structures, ensure increased popular participation in the decision-making processes at national, regional and local level, and instil the state with a new legitimacy that it had long lost.⁷ The Constituent Assembly was a national public body which included independent representatives from ethnic, political and religious minorities, as well as re-incorporated guerrillas of the M-19, the People’s Liberation Army EPL (Ejército Popular de Liberación) and the indigenous guerrilla group Quintin Lamé (Arocha 1992b).⁸ For my purposes here, I will not discuss the extent of institutional reform brought about by the new

⁷ The emphasis on participation must be seen within the overall strategy of a weak state to escape a crisis that threatens to extend through the whole of society. In fact, the guerrilla organisation M-19 had made a new Constitution a condition for peace in their negotiations with the government.

⁸ Conspicuously absent from the Constituent Assembly was the country’s most powerful guerrilla group FARC, whose previous negative experience of peace negotiations with the government and subsequent re-integration into society made them more cautious this time. As a result of a peace treaty between FARC and the then Colombian president Belisario Betancur, the Communist People’s Union party UP (Unión Popular) was founded in 1984. Yet, in the following months and years, many of their leaders were killed by right-wing paramilitary groups that were often linked to state institutions. This experience clearly throws its shadow over contemporary peace negotiations, in which it seems clear that the ever more powerful FARC guerrillas have no intention of re-integrating themselves into political and social life in Colombia, and thus exposing themselves to similar ‘cleansing actions’ as in the 1980s and 1990s. These ways of ‘doing politics’ by eliminating the political adversary affects the whole of national, political and social life. The candidate for presidency of the demobilised M-19, that had formed into the political movement Democratic Alliance M-19 (Alianza Democrática M-19), Carlos Pizarro, was killed in 1990. And still today, eleven years later, ex-members of the M-19 are subject to assassinations, which are covered by the national press in a matter-of-fact style and rarely in analytical terms as a systematic politics of the extreme right to eliminate political adversaries. In these circumstances, a guerrilla fighter would have to be plainly stupid to demobilise and intend a re-integration into social life. Such are the bleak prospects of a ‘peace’ process that sees the country slowly bleeding to death.

Constitution, but rather focus on the concrete implications that it has had for the organising processes of black communities in the country. In an unprecedented move the nation was declared to be multicultural and pluriethnic, for the first time recognising formally Colombia's ethnic diversity. Whereas various articles dealt specifically with Colombia's indigenous populations and outlined their territorial and political rights, only Transitory Article AT-55 (Artículo Transitorio 55), made specific reference to the country's black communities. I will discuss this legislation in detail in Chapter 8, but it is important to point out at this stage that the Constitution of 1991 set off a new dynamic and direction in the organising processes of black communities.

Until then, politicisation by black groups had been limited to some small urban intellectual groups on the one hand, and traditional land right struggles in the northern Pacific coast department of Chocó on the other. Two of the urban movements of black intellectuals have survived to this day; the Centre for the Investigation and Development of Black Culture, and the National Movement for the Human Rights of Afro-Colombian Communities - Cimarrón. Their political directions are very much informed by the North-American black civil rights movements. The former is based in Bogotá and made up of black educated people mainly from the Pacific coast, and although this organisation still functions, its influence is very limited, especially after UNESCO withdrew financial support. The other organisation, Cimarrón, has had a wider influence and is still very active in various regions of the country. It emerged out of a study group, Soweto, that was formed in 1976 by black university students in the city of Pereira in the interior of country. Cimarrón itself was formed in 1982 in Buenaventura, the Pacific's principal maritime port. It has functioned as an umbrella organisation for various study groups in different cities that have mobilised around issues of blackness. Its name is derived from the historical experience of *cimarronaje*, the self-liberating practice of slaves during colonial times to flee the haciendas and gold mines in search of autonomous life styles. The symbolic naming of the organisation Cimarrón therefore stresses a historical continuity and also the common experience of suffering and oppression as expressed in the underlying modern ideology of *cimarronismo* (Mosquera 1985). *Cimarronismo* takes the figure of the *cimarrón*, the runaway slave, as symbol of a cultural and political resistance that still prevails today, and at the same time this figure evokes a global community of suffering inviting people to make a link between certain aspects of their phenotype and a history of oppression that is national as well as global (Wade 1995). The links to the North-American

black experience are particularly evident in both of these organisations. Cimarrón's office in Bogotá, for example, is adorned with posters of black leaders from all around the world, prominently featuring Malcolm X, whose earlier photographs also have an intriguing similarity to Cimarrón's leader Juan de Dios Mosquera.

An important black organising experience prior to 1991 emerged in the mid-1980s in the Chocó department on the Pacific coast, where the Catholic Church's Afro-American Pastoral was decisive in helping to set up black peasant organisations who mobilised around the defence of their lands and the environment, under threat from the accelerated and uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources by external capital in the region. These first ecclesiastical grass-roots groups formed in 1987 the Peasant Association of the River Atrato ACIA (*Asociación Campesina Integral del Río Atrato*). It was here that first direct links were articulated between the notions of a peasant identity and blackness, as well as creating an expression of the black peasants' specific relations to territory. As some of the movement activists later pointed out:

In fact, the relationships between culture, territory, and natural resources constitute a central axis of discussion and strategy building both within movement organisations and in their dealings with the state. (Grueso *et al.* 1998:209)

These notions found concrete political expression in AT-55 of the Constitution of 1991. Although the whole process of constitutional reform was not overtly aimed at what the state might have called 'ethnic minorities', the debates on increasing popular participation opened a space both for black and indigenous populations into which issues about ethnicity and nationality could be thrust (Arocha 1992a,b; Findji 1992). Yet weak politicisation and internal division within the black movement meant that eventually no black representatives were elected for the Constituent Assembly (Wade 1995, Agudelo 1999). It was then up to a sympathetic indigenous representative, who had campaigned from a platform which addressed both indigenous and black interests in the Pacific region, to push for the inclusion of AT-55 that required the promulgation of a law that would grant collective land rights to rural black communities on the Pacific coast. The transitory nature of the article meant that the law had to be passed by 5 July 1993. As a result, political mobilisation in the Pacific region intensified considerably, and over 350 organisations of black communities were registered with the Office for Black Community Affairs by 1994.⁹ As

⁹ The Office for Black Community Affairs was created through Law 70 (Chapter VIII, Article 67) under jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior. One of its tasks lies in establishing a register of black organisations in Colombia (as dictated in Decree 2313 of 13 October 1994, Article 2). However, many of

one of the most strongly articulated directions at co-ordinating these efforts on the regional and national level, the Process of Black Communities PCN (Proceso de Comunidades Negras), a network of more than 120 local organisations, emerged in October 1993 as a national organisational dynamic with its base in Buenaventura. This group has also developed the strongest ideological discourse and is of particular interest for my subsequent analysis of local organisational forms.

***Ethnic-territorial mobilisation on the Pacific coast: the emergence of PCN*¹⁰**

PCN arose with the third National Conference of Black Communities ANCN (Asamblea Nacional de Comunidades Negras) held in September 1993 in Puerto Tejada, a predominantly black town south of Cali, where the politico-organisational situation of black communities was debated.¹¹ Given the growing gap between various organised black sectors, and in particular the presence of opportunistic black traditional politicians, mainly associated with the Liberal Party, who sought to capitalise for their own and party political interests on these unprecedented legal mechanisms favourable to black communities, the ANCN defined itself in the following terms:

[We are] a sector of the social movement of black communities composed of people and organisations with diverse experiences and goals, but united around a set of principles, criteria and objectives that set us apart from other sectors of the movement. In the same vein, we represent a proposal to the entire black community of the country, and aspire to construct a unified movement of black communities able to encompass their rights and aspirations. (quoted in Grueso *et al.* 1998:202)

PCN's strategy was consequently articulated as an ethnic-territorial movement based on five principles:

these organisations were rather short-lived experiences or even existed only on paper, without a more serious commitment to the multiple struggles of black people in Colombia.

¹⁰ The main sources of information for this section are, if not otherwise stated: OCN (1996), Escobar (1997), Grueso and others (1998), PCN (1999), various interviews with PCN activists in Buenaventura and PCN documents consulted in their office (19-22 December 1998), interview with PCN activist Libia Grueso in Cali (14 December 1998), and various personal communications of PCN activist Naka Mandinga on a recent visit to Glasgow (28-31 March 2001).

¹¹ The first ANCN took place in July 1992 in Tumaco in the Department of Nariño, where a framework was developed for the regulation of AT-55. At the second national conference in May 1993 in Bogotá, delegates revised and approved the text that was to become Law 70, which had previously been negotiated between the government and black community representatives. The rift between different black organisations had already become apparent in the third ANCN. The two most important organisations from the Chocó refused to attend and sent letters rejecting the position of PCN as a co-ordinating force. The Peasant Association of the river Atrato ACIA emphasised the need for organisation in the rivers and a decentralised nature of the struggle, whereas the Peasant Association of the river San Juan ACADESAN (Asociación Campesina del río San Juan) simply declared: "We don't believe that the time has come to construct a national organisation" (letters of ACIA and ACADESAN, studied at PCN's office, Buenaventura, 21 December 1998).

- 1) *the reaffirmation of identity and the right to be black*, seen as a cultural logic that permeates the lifeworld in all of its social, economic and political dimensions, countering the logic of domination and opposing a model of society that requires uniformity for its continued dominance.
- 2) *The right to territory and a space for being*, regarded as a necessary condition for the re-creation and development of an Afro-Colombian cultural vision.
- 3) *Autonomy as the right to the exercise of identity* that arises out of an Afro-Colombian cultural logic in relation to dominant society and other ethnic groups.
- 4) *Construction of an autonomous perspective for the future*, based on traditional forms of production and social organisation.
- 5) *Declaration of solidarity* with the struggle for the rights of black people throughout the world.

These principles address two different but interrelated themes: on the one hand, an ideological and political reflection of the movement that entails a re-articulation of the notions of territory, development and society from an Afro-Colombian perspective; and on the other the articulation of their rights, aspirations and dreams based on and developed through the perspective of daily life and traditional practices of black communities on the Pacific coast.

The movement has consequently referred to the latter as the ‘logic of the river’ (PCN 1999) from which the sense of belonging and of territoriality is derived for rural black communities in the Pacific, and through which their fundamental life aspects are spatially arranged. The logic of the river and what I have termed and will discuss in Chapters 5 and 6 as the ‘aquatic space’ among black communities on Colombia’s Pacific coast provide the particular spatial precondition for social mobilisation in the Pacific. The river banks are literally the ‘soils’ out of which mobilisation arises and on which it is built. There is not only an ethnic specificity to the black movement that distinguishes itself from other movements, then, but also a *spatial specificity* that distinguishes it from other *black* movements (in Colombia and beyond). This thesis argues that it is important to understand the spatial specificity of social movements, as it importantly impacts on the movements’ mobilisation structures and their articulations. Such a spatial approach to social movement theory and research recognises the nature of many contemporary place-based struggles and the ‘defence of local constructions of place’ by social movements (Escobar 2001). It furthermore stresses the need to understand the sense of place, or the local ‘structures of

feeling' - to borrow Williams' (1977) phrase, as a constitutive element in social movement organising. It is argued that by focusing attention, although not exclusively, on these spatial dimensions, we are better able to understand a movement's particularity, its development through time and space, and its relation to governments, party politics and civil society, all issues of great concern in conventional social movement theory. This is regarded as the original input of this thesis, as a contribution towards a 'geographical turn' in social movement theory.

Chapters to come: outlining the thesis' 'flow'

In *Chapter 2* I review and critique the existing literature on social movements, discussing in detail RMT and IOP. Rather than treating these two theoretical frameworks as separate, however, I suggest that they can be made work together on the empirical level to improve our understanding of contemporary social movements. I then examine critically existing definitions of what is understood by the term 'social movement', arguing that differences in definition contribute to some of the still existing binary thinking between RMT and IOP in social movement theory. Finally, cautioning against the ambiguous term '*new social movement*', I examine the recent literature on contemporary social movements in Latin America, weaving at this stage a number of case studies into my analysis.

Chapter 3 starts off from the premise that conventional theories of social movements have paid too little attention to their spatial dimensions, a trend further aggravated by an unprecedented explosion in the often uncritical and superficial use of spatial metaphors throughout the social sciences. The concepts of 'space' and 'place' and their practical applicability to social movement theory and research are then discussed, drawing in particular on Lefebvre's (1991) concept of the 'production of space' and Agnew's (1987) conceptualising of 'place' as consisting of the three elements location, locale and sense of place. Applying Lefebvre's notion of 'representations of space', I go on to examine the struggle over nature and discuss my own concept of the 'discursive fix' as the latest adaptive response of global capitalism to the 'limits to capital' (Harvey 1982) and to a deteriorating nature as necessary production condition. The concept of the discursive fix is subsequently applied in *Chapter 8* to the specific case of the discourses on nature, biodiversity and sustainable development that now circulate in and around Colombia's Pacific coast. Following Lefebvre, I then examine how 'representational space', encompassing the subjectivities of everyday life and local forms of knowing, can be

regarded as a (re)source for the 'quest for a counter-space' that social movements often articulate. Tying these insights into an analysis of Agnew's (1987) tripartite concept of place, I examine how location, locale and sense of place provide a framework with which to construct a 'place perspective' on social movements. Chapters 5 and 6 are also loosely framed around this tripartite distinction, in that Chapter 5 examines the 'aquatic sense of place' on the Pacific coast as a precondition for social movement agency, and Chapter 6 discusses the location and locale of the Pacific lowlands as the 'soils' out of which social movements emerge.

Breaking the thesis up between theoretical, methodological and empirical sections, *Chapter 4* provides a discussion of qualitative research methods in the social sciences and outlines the methodology that I have applied. The chapter is split into two main parts. Part One deals with theoretical reflections on qualitative methodology and critically discusses the concepts of representation, cultural translatability, community, strategic essentialism and the politics of positioning. In particular, I examine the often uncritically applied category of 'black communities' in the Colombian context. I then examine 'participatory action-research' (PAR), and discuss to what extent I had intended to apply PAR in my research and the limitations that I encountered in this project. Part Two is entitled 'Practical Experience' and consists of a detailed account of my in-the-field experiences, ranging from the ethnographic tools employed to a short portrait of doña Celia, a woman from Guapi who features prominently in my discussion of local aquatic epistemologies on Colombia's Pacific coast.

Chapter 5 provides an enquiry into the 'aquatic sense of place' on the Colombian Pacific coast, as accessed through the oral tradition and the voices of local peasants, fishermen and traditional healers. These provide the individualised personal keys through which I intend to unlock a more analytical account of the sense of place and the subjective feeling that is derived from living in this particular part of the world. Extensive quotes are used from two chief informants, doña Celia Lucumí Caicedo and don Agapito Montaña, both from the river Guapi on the Cauca coast, who have so generously given me access to their specific local aquatic epistemologies. Oral tradition is argued to function in the context of mobilisation as a site of resistance that conveys local history and can be drawn upon by social movements in their quest for a counter-space.

Chapter 6 examines in detail the location and locale of the Colombian Pacific coast, and thereby wishes to 'set the scene' for social movement agency emerging out of

this region. The aquatic space manifests itself in the physical environment of a rain forest criss-crossed by intricate river networks and mangrove swamps (location), but also in the spatialised social relationships (settlement patterns, distribution of land ownership, kinship ties, transport and so on) along river basins (locale). These contexts for social interaction are expressed in the notion of the 'logic of the river' that highlights the traditional 'flow' of life in the Pacific, one which is still of great importance in everyday life amongst rural black communities in spite of the increasing penetration of agents and aspects of modernity into the region.

Chapter 7 examines the ways in which the notions of the aquatic space and the logic of the river are reflected in a new political context, and how they have been drawn upon by black communities in the formation processes of community councils along river basins. It furthermore shows how other actors such as the government and external capital interests have played an important part in the mediation of these processes of community representation, which have not always adhered to the 'idealised' spatial form of a community council being established along a river basin. Crucially, the community councils are argued to be 'spaces of negotiations' between all of these different actors.

Chapter 8 looks more directly at the actual formation processes of the community councils, and their practices and their ideals. It starts off by examining the legislation that has created this specific organising figure as community representation and as territorial authority of the collective lands of black communities on the Pacific coast. I analyse in detail the text of the Constitution of 1991, the following Law 70 for black communities and the Decree 1745 of 1995 which lays out the norms for the creation of community councils. I then consider the local processes of mobilisation that have led from the building of *palenques* along the river basins via the constitution of General Assemblies as arenas of conscientisation to the eventual constitution of community councils. In particular, I examine the role of leadership and previous organisational experiences played in these processes, as important resources for mobilisation. The utility of aspects of both IOP and RMT are illustrated in this chapter as contributing to the understanding of the social movement of black communities on Colombia's Pacific coast.

In *Chapter 9* I draw out my principal conclusions. It now only remains to be hoped that this has not turned out too 'heavy' a book; I would hate to see the little prince bored.

CHAPTER 2

Social movement theories: a literature review and critique with particular reference to Latin America

Today more than ever, there are no ideas without a utopia.

Henri Lefebvre (1976:35)

It is not necessary to conquer the world. It is enough if we renew it .

Subcomandante Marcos (EZLN 1996:3)

Introduction

In a recent attempt at summarising and interrelating some of the emerging issues in social movement theory, Foweraker (1995:21) argues the case for a stronger consideration of resource-mobilisation theory (RMT) in the Latin American context. He conceives of this project as synthesising identity-oriented perspective (IOP) and RMT, thus attempting to break the binary division that is still prevalent in much of contemporary social movement literature (Tarrow 1994, Jordan 1995, Shefner 1995). With specific reference to the Latin American context, Escobar (1992:63) states that “more clearly in Latin America than elsewhere, the move toward a grand ‘theory of social movements’ is actively resisted”. Instead of analysing social movements through a closed conceptual framework, I suggest that we look at which particular insights from various social movement theories are relevant for a specific case study, and how they can be usefully combined in illuminating the specificities of social movements on the ground. Rather than procuring a clear-cut integration or synthesis of theories on the conceptual level, it seems more pertinent to me to aim at a juxtaposition of theories at the empirical level. It is my aim in this thesis to highlight the different stages or levels of inquiry into social movements, and in particular to focus on everyday social relationships as preconditions or ‘soils’ out of which social movements emerge. RMT and IOP have much to contribute in the understanding of both social movements *per se* (their actual organisational forms, structures, strategies) and the everyday contexts (preconditions, shared histories, cultural practices). In this chapter I will therefore outline the conceptual frameworks of both RMT and IOP in social movement theories, and point to how in subsequent chapters I draw upon insights from each when discussing the social movement of black communities on Colombia’s Pacific coast. I

define in this thesis a ‘social movement’ to be an organisational form of social actors who consciously and in a sustained manner enact processes of cultural and/or political contestation based on a common understanding and a shared collective identity.

Social movements in Latin America: towards a dialectics of theory and practice

Theory and practice must be regarded as a dialectical unity, as Marx long ago pointed out. That means that, while theory is derived from practical experience, it also informs practice, and is constantly reformulated and reworked through changing practical conditions, especially variations over time and space. Such an understanding highlights the problematic of applying theories that have been developed in a particular political, socio-economic and spatio-cultural context to a different geographical environment with very different socio-cultural conditions. This point has been most clearly expressed in radical post-structuralist critiques of Western theories of ‘development’ and their application to the so-called ‘Third World’ (Esteva 1987, Shiva 1989, Sachs 1992, Escobar 1995). These critics frequently stress the need to consider indigenous knowledges and traditional social practices as viable alternative production rationalities in communities that are threatened by the meta-narrative discourse and the homogenising practices of development. Following the above outlined dialectical approach to theory and practice, indigenous social practices should be accounted for in indigenous theorisations, which at the same time would act as a counter-weight to dominant Eurocentric theorising.

A strong plea for indigenous theorisations can be made, for example, from the experience of ‘dependency theory’ in Latin America and the considerable impact that it has had in Europe and North America.¹² In a similar vein we must understand the more recent development of ‘subaltern studies’ originating in India, from where some of the most powerful post-colonial voices arise these days.¹³ Also, within social movement theory,

¹² Dependency theory was an influential, complex body of theoretical development with structuralist and Marxist roots that emerged in Latin America in the 1960s. It explains Latin America’s historical and continued underdevelopment in terms of a structural logic inherent in the development of global capitalism that creates and exploits peripheral satellites, a process explained by Frank (1969) in the notion of the ‘development of underdevelopment’. See also Furtado (1965) and Cardoso and Faletto (1970) for detailed studies in the Latin American context. The insights of dependency theory have also been ‘regionalised’ and appropriated to speak to the specificities of Africa (Amin 1976).

¹³ Subaltern studies emerged in India in the 1980s as a radical project in contemporary Indian history. They challenged the dominant official histories of India’s colonial and post-colonial past, which, they argued, erased the presence and the power of various subaltern groups. In particular, they challenged a nationalistic historiography that represented an Indian elite as having heroically stood up against imperialism, when in fact they completed a political trajectory that was inaugurated by the colonial powers. Subaltern studies privilege local discourses and present alternative interpretations of seemingly established historical facts,

there now exists a large body of work coming from Latin American scholars, for example, who either work in Latin America or in the US or Europe. At the same time, Latin America still holds a fascination for many European and North American scholars, giving rise to a rich potential for cross-fertilisation of ideas and theories which travel across continents, through space and time. Said's (1983) notion of 'travelling theories' is helpful in this respect, as it conceptualises the dialectical unity of practice and theory in spatial terms, establishing a series of encounters and dialogues through which theories and theorists travel and move across space:

Both theories and theorists travel between the two continents, between uneven spaces, at times sharing the space and at times contesting it. There is no linear path between the two (multiple) places, no epistemological center and periphery; [...] rather, there are multiple and mutual creations, appropriations, and resistances [...] that create an overlapping and decentered network within which both theories and theorists travel. (Escobar 1992:63)

Theorising social movements in Latin America, while drawing on theories derived in North America and Europe, must therefore take into account the multiple and particular historical, cultural and geographical contexts that have conditioned social life in Latin America:

New social movements in Europe mainly represent a response to post-industrial contradictions, and those in Latin America primarily arise in response to clearly material demands, [...] their struggles are principally organized around the satisfaction of basic needs. (Hellman 1992:53)

This point is particularly important given the fascination that some theorists today show for the 'postmodern' moment of the information age, a focus which often seems to obscure the very material conditions out of which many social struggles arise. One can think, for example, of the common references to the Zapatista guerrillas in Chiapas, Mexico, as the 'first informational guerrilla movement' (Castells 1997:79), a conceptualisation that aims at emphasising the new forms of resistance that use state-of-the-art technology to spread their message world-wide. The writings of their leader Subcomandante Marcos (EZLN 1996) articulate best to some theorists the 'new postmodern revolutionary era' (Esteva, quoted in Hellman 1995:170). Yet, such an interpretative focus seems to reflect rather a new enthusiasm on the part of theorists than new realities on the ground. It must not be

thereby decentering the dominant representations of their colonial past and uncovering the facts that official history hides or lies about (Guha & Spivak 1988; Spivak 1990, 1996; Guha 1997). Particular theoretical concern has been given to the limitations of the subaltern subjects to recover their voices in a context of knowledge production under the sign of colonialism (Spivak 1988).

forgotten (and I do not suggest that Esteva does), that the peasant struggle in Chiapas is not a novel conflict, but that it can be traced back centuries through Mexican history (Katz 1988, Nash 1997). The Zapatistas' declaration *hoy decimos basta* - today we say it's enough - on 1st January 1994 drew attention to the historical continuity of a long-fought struggle, however invisible it may have been to the international community up to then. Their declaration and uprising was meant to put an end to the five centuries long pillage and 'bleeding' of the region.¹⁴ The point here is not to suggest that Esteva and Castells ignore the material conditions of the rebellion in Chiapas: of course they do not. But by portraying the struggle as 'postmodern', or the Zapatistas as 'informational guerrillas', they run the risk of obscuring and diverting the focus away from local material realities, and one can only wonder what the Chiapas peasants would make of these declarations. While able to understand the enthusiasm of theorists for new articulations and forms of resistance, care should be taken not to amalgamate all of these actions under the umbrella term 'postmodern'. New strategies do not necessarily mean new realities or new conflicts. And, of course, the so-called 'new social movements' are not so new according to Calhoun (1995), who argues that in the early 19th century some movements already showed characteristics that are associated today with new social movements. I will analyse this debate on new social movements later in this chapter.

In the remainder of this chapter I will review and critique the existing literature on social movements and stress the need to adapt social movement theories to Latin American realities, the latter of course in themselves being heterogeneous. Rather than a straightforward literary review, this chapter draws extensively on empirical data and other case study material, thus reinforcing my theoretical concern for 'placing' social movement theories within specific political, geographical and cultural contexts. I should emphasise from the outset that I share with Zirakzadeh (1997:19) the understanding of the various theoretical approaches to social movements as complementary rather than incompatible. It is only for analytical reasons that I treat the different approaches separately.

¹⁴ Galeano's (1997) imagery of a 'bleeding' Latin America clearly provides a guide for much of the Zapatistas' rich and creative use of language: "Chiapas is bleeding through thousands of paths: through oil and gas pipelines, through railway carriages, through bank accounts, through lorries, through vessels and aircrafts, through clandestine villages [...]; this land still pays its tribute to the empires: oil, electricity, cattle, money, coffee, bananas, cacao, tobacco, sugar [...] and blood from Chiapas flow through the thousand and one teeth of pillage thrust in the throat of Mexico's Southeast" (EZLN 1996:22).

Resource-mobilisation theory: the strategies of collective action

Zirakzadeh (1997) distinguishes between three waves in social movement theorising: pre-Second World War theories that regarded social movements as disruptive and usually negative within the prevailing social order; resource-mobilisation theory, indigenous community theorising and political process approaches that emerged in the 1960s and which saw social movements as potentially progressive elements of society; and culturally sensitive approaches that, by the end of the 1970s, had established a corpus referred to as identity-oriented perspective. For my purpose in this dissertation I will ignore the first wave, simply because it is irrelevant to the specific movement that I examine, while I will discuss the third wave in detail later in this chapter. In this section, I am discussing the various currents of Zirakzadeh's second wave, although I do not intend to explicitly distinguish between them, as there is much overlapping and cross-referencing between them.

Resource-mobilisation theory is concerned with explaining *how* social movements emerge and develop over time. It focuses above all on organisational structures, leadership and the movements' goals, with the availability of resources regarded as fundamental in the successful organisational structure. Resources include adequate funding and financial support, the existence of networks, the expertise of movement leaders, and some degree of already pre-existing organisations on whose experience leaders can draw (Oberschall 1973, Pickvance 1976, McCarthy & Zald 1977, Tilly 1978). Particular emphasis is given to the strategies that social movements adopt in their struggles, and to how these strategies can be assessed in terms of success and failure. The individual actor within this framework is seen as strategically assessing the costs and benefits of his/her involvement in collective action.

Olson (1965) has extensively discussed the obstacles to individual participation in collective action in his interest-group-derived theory. He focuses on the strategic calculations of self-interested 'rational' actors who will not engage in collective action if the perceived costs exceed the expected benefits, a situation also referred to as 'the Olson-problem' (Tarrow 1994). The question then arises as to how the obstacles to individual participation in collective action can be overcome. Olson argues that collective action is best sustained with selective incentives given to the individual by movement leaders, which would outweigh the perceived costs of participation in collective action. One of these selective incentives is, for example, the benefit of Union membership which protects the individual worker from sanctions. Yet, there arises the problem of 'freeriders' who see

themselves represented by the union without having to engage themselves in collective action, and the larger the group the greater the number of group members who may not see the need to participate in collective action since others already represent their interests. The Olson-problem thus focuses very much on the individual nature of engaging in collective action. This approach to collective action has recently been criticised from within RMT by Tarrow (1994:23-27), who argues that the problem is social rather than individual. The question to be addressed is how to get individuals to act in a sustained manner towards a common goal. Therefore, it becomes a problem of co-ordination, in which leaders must provide selective incentives to convince individual actors of the need for their own participation in collective action. McCarthy and Zald (1977) also argue for an organisational solution to the collective action problem, focussing on the role of professional social movement organisations in providing resources to mobilise individuals.¹⁵

Examining the strategies that social movements employ in the pursuit of their objectives, Tilly (1978) has argued that these are drawn out of a pool of previous experiences which he refers to as ‘repertoire of contention’. These provide general conventions of collective action for social movements that are born out of the particular histories of groups of people. The concept ‘repertoires of contention’ is still helpful today, particularly as it exemplifies the historical and spatial continuity of strategies employed in collective action. We can think, for example, of the strike as still being the main strategy for unions to rally the workers behind their demands. Other universally applied repertoires by demonstrators include the sit-ins and occupations of public institutions and places to disrupt the ‘normal’ flow of life, as in Beijing in 1989, when thousands of students converged on Tiananmen Square to voice their demands for a democratisation of Chinese society. These repertoires, far from being closed in themselves, are open to new influences and to the creative potential of the individuals participating in collective action.¹⁶ The

¹⁵ The continued emphasis on the role of leaders and the problem of co-ordination can be traced back to Lenin’s approach to collective action in terms of an organisational solution. Lenin saw an intellectual vanguard organising collective action in ‘backward societies’ that suffer from a lack of consciousness. Different from Marx, who regarded an emerging class consciousness as a necessary pre-requisite for a proletarian revolution, Lenin bypassed this process of consciousness-construction by placing an intellectual vanguard at the forefront of the workers’ struggle (Hobsbawm 1983:260-261).

¹⁶ See, for example, Routledge (1997b:369) for an activist’s report on the ‘Carhenge’ protest against the building of the motorway M77 near Glasgow: it “consisted of nine cars [...], buried engine-down in the M77 road bed. The cars were set alight and then spray-painted with political slogans. This hybrid site not only humorously evoked Stonehenge, it was also a symbol of the end of the age of the car. [...] Carhenge was

increasing use of information technology has also facilitated new forms of protest, as practised so efficiently by the Zapatista rebels in Mexico:

[Their] use of telecommunications, videos, and of computer-mediated communication [has helped to] diffuse their messages from Chiapas to the world [...] and to organize a world-wide network of solidarity groups that literally encircled the repressive intentions of the Mexican government. (Castells 1997:80)

This revolutionary new way of mediating local protests across global spaces, and the Zapatistas' call for an 'intercontinental encounter for humanity and against neoliberalism' (EZLN 1996), may well point towards new ways of conceptualising 'globalising resistances' from local realities. By placing these 'new' strategies into Tilly's conceptualisation of repertoires of contention, we can conceptualise these repertoires as fluid, becoming and open. The increasing 'media-tion' of social protest and resistance (Routledge 1997b) does not only spread social movement causes on a global scale, but it also experiments with new forms of protest. These new forms may consequently be adopted by other social movements of whose repertoires of contention they did not initially form part. This can lead to a networking across space, not only of causes but also of strategies among social movements, in which one learns from the experience of the other.

The concept of networking has found increasing recognition in social movement literature. Tarrow (1994:22), for example, conceives of social movements as an "interlocking network of small groups, social networks and the connection between them". Such loosely structured groups may be more efficient in voicing and co-ordinating social protest and can build and dissolve alliances across class, ethnic, racial, sexual and cultural boundaries. Gerhards and Rucht (1992), on observing two demonstrations in Berlin, have counted a total of 140 different groups involved in one of the demonstrations and 133 groups participating in the other. They conceive of this kind of networking as 'mesomobilisation'. In these cases, collective action is nurtured and sustained successfully precisely by such loosely built alliances and networking between different groups, which might otherwise not be accommodated within the more rigid structure often comprised by a single movement. Therefore, it has been suggested that "Olson's 'large group' problem is often resolved by a 'small group' solution" (Maxwell & Oliver 1993:54). If we are concerned with assessing social movements in terms of success and failure, possibilities of

symbolic of what activists understood as the irrationality of the car culture - the poisoning of the air that we breathe by increasing amounts of exhaust fumes, or 'carmageddon'."

networking will have to be taken into consideration, and we should attempt a theorisation of social movements in terms of loosely built alliances and networks.

*Identity-oriented perspective, or 'the power of identity'*¹⁷

The identity-oriented perspective in social movement theories emerged in Europe in the early 1980s. It must be placed within the wider intellectual environment of the 1970s within the social sciences that showed wide-spread dissatisfaction with essentialist and structurally determined notions of the individual in society. Giddens' (1984) structuration theory attempts to explain the complex dialectical relationship between structure and agency, between the surrounding environment and the individual as social actor, who is neither determined to act in prescribed ways nor completely free in his/her decisions from a constraining as well as enabling environment. Actors are no longer seen as exclusively defined by the category of class, as in structural Marxism, nor are their actions determined by rational choice, as suggested in RMT. Instead, the actors are defined by a complex web of social and power relations in which they are enmeshed. It is within these social relations that identities are actively constructed as the result of constant negotiations, and identities are therefore seen as unstable, dynamic and changing.

Applying these insights to social movement theory, Touraine (1988:49) has stated that the identities of actors must not be seen independent of the conflict with the adversary, but that they represent the expressed cultural dimensions of social protest and are dialectically constructed in social struggle. The construction of identities is hence a fluid process within which the individual social subject can assume more than a single identity. Indeed, the individual is regarded as made up of multiple identities or a 'plurality of subject positions' (Laclau & Mouffe 1985). The weight with which any one subject position is articulated changes according to the social relations encountered. A worker, for example, is not simply defined by his/her position in the production process and determined to engage in revolutionary anti-capitalist struggle once he/she has become aware of his/her class consciousness and capitalism's inherent contradictions. The same worker may be a father (or a mother), may have homosexual (or heterosexual) orientations and/or may be black (and/or Asian or white); in all of these different roles, the individual actor assumes a different subject position. The anti-essentialist stance of the individual as social subject

¹⁷ This phrase is taken from Castells (1997).

emphasises the multiplicity of these subject positions inherent in the individual actor's process of identity construction. These identities are therefore neither fixed nor obvious, but must be constantly negotiated and fought for. Yet, rather than rejecting structural Marxist approaches to the individual altogether, I argue that parallels can be observed between a classical Marxist analysis and a post-Marxist critique of the categories of class and identity, as I have shown in Table 2.1:

Table 2.1: Marxism and post-Marxism: class or identity?

<i>Marxism</i>	<i>post-Marxism</i>
* actor defined by class consciousness	* defined by identity consciousness
* proletarian revolution	* multiple forms of resistance
* meta-narrative / macro-level	* series of narratives / micro-level
* teleological	* unstable, negotiated, ambiguous

I am not interested in constructing a binary division here, simply opposing a fixed class consciousness with a dynamic process of identity consciousness. Rather, I argue that, as in structural Marxism which regards class consciousness as a necessary prerequisite for collective action in terms of a proletarian revolution, post-Marxist contributions to the study of social movements focus on an actor's identity consciousness that induces him/her to engage in sustained collective action.

Nevertheless, whereas post-structural critiques have placed much emphasis on the social construction of identities and on the plurality of subject positions, less focus has been given to the process of what I refer to as 'identity conscientisation'.¹⁸ This process is arguably indispensable for a social movement when mobilising, precisely because all identities are unstable, ambiguous and dynamic. In the process of conscientisation they are temporarily stabilised, and particular subject positions are motivated, educated and

¹⁸ The notion of 'identity conscientisation' owes to Freire's (1971) concept of *conscientização*: the processes by which consciousness is generated collectively within an oppressed group, normally on the general and more specific conditions of submission and oppression within which their everyday lives are inscribed, and as a result of which they are encouraged to take action against these unjust political and economic structures. The English version of Freire's (1971) text sticks to the original Portuguese phrase of *conscientização* without translating it. Subsequently, however, the term 'conscientisation' has become accepted throughout the social sciences. I discuss Freire and *conscientização* in more detail in Chapter 4.

encouraged. It is this process of identity conscientisation that acts as the motivating force for an individual to engage in sustained collective action. Obviously there is no necessary relation between a constructed identity consciousness and an actor's engagement in collective action. Many other factors will have to be considered as well, such as the social networks in which an actor is enmeshed that may encourage his/her participation in collective action or may hinder or even prevent it. The presence of already existing organisations, neighbourhood associations or other movements may facilitate an individual's choice of participation in these movements. The social networks may provide a certain disposition for engaging in collective action, and maybe some neighbours will already have attained experience in mobilising and are now encouraging others to join them in their movement.

Furthermore, it is important to assess the weight of the individual's other subject positions at any one time. For example, a single mother with three children, no matter how conscious she is of the oppressive conditions surrounding her, may decide against participating in collective action within a framework of governmental repression if she deems that the conditions are too dangerous to risk her life and maybe those of her children. This situation would warrant a typical Olson-style analysis in terms of a rational actor weighing the costs of his/her engagement in collective action against the expected benefits. However, this same mother may decide to participate in acts of resistance, precisely for the same reasons, namely with regards to her children's future lives and to improve the conditions in which her children will grow up. Her social network plays a crucial part in this decision-making process, particularly if there are like-minded people in the neighbourhood where certain structures for popular participation in collective action already exist. In the absence of such preconditions, she may feel rather isolated with her consciousness of the repressive conditions in which her life evolves. Consider the moving example that Galeano (1997:269-270) gives of the four women and 14 children who started a hunger strike against General Hugo Banter in La Paz, Bolivia, in 1977, demanding a general amnesty for the exiled and fired workers in the tin mines. Against all the odds and threats of the dictatorship and the 'advice' that was given by like-minded people, they sustained their protest. Ten days later, 1400 workers and students had gone on hunger strike, and the dictatorship finally gave way and conceded the general amnesty. The women started their collective action, having created a social network of solidarity amongst themselves first, which then extended to other sectors of Bolivian society. They

created their disposition to engage in collective action through a process of identity conscientisation, in which they became to see themselves as the women whose husbands had been sacked and who no longer knew how to feed their children. While this was the particular subject position that they articulated in their protest, once their husbands had returned to work, it became possible for other subject positions to come to the forefront and to be more strongly articulated. The very process of collective action may also have further raised levels of conscientisation among the women, so that they did not only see themselves as mothers or wives, but as members of a society ruled by an unjust and repressive government, a subject position that may have been articulated consequently in further acts of resistance.

Of course, one form of identity can still be located in the concept of class, and a proletarian revolution is still a form of resistance in post-Marxist conceptualisations (however likely or not this is to happen!). Miliband (1985), for example, still emphasises the primacy of organised labour as the ‘principal gravedigger of capitalism’, and thus argues for the continuing strategic importance of struggles centred on property and class relations. This is particularly important in Latin America, where most social struggles are based around material concerns (Hellman 1992, Foweraker 1995). It is therefore crucial to understand social movements as articulating multiple subject positions that embrace both material and non-material struggles. The black communities on the Pacific coast in Colombia, for example, have organised themselves as a social movement around non-material claims of ethnicity and their cultural difference from dominant representations of Colombia as a mestizo nation. Yet, their demands for collective land rights are material claims, and these remain at the centre of their struggle with the Colombian government (Escobar & Pedrosa 1996, Oslender 1997).

Similarly in Brazil, one of the most important social movements, the movement of landless peasants MST (Movimento Sem Terra), aims to bring about agrarian reform and challenges existing political and social structures. The identity of participants as landless peasants is a powerful construction across ethnic and gender boundaries. Within the movement we find people from all kinds of ethnicities in Brazil, as was visible in 1997 on the ‘1000 kilometres march to Brasilia’ when the MST had organised marches originating in different parts of Brazil that converged on the country’s capital (Simoes 1997). The participants’ subject positions derived from ethnicity were superseded during the march by those of being landless peasants, expressed visually by waving MST flags and wearing

MST T-shirts. Their identity as landless peasants of multiple ethnic origins was actively constructed by the movement, and had to be constantly re-negotiated. Once the march was over, people returned to their place of residence and different subject positions came temporarily to the forefront.¹⁹ Even during the march, other subject positions were articulated simultaneously, so that, for example, women or members of the same ethnic group walked together in groups within the march. Therefore, other subject positions of race, gender, age and so on, are not erased but are temporarily put in subordinate positions and may appear less visible, as the actors affirm their identities in the manifestation of their activities and their ‘articulatory practices’:

There is no subject position whose links with the others are permanently assured; and consequently, there is no fully acquired social identity which is not subject, to a greater or lesser degree, to the action of articulatory practices. (Laclau 1985:33)

The identity of agents is thus not given by class alone (peasant, worker, bourgeois) but by the *plurality* of subject positions. With such an anti-essentialist stance, “we break with the category of the subject as a rational transparent entity which could convey a homogenous meaning on the total field of her conduct by being the source of her actions” (Mouffe 1995:260). As Laclau further elaborates:

Evidently, the relation between these different positions is far from being obvious and permanent; it is rather the result of complex political constructions which are based on the totality of social relations and which cannot be derived unilaterally from the relations of production. [...] The concept of ‘class struggle’, for example, is neither correct nor incorrect - it is, simply, totally insufficient as a way of accounting for contemporary social conflicts. (Laclau 1985:28-29)

The relation between the different subject positions is contingent, non-determined and negotiated, so that every identity is a ‘relational identity’:

The creation of an identity implies the establishment of a difference. [...] Every identity is relational and the affirmation of a difference is a precondition for the existence of any identity. Mouffe (1995:262-263)

Drawing on Derrida’s (1976) concept of the ‘constitutive outside’,²⁰ Mouffe further states:

When it comes to the creation of a collective identity, basically the creation of an ‘us’ by the demarcation of a ‘them’, there is always the possibility of that ‘them and us’

¹⁹ Unless the peasants took part in occupations of non-productive lands, for example, which is one of MST’s main strategies at expressing their demands for land reform. In this case, the actors continued to identify themselves primarily as landless peasants.

²⁰ The ‘outside’ is constitutive in the formation of identities in that the existence of the other becomes a condition of the possibility of my own identity, since I could not have an identity without the other. Thus the ‘outside’, as the other within, is essential part of the articulation process of any identity, and the interior is always contingent in relation to the outside.

relationship becoming one of ‘friend and enemy’, that is, to become antagonistic. (Mouffe 1995:263)

Collective identity in this understanding must be seen as a product of constant negotiations which establish a contingent, non-predetermined relation between subject positions within an unstable discursive structure. Hence, there seems to exist a contradiction between an autonomy of subject positions and the fixing of articulatory practices in a unified discursive structure, as expressed, for example, by social movement leaders at the negotiating table. In the name of a temporary unity to achieve wider political aims, the ‘social’ is ambiguously “constructed by the partial limitation of the effects of contradictory logics” (Laclau 1985:34) as a strategy in the process of negotiation and bargaining.²¹ With such a position we break the binary division between the ‘social’ and the ‘political’ by immersing the political into the social, and indeed, the political is “inscribed within the different spheres of the social whole” (Slater 1997:262). Therefore, “political practice in a democratic society does not consist in defending the rights of preconstituted identities, but rather in constituting those identities themselves in a precarious and always vulnerable terrain” (Mouffe 1995:261).

Appropriating historicity and other preconditions

Identities are not only relational, but they are also grounded in specific cultural experiences. And it is this cultural sensitivity that the identity-oriented perspective has inserted into social movement theory. Touraine (1988:8) has referred to the actors’ specific cultural experiences as ‘historicity’, “the set of cultural models that rule social practices”. The actors assume the collective task of cultural self-production, which is regarded as a complex set of actions that society performs upon itself. Thus a social movement in Touraine’s definition (1988:68) is “the action, both culturally oriented and socially conflictual, of a class defined by its position of domination or dependency in the mode of appropriation of historicity, of the cultural models of investment, knowledge and morality towards which the social movement itself is oriented”. Or in other words, within a social movement people assume, or seek to assume, control of their historicity. In this context, the processes of identity conscientisation and the articulation of relational identities as discussed above chart the ‘shift’ that occurs from a precondition stage of mobilisation to

²¹ The strategy of essentialising identities for the purposes of achieving political goals has also been referred to as ‘strategic essentialism’ (Spivak 1990), a concept that I will discuss in Chapter 4 in more detail.

the development of a social movement *per se*. In the case of the black communities in Colombia, I will show how a process of identity conscientisation entails such a shift from a mere possessing of shared histories and cultural traditions to a concrete political project with cultural, political and territorial demands. Crucially, this shift also has its spatial component in that a particular set of spatialised social relationships along the rivers in the Pacific coast is translated into the physical constitution of community councils along river basins. This shift is then also (chrono)logically traced in my thesis in that I begin with an analysis of the everyday social relations constructed around the aquatic space (Chapters 5 and 6) through to the organised political expressions of the community councils (Chapters 7 and 8). Clearly, not all black peasants, fishermen, and others embark on such a political project; the processes of identity conscientisation, far from being completed, have only just begun and are themselves ambiguous, interrupted and discontinuous. Importantly, the cultural and the political cannot be separated any more in these processes. In fact, “social movements are a crucial arena for understanding how this perhaps precarious yet vital entanglement of the cultural and the political occurs in practice” (Alvarez *et al.* 1998:5). To some, most struggles fought today can be located in this field of ‘cultural politics’, the “process enacted when sets of social actors shaped by, and embodying, different cultural meanings and practices come into conflict with each other” (Alvarez *et al.* 1998:7). These authors apply Touraine’s notion of historicity to a Latin American context and show how social movements there assume control over their historicity, and how they actively defend it.

In a way, this is an appropriation of Touraine’s notion for a context that he deliberately excluded. To him, Latin America was in the process of acceding to a ‘higher’ level of historicity, as it had been reached in European and North-American societies, but this tells us more about the Eurocentric nature of the author than about changing realities in Latin America. The notion of a ‘highest level of historicity’ in itself is, of course, very problematic. Escobar (1992:84), for example, points to the sophisticated historical consciousnesses which anthropologists have analysed in non-post-industrialised societies. There, historical consciousnesses have always existed, deeply embedded in the societies’ everyday social practices. Denying this fact exposes the theorist’s incapacity for reading these ‘submerged realities’ (Melucci 1989) with a sufficiently analytical eye. Such a representation indeed tells us more about the author than about the culture his/her text pretends to represent. Touraine’s ‘view from the hill’ and top-down approach is also visible

in the methodology that he developed in social movement research, *intervention sociologique*, in which the researcher enables a social movement to find its 'highest possible meaning' through a hypothesis and initiates a social movement's self-analysis. An analysis of the self-production of action is then followed by a 'conversion' of the results into contents of action. Touraine's method implies a normative assumption of the possibility of an objective analysis without considering issues of power relations. He ignores the problematic interaction of researcher and actor, and aims at a causal explanation of the notion of 'meaning'. His qualitative assessment of meaning as having different stages further raises the question as to whether there are also 'lower' meanings. Touraine's structural approach can moreover be traced in his belief that there is only one central social movement in a given society at any one time, and in post-industrialised societies he claims to find evidence of a temporal shift from the worker's movement to the anti-nuclear struggles as epitomising the 'truly central conflicts' (Touraine 1988:26). In constructing such hierarchies, Touraine plays down the continued importance of workers' struggles and the transformational potential that the plurality of contemporary social movements have for society, a characteristic of all societies at the end of the millennium (Castells 1997).

What remains important in Touraine's analysis, however, is his insistence on the cultural stakes of collective action. Melucci follows on from this, but less authoritatively he sees the researcher essentially as an option, a kind of feedback in relation to the social movement. In this understanding, identity does not appear as an accomplished fact, but as a socially constructed process that acknowledges "the internal complexity of an actor (the plurality of orientations which characterizes him [sic])" (Melucci, quoted in Escobar 1992:72). Precisely because of this plurality of subject positions (Laclau & Mouffe 1985), collective identities are always negotiated, unstable and ambiguous. Melucci further stresses the importance of understanding the 'submerged realities' of social life, which in the context of political mobilisation form "the crucial network of relationships that underlie collective action before, during, and after the events" (Escobar 1992:73). Indeed, "what nourishes [collective action] is the daily production of alternative frameworks of meaning" (Melucci 1989:248). An increasing emphasis in social movement research has therefore been put on the role of the household (Katz & Monk 1993, Gibson-Graham 1995, Bourque 1997), women's participation in popular struggles (Shiva 1989, Radcliffe 1993, Jaquette 1994, Kueppers 1994, Townsend 1995), neighbourhood organisations (Assies *et al.* 1990,

Assies 1991, Burgwal 1995), alternative production rationalities (Esteva 1987), and even popular culture (Wade 1997b). The mediations of social relations in daily life are seen to provide an emerging field for the construction of democracy:

We believe that daily life and social movements are privileged spaces in which to study these processes of mediation, since social movements are situated, at least in theory, in the intermediate space between individualized, familiar, habitual, micro-climatic daily life, and socio-political processes writ large, of the State and the institutions, solemn and superior. (Jelin 1987:11)

Summarising these complex issues, we recognise that identities are not given facts but actively and consciously constructed. Identity consciousness is a necessary precondition to stimulate the individual social actor to engage in sustained collective action, although it is not the only one. Whereas in structural Marxism consciousness is seen to be determined by the fixed category of class, identity consciousness is multiple, depending on the play of different subject positions, changing over and within time and space, and often articulated in an ambiguous manner. Social protest is then not teleologically determined to evolve as proletarian revolution, but rather as a multiplicity of resistances that starts with the ordinary affirmations of everyday life (Scott 1985, 1990; Esteva 1987). This last point can also partly explain the interest that contemporary social sciences have in popular culture, as everyday life provides the pool out of which resistances may emerge, and which may or may not then form into social movements. I therefore examine the social movement of black communities on Colombia's Pacific coast through the everyday social relationships that people have established along the river basins and that provide a pool or the 'soils' out of which the social movement emerges in a conscious act of appropriation of their historicity.

The problem of defining social movements

I have already defined a social movement at the beginning of this chapter as an organisational form of social actors that consciously and in a sustained manner enact processes of cultural and/or political contestation, based on a common understanding and a shared collective identity. Yet, there does not exist a common agreement among social movement researchers and theorists as to what exactly is to be understood by the term social movement. I therefore want to look at this point at the different ways how theorists think about social movements, as these discrepancies in definitions can partly explain much of the binary thinking that still exists between RMT and IOP. Shefner's (1995)

attitude seems particularly worrying, when he outrightly critiques much of the focus on collective identities as ‘moving in the wrong direction in social movement theory’. Equally worried by this binary thinking, Hellman (1995:166) has rightly pointed to the “daunting task involved in establishing a broadly acceptable definition of new social movements”. I will hence juxtapose in this section a variety of different definitions of social movements and reflect on the flexibility of the concept itself. I thus also exemplify the ‘daunting task’ for social movement theorists to define a societal phenomenon to which they often feel personally and subjectively attracted. Since every act of definition entails an act of exclusion, in that certain phenomena that do not fall within a definition are left outside, many researchers are plainly uncomfortable with providing a clear-cut definition of social movements.

We find the loosest definitions of what exactly a social movement is within IOP, taking into account the vast array of different cultural manifestations and placing particular emphasis on everyday resistances and popular culture. RMT’s instrumentalist vision and concern for the rational actor and leadership on the other hand applies a somewhat tighter definition. Yet, rather than regarding a social movement as a fixed organisational structure, it should be conceptualised as providing an open space of participation for all these ‘non-elite’ actors “whose interests are not routinely articulated or represented in the political system” (Zirakzadeh 1997:4). An ‘inclusive’ definition in this sense is provided by Escobar and Alvarez (1992:321), who conceptualise social movements as “organized collective actors who engage in sustained political or cultural contestation through recourse to institutional and extrainstitutional forms of action”. In a similar vein, Diani (1992:13) perceives a social movement to be “a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organisations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity”. Zirakzadeh (1997:4) regards a social movement as “a group of people who consciously attempt to build a radically new social order”. Likewise, Munck sees a social movement as a type of collective action that is oriented towards change. Within this loose definition he sees actor formation, social co-ordination and political strategy as the three central notions, still focusing on the social movement as a strategic actor: “Indeed, only when all three problems are successfully resolved is a social movement fully formed” (Munck 1995:681). To Tarrow (1994:2), “contentious collective action is the basis of social movements”, and he too emphasises the “need to solve the social transaction costs of collective action. This involves mounting collective challenges,

drawing on common purposes, building solidarity and sustaining collective action - the basic properties of social movements” (p.3). Collective challenges are then the “most characteristic actions of social movements” (p.4), and the building of solidarity the necessary process of the “participants’ *recognition* of their common interests that translated the potential for movements into collective action” (p.5; emphasis in the original). The process of building social movements out of mere contentious episodes is facilitated according to Tarrow (1994:6) by “changes in the political opportunity structure [which] create incentives for collective actions”. Tarrow makes a number of interesting observations here. What he refers to as the ‘participants’ recognition of their common interests’ finds repercussions in my concern for the processes of identity conscientisation, and the potential of collective action for movements, which I have conceptualised as the movement’s preconditions or soils. The changing ‘political opportunity structure’ is crucial in understanding the black movement in Colombia, as I have already outlined in Chapter 1, in that a new and generally favourable legislation towards black communities enabled and stimulated large-scale mobilisation on the Pacific coast.

Changes in the political opportunity structures are also held to account for large-scale spatial and temporal variations in the emergence and/or disappearance of social movements. Munck (1995), for example, claims that a decline in social movement activities can be observed in the recently democratised societies in Latin America as a direct result of now less obvious tensions between state and civil society. He further argues that previously in Latin America, the authoritarian or populist state in South America and the oligarchic state in Central America had provided conditions of tensions between state and civil society, wherein social movements found a fertile soil in which to locate their struggles. In contrast, in today’s recently democratised societies, social movement leaders find it more difficult to successfully organise and sustain collective action. Yet, Slater (1985), Escobar and Alvarez (1992), Foweraker (1995) and Castells (1997) have more convincingly argued that social movements are on the rise in Latin America, and that we can observe a whole array of new struggles as well as older struggles in new forms. Quite contrary to Munck’s argument, they claim that the political opportunity structure of recently democratised societies in Latin America has instead opened up new political spaces in which social movements can act and place their struggles; an observation that is fully supported by my Colombian case study material. How then did Munck arrive at such an opposed observation? The answer lies again in how he and others rigidly define social

movements as working towards the change of society as a whole. They thereby exclude certain forms of social protest which are not necessarily geared at a radical change of the entire realm of societal organisation. Such is the case of movements that challenge the dominant political system by choosing *not* to be part of it and by opting out of it, without necessarily attempting to change the social structures surrounding them. An example of such a movement can be found in Brazil, where at the turn of the last century Antonio *o conselheiro* walked through the arid backlands of north-eastern Brazil (*sertão*) predicting the end of the world, and gathered a large following on his pilgrimage to found the town of Canudos. This messianistic and millennial movement was seen as a threat by the new republic of Brazil, which sent four military expeditions before finally defeating the movement and completely destroying the town of Canudos in 1897 (Touraine 1987:174).²² This movement effectively created a self-sufficient community, or what Touraine (1987:174) refers to as *contrasociedad* or ‘counter-society’, in the remote backlands of Brazil’s Northeast. It presented a threat to the central government only in the political imaginary of the time, without ever actually attempting to change wider social structures in Brazil. A similar case for a counter-society can be argued for the fortified villages formed by black maroons or runaway slaves in the Americas during colonial times (Price 1979). The most famous ones are the *Quilombo de Palmares* in Brazil and the *Palenque de San Basilio* in Colombia, which I will discuss in some detail later. These fortifications provided safe havens free from oppression and surveillance for the runaway slaves and protection from the slave owners and the colonial military. From the base of their *palenques*, the maroons occasionally raided nearby haciendas and attacked colonial army outposts, but at no time was it their intention to threaten to overthrow or to abolish the colonial order. In fact, the *quilombos* and *palenques* functioned as counter-societies *within* the dominant colonial order.

There are probably as many definitions of what a social movement is or of what it is supposed to be as there are social movement theorists. This raises the important question as to what a clearly cut definition is supposed to achieve. Like any other definition, it is bound to exclude certain collective actions and/or acts of resistance which do not fit its tightly knitted definition. This prompts a whole series of further complex issues about

²² An eyewitness report exists in the form of a wonderful book, *Rebellion in the Backlands*, by Euclides da Cunha (1944). Based on this work, the Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa (1985) wrote a powerful evocation of the story of Canudos in his novel *The War of the End of the World*.

power and knowledge relations arising within social movement theory which theorists must address. Routledge and Simons (1995:474-475) have pointed out in this respect that “social science has been a key tool for taming spirits of resistance”. The latter are always regarded as a threat by the dominating power, because they are precisely “embodied in behaviour that cannot be explained by the Hobbesian model of fear, rational choice, and social contract”. Spirits of resistance are seen as different from a social movement, but as occurring within social movements as ‘moments’ which help to explain acts of resistance, the very stuff of which social movements are formed. Rejecting a closing and excluding definition, Routledge and Simons (1995:480-481) reckon that “social movements [...] may be theorised as multiplicities of interactions, relations, and acts of becoming - a ceaseless process of struggle, confrontations, and transformations”.

The authors reiterate here some of Melucci’s (1989:197) considerations, in that he conceives of a social movement as a social construction, a process within which “social action is never a given fact, it is always socially produced”. Collective action, according to Melucci, is built by social actors creating a collective identity. They have a movable definition of themselves and their social world, and a more or less shared and dynamic understanding of their common goals of action. Social movements constitute a complex interaction between actor, society and environment, and cannot be conceived of in dualistic thinking as either objective or subjective. Rather they bear within them a ‘contested internal solidarity’ as the product of intense interaction, negotiation and compromise. Solidarity therefore exists only as ideal-type, but as essentially dynamic and unstable reality, and not a ‘personage’. Melucci (1989) further criticises the term social movement for being too often used as a mere ‘conversational tool’ that suggests a unity of collective action, whereas in practice a whole range of different experiences and different levels of meanings can be observed within any one social movement. Such a conceptualisation leads us away from the narrow focus of most RMT on political strategy and on how to achieve a unity of social movements (Munck 1995, Shefner 1995). It also enables us to include, rather than exclude, certain experiences of resistances by social actors, as for example the phenomena of subterfuge and foot dragging in agrarian communities, which Scott (1985) sees as a source of positive resistance. Likewise, I argue that it is out of these initial acts of resistance that social movements may emerge, often in what may appear unlikely

conditions, constructing what Hall once referred to as ‘unexpected identities’.²³ If we try to understand the multiple ways in which social movements emerge, we should not exclude the spirits of resistance from their wider implications in social movement analysis. Nevertheless, Tarrow displays such a narrow and closed interpretation when he critiques Scott’s (1985) *Weapons of the Weak* as mere ‘individualistic resentment’: “Scott runs the risk of obscuring its differences from the forms of sustained interaction with opponents that are found in social movements. Scott only stretches the concept of ‘resistance’” (Tarrow 1994:6). Rather than a ‘conceptual confusion’ (Tarrow 1994:219), stretching the concept of resistance widens the interpretative angle and opens up new possibilities of including these acts of resistance in an interpretative framework; instead of taming the spirits of resistance, this can lead to a diffusing of tactics that “re-appropriate the space organized by socio-cultural production” (De Certeau 1984:xiv).

Contemporary social movements in Latin America

IOP is sometimes also referred to as ‘new social movement theory’, highlighting the supposed ‘newness’ of contemporary forms of resistance and the multiple forms and articulations of social protest. Considering the cases of Brazil and Argentina, Mainwaring and Viola (1984) identify five ‘new movements’ to be considered in this approach. These are ecclesiastical base communities, neighbourhood associations and the feminist movement in Brazil, human rights groups in Argentina, and ecological associations in both countries. Evers (1985) includes in this approach workers’ associations that act independently from trade unions and parties, indigenist associations, popular education groups and a range of self-help organisations amongst the poor and unemployed. Slater (1985:1) therefore points to the “highly diverse and multi-faceted list of social movements that have surfaced in recent years”. In a more recent collection of essays on social movements in Latin America, Escobar and Alvarez (1992) emphasise the spread of feminism, gay rights groups and ecology movements all over the continent, and Calderón and others (1992:19) in the same collection state that the “multiplicity of actors, themes, conflicts, and orientations is overwhelming”.

There have subsequently been ongoing debates over the supposed newness of these movements, debates that have not proved very fruitful in my opinion. Fals Borda

²³ See, for example, the case of the US farmworker movement during the 1960s (Zirakzadeh 1997:12-13).

(1992:303) usefully stresses the historical perspective that “more than two decades have passed since a new surge of social and popular movements began to arise in the Third World [and] today, these movements are no longer ‘new’”. Furthermore, Calhoun (1995) presents an intriguing argument that many movements of the early-19th century already showed characteristics of what many consider ‘new social movements’ today. In this respect, Castells (1983) has also pointed out that women have been at the forefront of many struggles over consumption long before we started talking about the newness of social movements,²⁴ and Melucci (1989:231) further stresses that these movements have come to stay in contemporary societies. Given that they keep re-inventing themselves and changing their structures as well as strategies, I prefer to refer to these movements as contemporary social movements (CSM). All that is new passes away one day, or interest is lost in it as in yesteryear’s Christmas present. And, although many theorists point to the short duration of some of these movements (Foweraker 1995, Hellman 1995), noting that their constant dispersal and the only temporary involvement of actors at any one time is one of their characteristics (Melucci 1989, Routledge 1997a), these Christmas presents are here to stay, albeit forever wrapping themselves up in new papers.

A much commented upon aspect of CSM is the participation of women at the forefront of contemporary social struggles (Radcliffe & Westwood 1993, Jaquette 1994, Kueppers 1994, Townsend 1995); in fact, the majority of actors that are involved in neighbourhood associations in Latin America, for example, are often women (Assies *et al.* 1990, Assies 1991, Burgwal 1995). This development is seen in relation to the shift of struggles from the realm of production to that of consumption. It is mostly women who are responsible for the social reproduction of the household, and it is they who have to make ends meet to feed the family and to look after the children. Their main concern is often one of improving living conditions in the household as well as in the local neighbourhood. It is, therefore, important to distinguish between women’s movements that are characterised by the above mentioned concerns for the spaces of consumption, and feminist movements that address patriarchal structures within which they find themselves to be subdued. In fact, a women’s movement does not have to be feminist at all, and can on the contrary reinforce

²⁴ Castells (1983) relates the example of the Glasgow rent strike of 1915, in which women protested against the increase in their rents while their men were away fighting in the war or employed in the ship-building industries. This was a women’s struggle over consumption that was different and independent from the mainly Union-led struggles over production. It is useful to bear this in mind when discussing the continuities or discontinuities of contemporary social movements.

patriarchal structures of male domination (Radcliffe 1997). On the other hand, a women's movement may be the stepping stone for many women to address wider issues of societal dynamics. If a woman's identity consciousness is mainly formed by her position in the household, then she will be chiefly concerned with improving the patterns of consumption. If, however, she is conscious that her position could be improved by addressing issues of male domination within the community and/or family structure, then this very different identity consciousness can lead her to engage in a very different struggle, namely one against male domination.

A further oft-stressed characteristic of CSM is their autonomy from traditional political party structures, as "today most Latin American social movements furiously defend their political, ideological, and organizational autonomy" (Escobar & Alvarez 1992:321). They are no longer linked to political parties, as they were in the 1960s, even though their ties are not entirely broken. The reasons for such a 'distancing', as I would put it, are manifold. First of all, there is the disillusionment and deep distrust that social actors have developed against traditional parties regarding their willingness to address the issues that social movements have brought to the fore. Secondly, the left has on a global level plunged into a crisis after the collapse of communism in eastern Europe, and still struggles to fill the void that this demise has left in the political landscape. A third point is the rise of new issues that CSM address, which formerly did not form part of political parties' concerns and were often outrightly ignored. This explains in part the rise and spread of feminist, gay rights, ethnic, and ecology movements throughout Latin America, which have created their own new organisational frameworks. Yet, the link to political parties has not necessarily been broken completely, and the relationship between social movements and political parties should not be conceptualised in such a linear form. Hellman (1992:58) rightly points out that "the encounter between movement and party is a dialectical one in which the movement is altered but so, too, is the party". And while it is true that many CSM have initially constituted themselves outside of traditional party politics, they nevertheless play an important part in the national political arena, where they effectively challenge traditional political structures.

This argument also counters some social movement theorists' claims that CSM essentially lack a concrete political project (Melucci 1989). Whereas some theorists envisage projects of 'endogenous action' and the creation of semi-autonomous spaces based on trust, friendship and hospitality instead of rules (Esteva 1987:129-137 on the

Mexican peasant experience), and also emphasise the creation of ‘counter-cultures’ or ‘counter-societies’ outside of the dominant society (Touraine 1987:174 on Canudos in Brazil), others refer to the constant negotiating and bargaining between social movements and governments. Scherer-Warren (1987:48), for example, argues that the Brazilian grass-roots movements in the 1986 election found themselves in a transitional period, which eventually led through expanded forms of popular expression to a ‘conquest of political space’. It is within this dimension of a ‘proliferation of political spaces’ (Laclau 1985:31) that social movements move from the ‘micro to the macro’ and from protest to proposal (Fals Borda 1992), since “resistances at the micro-level are necessary to produce social conditions for political action at the macro-level” (Fiske 1989:172). If the Brazilian political left wants to ascend into government, it depends on the votes of the grass-roots, and will have to rethink its relation to CSM by integrating their demands more seriously into party politics. More specifically, the before mentioned distrust at the grassroots derived from negative experiences with political parties means that the party will have to re-define itself. The recent case of the landless peasants’ (MST) march in Brazil (Simoes 1997) has illustrated the alienation of the workers party PT (Partido Trabalhador) from the grass-roots: as an observer on the march commented, she was surprised not to see any PT flags displayed. Instead, Brasilia’s landscape was flooded by a sea of MST flags when the different marches converged upon the capital. The speech delivered by PT’s leader Lula appeared almost anachronistic; it was considered too long, too detached from the grass-roots, and was not received with as much enthusiasm as he might have expected.²⁵

In a manner of concluding

In this chapter I have reviewed and critiqued the principal strands of RMT and IOP to social movements. I have furthermore argued that, rather than attempting a synthesis of both theories on the conceptual level, I draw on various of their insights at the empirical level to inform my particular inquiry into the social movement of black communities on Colombia’s Pacific coast. Throughout this chapter, I have made it clear that my approach to this movement leads me through the movement’s preconditions as the soils out of which subsequent movement mobilisation occurs. In a way, this is a different ‘take’ on social movements that proposes to chart the shift that occurs from the everyday shared cultural

²⁵ Personal communication from Nina Simoes, Glasgow, 5 April 1998.

practices and experiences to the actual organisational forms. This shift is marked by processes of identity conscientisation and the appropriation of historicity. It also takes on specific spatial forms and is related to the particularities of place and culture. Spatial considerations have to date largely been absent from social movement theorising, and have only been gestured to in the present chapter. Yet, as I will argue in Chapter 3, space and place must be seen not only as constitutive of social movement practice ‘on the ground’, but also as needing to become central to their theorisation. A dialectical unity of theory and practice must therefore embrace spatial theorisations of social movement practice. I intend to do this by applying a place perspective on social movements in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3***Spatialising resistance: perspectives on 'space' and 'place' in social movement research***

They encircled Ngafúa. They beat him and sprinkle salt and gunpowder on his wounds. The Senior Wolf barks, ordering him to reveal our plan, but all we hear is his invitation to resist.

Zapata Olivella (1998:110)

Introduction

Social movements emerge out of specific places at particular times, and reflect the characteristics of these places and times. This may be an obvious claim, a truism, but rarely is what might be termed a spatial 'alertness' to social movements spelled out analytically. Emphasis is normally placed on the temporal dimensions of social change, as reflected, for example, in Zirakzadeh's (1997) conceptualisation of three (temporal) waves in social movement research or in Melucci's conceptualisation of contemporary social movements in terms of 'nomads of the present'. Social movements from different corners (and cultures) of the planet are analysed in their temporal context, in that some common ground is sought between them as articulating the 'sign of the times', an angle of analysis that is particularly strong today 'at the end (or the beginning - depending on our mood) of the millennium'. This means, that most accounts of social movements examine only briefly (if at all), as little more than introductory background information, the particular worldly place out of which a given movement emerges, before the more 'serious' analysis then focuses on the movement structures, its demands, and how it is inscribed in the wider global changes of history.

In a way, this focus has begun to be changed with some work within IOP approaches to social movement research that recognise identities as intricately linked to place (Routledge 1993, Escobar 2001). To understand an identity-based movement, we have to understand the specific *places* where social movement agency evolves, and where these identities are constructed and physically acted out. Although these relations are increasingly understood and accepted today, surprisingly little attempt has been made to theorise the implications of such an understanding of place-based identities for social

movement research. There are concrete questions arising out of the interactions between social movement agency and place: How do the particularities of a place impact on people who form into a social movement, and how do they constrain or otherwise enable individuals to get involved in collective action? How far does the experience of living in a place, and the subjective feelings that this generates, influence an individual actor's choice of engaging in social movement activity? Do the particular local histories of a place play a part in understanding the ways in which locals think about their participation in collective action? But also, how do the wider and more objective characteristics of a place, as inscribed in the political and economic macro-order of things, account for the organisation and articulation of resistance in a particular place? What are the implications of a particular physical environment in local organising processes? This list could be continued almost indefinitely, as the multiple entanglements of place, social action and identity construction emerge before our eyes.

More specifically, in the case of social movements that organise around access to or the defence of their territorialities or struggles over land, it is the material physical space that is at the centre of their activities. Their struggle for land is at the same time a contestation of space and of the interpretations, readings and representations of this space. In the particular case of the social movement of black communities on Colombia's Pacific coast which defines itself as an *ethnic-territorial* organisation, the struggle for their territories is explicitly and intimately linked to a re-interpretation of space and to different representations of space. In effect, the 'place' of the Colombian Pacific coast becomes the centre of struggle over representations of space, as I begin to demonstrate in this thesis.

These developments in practice have to be fed into theoretical reflections on how place and space impact on social movement agency, their articulations, strategies and identity construction processes. It is not possible (nor desirable) to radically separate space and place in these considerations, as if space constituted an abstract perception of the things that surround us, whereas place is the very tangible notion of the things we touch, see, feel and smell. Instead, space and place melt into each other, as Merrifield attempts to show in outlining a Lefebvrian reconciliation of space and place:

Space is not a high level abstract theorization separated from the more concrete, tactile domain of place which is frequently taken as synonymous with an easily identifiable reality such as specific location or 'locality'. [...] Both space and place have a real ontological status since they are both embodied in material processes – namely, real human activities. Their distinction must, therefore, be conceived by

capturing how they melt into each other rather than by reifying some spurious fissure. (Merrifield 1993:520)

It therefore becomes necessary to disentangle some common misconceptions over the often proclaimed abstractness of space *vis-à-vis* the concreteness of place. Whereas I *do* see place as something tangible that I can clearly picture in my mind and whose landscape I can imagine and mentally recall, so does space have its concrete ‘moments’ that can be traced in particular landscapes without reducing them to any fixed place. Space as concept certainly enables us to make abstractions from particular places, but it too has its concrete manifestations. These theoretical reflections will become clear in my empirical Chapters 5 to 8, where I show how the concept of the ‘aquatic space’ on the Colombian Pacific coast enables us to think about the spatial articulations of everyday life forms, and how they are fed into particular spatial organising forms through social movement agency.

In this chapter, I will arrive at an account of why space and place matter in social movement research and how they influence, shape, enable or otherwise constrain both social action in general and certain resistance practices in particular, through sustained theoretical reflections constructing a genealogy of spatial theorising. In particular, I will use Lefebvre’s (1991) threefold spatial theory (spatial practices, representations of space, representational space) and Agnew’s (1987) use of the concept of place as constituted of three elements (location, locale, sense of place) as optics through which to view social movements. Although these appear to be two different theoretical frameworks, they interact on the empirical level by doing slightly different work in this thesis. Whereas Agnew’s concept of place enables us to outline and describe both the objective and the subjective aspects that make up the ‘place’ that is the Colombian Pacific coast, Lefebvre’s spatial theory opens up ways of contextualising these place aspects and of imagining the construction of an alternative life project in this place, as articulated by the social movement of black communities. Throughout the empirical chapters there will be great interplay between these two theoretical frameworks, and at times one may be tempted to roughly equate Lefebvre’s ‘representational space’ with ‘sense of place’. The ‘melting together’ of space and place thus acquires a real empirical background, while a conceptual distinction is still preserved. Reiterating my concern for a dialectics of theory and practice as outlined in Chapter 2, I am therefore discussing these theoretical concepts from the outset with their practical applicability in mind. Their apparent abstractness must be

regarded as a ‘concrete abstraction’, one that is “embodied in a social process that creates abstract forces that have concrete and personal effects in daily life” (Harvey 1985:1).

Space - what’s in it? Making (non)sense of spatial metaphors

A whole history remains to be written of spaces - which would at the same time be the history of powers.

Foucault (1980:149)

The German sociologist Beck recently called for the need to establish ‘world citizen parties’ (Weltbürgerparteien) in order to tackle contemporary global problems that, according to him, cannot any longer be solved in the arena of national politics:

There exists today a new dialectic of global and local questions, that cannot be accommodated easily within the field of national politics - ‘glocal questions’. Only in transnational space can they be adequately represented and solved. (Beck 1998:43; my translation)²⁶

Beck’s vocabulary drips with spatial metaphors, intermingling the global and the local in apparently harmonious symbiosis to produce the ‘glocal’. But what exactly do(es) (t)he(y) mean? Beck’s inquiries emerge out of the field of globalisation studies that Brenner (1999:41) has critiqued for their “relatively unhistorical geographical assumptions” that are themselves derived from earlier state-centric configurations of capitalist development:

State-centric approaches do not exclude geographical considerations to constitute a ‘despatialized’ or ‘spaceless’ social science: a distinctively ahistorical spatial ontology, the notion of ‘space-as-container’, lies at their very heart. State-centrism can be defined in terms of its two most essential, if implicit, geographical assumptions: 1) the conception of space as a static platform of social action that is not itself constituted or modified socially; and 2) the conception of state territoriality as a preconstituted, naturalized, or unchanging scale of analysis. The first assumption results in a *spatial fetishism* in which space is seen as being timeless, and therefore, immune to historical change. The second assumption results in a *methodological territorialism* that analyzes all spatial forms and scales as being self-enclosed and territorially bounded geographical units. Taken together, these assumptions produce an internalist model of societal development in which territoriality operates as the static, timeless container of historicity. (Brenner 1999:45-46; emphasis in original)

Such ‘unhistorical geographical assumptions’ may be regarded as symptomatic of the contemporary ‘globalisation craze’ in social sciences (Escobar 2001).

²⁶ “Es gibt nämlich eine neue Dialektik von globalen und lokalen Fragen, die in der nationalen Politik nicht gut unterzubringen sind - ‘glokale Fragen’. Nur im transnationalen Rahmen können sie angemessen dargestellt und gelöst werden.”

There has of course been an increasing interest in spatial debates over the last decade throughout the social sciences, and spatial conceptualisations are now seen as fundamental and of core importance to all forms of social theorising (Werlen 1988, Massey 1999). With the ‘reassertion of space in critical social theory’ (Soja 1989), an entire spatial language has emerged for comprehending contemporary social reality (Smith & Katz 1993). However, although “‘space’ is very much on the agenda these days” (Massey 1993:141), and others claim to have detected a “heightened geographical sensitivity in the face of an entrenched ‘historicism’” (Philo 1994:254), geographers still deplore the lack of an analytical understanding of the very concept of space (Bondi 1993, Massey 1993). An unprecedented proliferation of spatial metaphors in social theory - globalisation, de- and re-territorialisation, exclusion, time-space compression, locality, glocality, transnational, to mention just a few - has certainly not helped to engage in critical reflection over these issues. As Agnew criticises:

Spatial metaphors are used for categorizing and containing observations without much attention to their impact on the selection and ordering of the ‘concrete particulars’ themselves. Modern social science suffers from a sort of ‘agnosia’ (or disorder of perception) in which representations of space set boundaries for non-spatial processes rather than provide an understanding of space and society as inextricably intertwined. (Agnew 1994:261)

This tendency in social sciences has been discussed amply by Massey (1993, 1994), who argues that references to space seem to assume too often that its meaning is clear and uncontested. At the same time, space is frequently represented as essentially apolitical and opposed to time (see, for example, its use in Laclau 1990, and in Jameson 1991), a tendency which continues to give preference to an historical analysis over a geographical one:

Historicism blocks from view both the material objectivity of space as a structuring force in society and the ideational subjectivity of space as a progressively active part of collective consciousness. [...] Spatiality, as the praxis of creating human geography, still tends to be pushed into an epiphenomenal shadow as history’s mirroring container. (Soja 1989:130)

Harvey (1996:9) also contends that “social theoretic meta-narratives usually concentrate on processes of temporal change, keeping spatiality constant”.

If we instead imagine space in terms of multiplicity and the possibility of interrelations, then we can see the openness of the outcome of any interaction, and space itself becomes the open ground of possible change and political action:

This space is neither stasis nor closure (nor is it ‘smooth’). It is disruptive, active and generative. [...] Precisely through its multiplicity, and through those happenstance juxtapositions and sometimes paradoxical positionings, it opens them up to the generation of novelty, to the emergence of new narratives, to a future which is less predictably inscribed in the past. This ‘spatial’ is the very product of multiplicity and thus a source of dislocation, of radical openness, and so of the possibility of a kind of creative politics. (Massey 1999:287)

Other geographers who have been keen on decentering hegemonic historical narratives have turned to writers such as Foucault (Driver 1985, Philo 1992) and Benjamin (Gregory 1994) whose spatialised historical accounts effectively disrupt a linear narrative of seemingly chronologically ordered facts and events. Examining Benjamin’s Arcades Project (*Das Passagen-Werk*), Gregory (1994:234) argues that “Benjamin effectively ‘spatialised’ time, supplanting the narrative encoding of history through a textual practice that disrupted the historiographic chain in which moments were clipped together like magnets”. Harvey, on the other hand, cautions against uncritically embracing such a disruptive and decentering potential of the notion of spatiality, which he relates to the ‘extraordinary eruption of spatial metaphors in poststructuralist and postmodernist work’:

The insertion of spatial considerations into most forms of social theorizing [...] often turns out to be profoundly disruptive of how the theory can be specified and put to work. [...] If spatiality typically disrupts received theory and dominant metanarratives, then those who, for whatever reason, want to disrupt them can most easily do so by invoking some sort of spatiality. (Harvey 1996:9)

If we hence intend to reconstruct theory with space as an integral element, if we want to construct a spatial theory that does not only understand but also actively create what Harvey (1996:8) refers to as ‘permanences’ (organisations, institutions, programmes) in order to change anything at all in a meaningful way, then I agree with Harvey (1996:9-10) that “the only way to do that is to theorize what might be meant by ‘the production of space’”. Our insertion of space should not just be about the deconstruction of certainties and foundational beliefs, showing the ‘differences’ which fragment the theoretical and the political meta-narratives. It should also be about (re)constructing (new) theories and political practices where space becomes a key to new projects and possibilities. This latter point is, of course, of central importance in social movement research, since these movements precisely contest the dominating structures in which social life and they themselves are inscribed, and which are the result of specific ways of the production of space. Space is therefore of central concern in understanding the emergence and the

workings of social movements, and even more so, since their resistance practices are physically and materially acted out in space. It is in this understanding that (material) space as the concrete physical scenario and terrain of social movement agency ‘on the ground’ quite literally enables us to conceptualise (theoretical) space as grounding social movement theories. It is therefore of paramount importance to break common assumptions that regard the meaning of space as unequivocal and fixed without real inquiry into its dynamic and fluid characteristics.

Space/time and time geography: alternative conceptualisations of space and time

Why was there time? Why always this idiotic succession of things, and not some thunderous, satisfying all-at-the-same-time? Why was he now alone in bed again, like a widower, like an old man? Throughout this short life, one could have pleasure, one could create, but one always only sang one song after another, never did the whole, full symphony sound with all hundred voices and instruments at the same time.

Hesse (1995:17; my translation)²⁷

Arguing against the old dualism between time and space, between history and geography, and that this dualism is neither natural nor necessary, Massey proposes the concept of a ‘four-dimensional space-time’:

Space and time are inextricably interwoven. It is not that we cannot make any distinction at all between them, but that the distinction we do make needs to hold the two in tension, and to do so within an overall, and strong, concept of four-dimensionality. (Massey 1993:152)

Massey’s (1993) space/time annotation emphasises the very fluid, dynamic and open nature of this relationship and the multiple ways in which time and space are bound into the conduct of social life. Her conceptualisation provides a further step in the debates over time-space relations that were first geometrically represented in Hägerstrand’s time-geography. Hägerstrand (1973) developed a web model as an elementary time-space notation for social networks, which aims at registering flows and encounters in social space, and emphasises the continuity and connectedness of sequences of events which necessarily take place in situations bounded in time and space. The model assumes that space and time function as resources for individual projects, which are necessarily affected

²⁷ “Warum gab es Zeit? Warum immer nur dies idiotische Nacheinander, und kein brausendes, sättigendes Zugleich? Warum lag er jetzt wieder allein im Bett, wie ein Witwer, wie ein Greis? Das ganze kurze Leben hindurch konnte man genießen, konnte man schaffen, aber man sang immer nur Lied um Lied, nie klang die ganze volle Symphonie mit allen hundert Stimmen und Instrumenten zugleich.”

by the existence of constraints. These constraints are expressed as possible time-space *paths*, flowing through certain accessible *stations* within a wider structure of *domains* that restrict human action.²⁸ Although accused of confining space-time interrelations to a strict physicalism of routinised interactions of social actors within a known framework of possible places and time-space paths, time-geography considerably influenced and spatially sensitised the development of structuration theory, and in particular how its graphical representations enable us to see the material logic of structuration (Pred 1981). In fact, the paths and projects in time-geography can be seen as providing the practical glue for place (Pred 1984).

Structuration theory (Giddens 1979, 1984) conceives of social systems as systems of interactions which involve the situated activities of knowledgeable and capable human subjects and structures. It is crucial here to acknowledge that these structures have been created by these very human subjects, and that, while they can constrain social actors, they can also enable human agency or, indeed, can be adjusted, changed or even dismantled. Thus, social practices can reproduce and/or resist these structures. It is possible, therefore, to conceive of social movements and processes of resistance through what I term a 'structurationist perspective' by analysing these dialectics between structure and agency at work. This is of course one of the key paths of inquiry for RMT, in particular its focus on political opportunity structures and on the ways in which collective actors (human agency) use these structures and/or change them. Such a structurationist perspective has also been the dominant approach to the social movement of black communities in Colombia who have mobilised extensively following a favourable legislative change in Colombia's political opportunity structures (Restrepo 1998, Pardo 2001, Rivas 2001). Yet, a dominant focus on *political* structures as providing the impetus for mobilisation may easily divert the analysis away from the local structures of *feeling* as providing the important preconditions for social movement agency. The latter are the central object of inquiry in this thesis.

In sum, structuration theory is concerned to promote a recovery of the subject without lapsing into subjectivism. Human agency in this context must not be seen as an essentialised, simplified notion, always self-aware as if it was not tainted by unconscious desires and tensions itself. In fact, it is an unstable and multiple notion in itself, and finds

²⁸ This emphasis on constraints has been criticised as owing too much to structuralism and as relegating human agency (Gregory 1985). Furthermore, the attempt at capturing space and time in a rigid grid has been critiqued by Rose (1991), who has also pointed to the masculinist ontology of power over space in time-geography and to its physicalist notion of space as 'something' to be controlled.

articulation often in highly ambiguous expressions. Not all resistance practices, for example, are necessarily directed against structures of oppression, but quite on the contrary may reinforce them. The US-backed *contras* in Nicaragua, for example, who fought the revolutionary socialist Sandinista government that attempted to break the structural stranglehold of foreign intervention and domination on the country, were a reactionary movement that put up resistance to the liberating experience of the Sandinista government. It was a reactionary resistance that aimed at re-installing pre-Sandinista structures of domination and exploitation. And it succeeded in the most unexpected of all ways - through a general election. The war-tired Nicaraguans voted the Sandinistas out of power, and thereby also indirectly abolished their claims to free education and free health service in the country. Obviously, therefore, not all resistance practices should be greeted with enthusiasm. Another example of a resistance movement that effectively aims at reinforcing structures of domination can be found in the anti-abortion campaign in the US. This campaign, in fact, aims at restricting women's rights over their own bodies, and thus reifies women's structural subordination within a context of patriarchal domination.

Within the same context, Radcliffe (1993) discusses the case of the 'Madres de la Plaza de Mayo' in Argentina, who mounted a visible protest in public spaces demanding information on their relatives' whereabouts who had been 'disappeared' by the Argentine military dictatorship. Radcliffe argues that, while the mothers effectively challenged the dictatorship, they also reinforced patriarchal structures of male domination by reifying their traditional role model as mothers and wives. This seems a dangerously 'matronising' critique to me, in that it tends to impose Western feminist principles from the outside onto a context with politically and culturally very different and immediate issues at stake. It also ignores how, as I have explained in Chapter 2, the very experience of collective action can encourage individual actors to engage in further acts of resistance at a later stage. In the course of participation in collective action, identity consciousness is invariably raised not only over the particular conflict situation, but also regarding a whole range of related issues. Thus, the experience of collective action itself generates the kind of conscientisation process that I have discussed in Chapter 2. In the case of the Madres in Argentina, this can lead, for example, to the questioning of patriarchal structures in the future. Such a potential must always be born in mind when attempting to assess a movement's outcome in terms of success or failure.

Ambiguous, differing and multiple as they are, common to all these resistances, and indeed to all social practice, is that they are acted out and mediated in space and over time. Although such a statement may sound banal on first sight, its implications are that such an approach to space and time as binding social practices reveals both concepts to be political and conflictual. We therefore have to problematise what space entails, how it is produced and what implications it holds for social practices. The meaning of the ‘spatial turn’ must go beyond the usual, casual deployment of metaphors without attending to the complexities and the politics of ‘real’ spaces in the world. The ‘ground’ that gives rise to spatial metaphors is so much more conflictual and non-obvious. All conflict is acted out in space, and social movement action, as a contestation of structures of domination and/or exploitation, must therefore be thought of and conceptualised as a discernibly articulated politics of space, informed by what Lefebvre (1991) so masterfully laid out in ‘The Production of Space’.

Lefebvre and the Production of Space

In his ‘Reflections on the Politics of Space’, Lefebvre states:

Space is not a scientific object removed from ideology or politics; it has always been political and strategic. If space has an air of neutrality and indifference with regard to its contents and thus seems to be ‘purely’ formal, the epitome of rational abstraction, it is precisely because it has already been occupied and used, and has already been the focus of past processes whose traces are not always evident in the landscape. Space has been shaped and molded from historical and natural elements, but this has been a political process. Space is political and ideological. It is a product literally filled with ideologies. (Lefebvre 1976:31)

The implications for such a conceptualisation of space are that there are conflicts and contestations in the use of space. These contestations are frequently articulated by social movements in the political, economic and civil society arena. As I have shown in Chapter 2, RMT and IOP have tried to explain the emergence, manifestations and success or failure of social movements. However, what has been referred to by Routledge (1993:21) as a ‘lacuna’ in social movement theories is their lack of both a place perspective and a more explicitly spatial analysis. He reinforces this point by arguing that a “sensitivity to particular places of resistance implies the acknowledgement of the intentionality of historical subjects, the subjective nature of perceptions, imaginations and experiences in dynamic spatial contexts, and how spaces are transformed into places redolent with cultural meaning, memory, and identity” (Routledge 1996:520). Although some attempts have been

made to address this problem of spatially insensitive approaches to social movement analysis (Pile & Keith 1997, Routledge 1997a, Moore 1998, Slater 1998), such a critique still holds true today. A recent collection of essays on social movements in Latin America (Alvarez *et al.* 1998) is advertised in the Westview Press pamphlet as drawing on a ‘variety of disciplines and fields - particularly anthropology, political science, sociology, feminist theory, and cultural studies’. Geography is conspicuously absent once again.²⁹

To address this lacuna, I argue that Lefebvre’s conceptualisations of the production of space provide a helpful framework through which to spatialise resistance, in that it enables us to ground the contributions of RMT and IOP in material reality and in particular contexts. What has attracted geographers in particular to Lefebvre’s work is his constant concern with the everyday life (*le quotidien*) and its implications for a politics of space. Furthermore, he extensively deals with issues of representation, and does so in very engaged ways, which have led Gregory (1994:358) to celebrate Lefebvre’s “sometimes poetic figurations”. Throughout Lefebvre’s work shines his commitment to resistance practices, which, of course, reflects his own lived experiences, be it in the French *Resistance* against Nazi occupation during the Second World War or in the student unrests of 1968 (Harvey 1991). To Lefebvre, the abstract model always needs to have practical implications for the everyday, and this is how we should approach and understand the conceptual triad or the three interconnected ‘moments’ that Lefebvre (1991) identifies in the production of space: 1) spatial practices; 2) representations of space; and 3) representational space. I will discuss here first points 1) and 2), followed by an examination of the ‘struggle over nature’ as a typical contemporary example of the workings of representations of space. This account is empirically enriched with my case study material from the Colombian Pacific coast. I will then follow on with a discussion of point 3) on representational space. I thereby also follow Lefebvre’s own recommendation in that his triad is an abstract, hollow device that only becomes a forceful explanatory framework by being employed in concrete situations (Lefebvre 1991:40).

Generally speaking, *spatial practices* refer to the ways in which people generate, use and perceive space. More specifically, spatial practices “take on their meanings under specific social relations of class, gender, community, ethnicity or race and ‘get used up’ or ‘worked over’ in the course of social action” (Harvey 1989:223). On the one hand,

²⁹ Although Slater (1998) contributes a chapter in this volume on the spatialities of social movements, the lack of mentioning geography as a contributing academic discipline to these issues seems symptomatic.

therefore, they affect the processes of commodification and bureaucratisation of everyday life, a phenomenon which is symptomatic and constitutive of modernity, and which has effectively colonised an older, historically sedimented ‘concrete space’. This argument has also been made by Habermas (1987) who refers to these processes as the ‘colonisation of the life world’. On the other hand, however, these spatial practices are intimately linked to the experiences of everyday life and the memories and residues of older and different life forms. They bear, therefore, a potential for resisting the colonisation of concrete spaces. These are crucial insights for my case study on the Colombian Pacific coast. Whereas processes of colonisation of the life world have set in there too, the older and historically sedimented concrete space still survives, especially in the more remote and less accessible parts of this region, in the form of everyday cultural practices such as traditional healing methods, oral tradition and funeral rites. It is precisely *these* spatial practices that social movement leaders evoke and draw upon in their political project, resisting the further penetration of external capital into the region. Spatial practices can thus be seen as embodying “a close association, within perceived space, between daily reality (daily routine) and urban reality (the routes and networks which link up the places set aside for work, ‘private’ life and leisure)” (Lefebvre 1991:38).³⁰ And here again, we can feel, and graphically imagine maybe, these paths, stations, and domains that saturate social space as envisaged in Hägerstrand’s time geography.

Representations of space refer to the conceived spaces, which are derived from a particular logic and from technical and rational knowledges. They refer to the “conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers” (Lefebvre 1991:38), whose expert knowledges represent the ‘advance’ of scientific discourses of modernity in health, education, family planning and so on, which invade and destroy the spheres of social life through institutionalisation (Habermas 1987). As Foucault (1972) has argued, these expert knowledges are first derived by a whole range of scientific methods, and then administratively applied in the regulation of all areas of life. Lefebvre refers to these knowledges as *savoir*, knowledges which are connected to an institutional apparatus of power and dominant representations generated by a hegemonic logic of visualisation. These knowledges are represented as

³⁰ Lefebvre mainly derives his conceptualisations regarding the production of space from an urban experience, and therefore frequently refers to the ‘urban reality’, as he does in this quote. However, there is nothing to suggest that his insights cannot be applied to a ‘rural reality’, which is the Colombian Pacific coast in my approach.

readable spaces, as for example in the form of maps and statistics. They produce normalised visions and are always connected to dominant representations, be it in state structures, within the economy, or in civil society. Such a readability works as a reduction of space to a transparent surface. It thus creates a particular normalised vision, which obscures struggles and existing ambiguities while laying claim to a truthful representation of space.

Lefebvre argues that in ‘traditional’ societies spatial practices preceded representations of space, whereas in today’s (post-)industrialised societies the opposite is true; that is before we experience space through our spatial practices, it has already been represented to us. The temporal teleology implied in this argument is too deterministic, though, in that the relation between spatial practices and representations of space is contingent and subject to all kinds of contestations and reappropriations by human agency in general, and by social movement agency in particular. Nevertheless, what is important here is the ever-increasing significance of representations of space and the underlying logic of visualisation. The increasing importance of information technology and new ways of dynamically modelling social life, as for example in Geographical Information Systems (GIS), present another leap ‘forward’ in these hegemonic forms of representations of space. Their effect is one of increasing abstraction and decorporealisation of space, always backed by scientific claims to a truthful representation. There hence emerges an ‘abstract space’, in which “things, acts and situations are forever being replaced by representations” (Lefebvre 1991:311). This abstract space is precisely “the space of contemporary capitalism” (Gregory 1994:360), where the law of commodity exchangeability as the dominant economic rationale of modern capitalism has led to an increased commodification of social life. Rather than a homogenous, closed space, though, abstract space is the site of contestation in which socio-political contradictions are acted out:

Socio-political contradictions are realized spatially. The contradictions of space thus make the contradictions of social relations operative. In other words, spatial contradictions ‘express’ conflicts between socio-political interests and forces; it is only *in* space that such conflicts come effectively into play, and in so doing they become contradictions *of* space. (Lefebvre 1991:365; emphasis in original)

These contradictions will ultimately give rise to a new kind of space, a ‘differential space’, “because, inasmuch as abstract space tends towards homogeneity, towards the elimination of existing differences or peculiarities, a new space cannot be born (produced) unless it accentuates differences” (Lefebvre 1991:52). It can be argued that this is precisely what we

are witnessing today, a proliferation of ‘differential spaces’ as a result of the contradictions inherent in an abstract space that seeks to homogenise and to create conformities. Identity politics that mobilise around issues of class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and so on, have led to an accentuation of differences and peculiarities which are articulated in a myriad of resistances and contestations of dominant representations as embodied in abstract space. Thus the contradictions inherent in ‘abstract space’ lead to a “quest for a counter-space” (Lefebvre 1991:383), a ‘differential space’, which finds articulation in the *multiplicities* of resistances as a concrete politics of space. Multiplicity is indeed a key characteristic of spatiality, as Massey (1999) has argued. PCN’s experience in Colombia provides ample empirical material to support these claims, although analysing all these aspects is beyond the scope of this thesis. PCN’s principles as outlined in Chapter 1, however, give a good idea of what the ‘quest for a counter-space’ may entail in practice. They oppose a ‘model of society that requires uniformity’ (the homogeneity of the abstract space), but instead demand autonomy (the accentuation of difference) and the right to territory and a space for being (the territorially grounded quest for a counter-space). The latter in particular builds a clear spatial-territorial logic into these processes of socio-spatial contradictions.

Slightly differing from Lefebvre, however, I do not see these processes as teleologically determined in a linear fashion, as if at some point a differential space will replace the abstract space altogether.³¹ Rather both spaces must be seen as existing parallel one to another, side-by-side, at times in conflict with each other, at other times in dialectical cohabitation. To exemplify this argument, I will now discuss the (practical and discursive) ‘struggle over nature’, which has been identified by some as one of the most important areas of contemporary global resistance practices (Haraway 1991). I have chosen to present this example at this particular point in the thesis because it a) illuminates the complex dialectical relationship between (dominant) representations of space and the quest for a counter-space as theoretically outlined by Lefebvre, and b) in many ways it establishes the setting for my particular case study of the social movement of black communities on the Colombian Pacific coast.

³¹ See also claims by Gregory (1994:354) on a teleological tendency in Lefebvre’s ‘spatial history’, as standing “in the shadows of the totalizing drive of Hegelian Marxism”.

Representations of space: the struggle over nature and the ‘discursive fix’

The salvation of the environment is the most brilliant business for the same companies that destroy it.

Galeano (1998:196)

The struggle over nature and its meanings and appropriations has recently been given central importance in cultural politics. As Haraway (1991:1) notes, nature is “perhaps the most central arena of hope, oppression and contestation for inhabitants of the planet earth of our times”. We can no longer view nature as an uncontested field of common understanding, but rather as culturally and socially constructed under specific historical and geographical settings. As Escobar points out:

As much as identities, natures can be thought of as hybrid and multiform, changing in character from place to place and from one set of practices to another. In fact, individuals and collectivities are compelled today to hold various natures in tension. One might situate these natures according to various coordinates or draw cartographies of concepts and practices to orient oneself in the *complex field of the natural*. (Escobar 1999:2; my emphasis)

This ‘complex field of the natural’ has been appropriated by various actors, and increasingly ‘ecologically aware’ discourses have entered the political arena. Notions of sustainable development and conservation of biodiversity have been integrated into the accumulation principles of capitalist development, incorporating a subtle change in the ways that nature is viewed and thought about these days. Discourses on conservation emphasise not so much nature’s immediate extractive value, but rather the potential that nature provides as a reservoir to be tapped in a sensible manner, so as to ensure its future exploitation in sustainable ways. This tendency can be observed, for example, in the fields of genetic exploration by major pharmaceutical industries in tropical rainforest areas. Dominant representations of space have thus shifted their *strategic focus* on nature towards sustainable exploitation (although *unsustainable* exploitation continues to be practised at the same time), while nature is still produced as the homogenised abstract space of consumption. On the other hand, constructions of nature by local communities often (if not always) reveal a different cultural logic. Rural black communities on Colombia’s Pacific coast, for example, have developed a complex spatial and symbolic configuration of their world and a mental relation with their natural environment in which the mythical penetrates the everyday social relationships (Restrepo 1996a). Nature in these highly symbolised everyday configurations is not the homogenised abstract space of consumption,

but the lived differential space *per se*, redolent of meaning, myths and local history. Nature is not the space of exploitation of natural resources, but the material habitat, the lived space in which life is literally lived and on which it depends for its reproduction. The non-accumulative principles of traditional productive practices (Funcop 1996, Arboleda 1998) enter into conflict with the capitalist drive for natural resources, the more the latter penetrates the lived spaces of rural black communities.³² Activists of the social movement of black communities are hence compelled to hold various natures in tension. As Escobar relates the case of a PCN leader:

This activist grew up in a river community and migrated to one of the big cities in the Andean part of the country in search of education; she is now back organizing for the defense of the cultural and biophysical landscapes of her region (many activists are in fact women). If we take a step back and look at what she is doing, we can say that she is holding various landscapes, various natures in tension: foremost in her mind is the landscape of forest and rivers and settlements of her childhood, populated with all kinds of beings, from the beautiful coconut and *naidí* palm trees to the visions and spiritual beings that populate the under- and supraworlds. If she is in her early twenties, perhaps she also grew up alongside of the disciplined landscape of the plantations. As an activist, she has become aware of the discourse of biodiversity and of the fact that her region is in the mire of international organizations, Northern environmental NGOs, multinational corporations, and the government of her own country, all intent on having access to the allegedly rich genetic resources of the region. (Escobar 1999:5)

Applying Lefebvre's insights, these various constructions of nature enter into conflict, which comes effectively into play *in* space and so becomes a contradiction *of* space. This conflict is articulated by the PCN who try to co-ordinate it in a 'quest for a counter-space' as a concrete politics of space, expressed most clearly in their principle that demands their 'right to territory and a space for being' (see Chapter 1). The struggle over nature is in fact one of the principal scenarios or 'terrains of resistance' (Routledge 1993) of contemporary quests for counter-spaces, and localised resistances and social movements that contest dominant representations of nature (and space) are on the rise in every corner of this planet (Escobar & Alvarez 1992).

Environmental struggles in the 1980s were triggered by a growing global awareness over the accelerated destruction of rainforests, the contamination of rivers and seas, air

³² This is not to say that all black peasants and fishermen engage in traditional production practices. Many in fact work in and for capitalist enterprises that are active in the region of the Pacific coast. Their engagement in activities such as large-scale timber logging and unsustainable gold-mining, however, relates to the present moment and to the power of co-optation and seduction that capital holds wherever and whenever it enters 'pre-modern' life forms. This is not a place-specific phenomenon. It is much more interesting to focus on the ways in which traditional practices have survived, resisted and/or rejected these outside interventions.

pollution and so on. These were argued to be the result of the contradictory nature of capitalist accumulation principles (Shiva 1989, Sachs 1993). Dominant global discourses on nature have changed as a result, now accommodating many of the environmental concerns. They are an important tool in how capitalism realises “its reproduction of disguising abstractions such as ‘nature’ and ‘space’” (FitzSimmons 1997:192). In fact, ‘nature’ has been disguised and re-invented as ‘environment’, inserting into it a strong moral connotation or environmental ethic. I term this process the ‘discursive fix’, following Harvey’s (1982:415) identification of a ‘spatial fix’ as capitalism’s capacity for responding to the crisis of overaccumulation of capital in the space economy (idle productive capacity plus unemployed labour power) and to the limitations and restrictions that space imposes on the development of capitalism.³³ The discursive fix accompanies, prepares, conditions and sets the context for a new phase of capitalist restructuring. It prepares the ground for new ways of thinking about nature - in terms of environment - and produces universal feelings of concern for the environment, such as expressed, for example, in the United Nations’ Brundtland Report in the notion of ‘our common future’ (UNCED 1987, Visvanathan 1991). It is common practice today to refer to the ‘ecological crisis’, a term that embraces all kinds of environmental damages done to nature, and which at the same creates this feeling of concern within us and for some even existential angst.

Marxist analysis has explained that capitalism’s inherent contradictions are to be sought in the relationship with its production conditions of labour, space, and nature (Harvey 1982, Smith 1990). In this context, the discursive fix functions as a necessary response to the accelerated deterioration of nature as production condition. This physical deterioration of nature has been theorised in historical materialist terms as capitalism’s ‘second contradiction’ (O’Connor 1988, 1989).³⁴ Capitalism’s expansionist drive on

³³ As Harvey explains the ‘spatial fix’ in a later formulation: “There are two facets to this process. Excess capital can be exported from one place (city, region, nation) to build another place within an existing set of space relations. [...] Space relations may also be revolutionized, through technological and organizational shifts. Such revolutions alter relations between places and affect internalized processes of place construction, sustenance, and dissolution (as has happened through the recent history of rapid deindustrialization in many cities of the advanced capitalist world)” (Harvey 1996:295).

³⁴ The first contradiction refers to capitalism’s relation to labour. Labour is exploited in the process of capitalist surplus value accumulation. Capitalism’s profit, therefore, increases proportionally to labour’s exploitation. However, as labour as necessary production condition deteriorates, so does surplus value. Marx predicted a working-class revolution as the necessary outcome. Yet, as Harvey (1982) has shown, these apparent ‘limits to capital’ have been addressed by capitalist restructuring in the forms of benefits given to labour. These benefits include, for example, the creation of unions to defend workers’ interests and rights and the introduction of legislation concerning social security, pensions, health services and so on. Harvey has argued that both capital and labour may benefit from such a restructuring of capital in what he refers to as a ‘territorially based alliance’: “Production capital which cannot easily move may support the alliance and be

nature, exploiting its vast, seemingly limitless resources, has resulted in nature's steady deterioration as production condition, and has reached dimensions that threaten the very reproduction of capitalism itself. The inner contradictions of capitalism, therefore, produce constantly changing geographical landscapes that must adapt to capitalism's needs and that, in the case of nature's physical deterioration/destruction, must respond to the self-imposed crisis:

Capitalism perpetually strives, therefore, to create a social and physical landscape in its own image and requisite to its own needs at a particular point in time, only just as certainly to undermine, disrupt and even destroy that landscape at a later point in time. The inner contradictions of capitalism are expressed through the restless formation and re-formation of geographical landscapes. This is the tune to which the historical geography of capitalism must dance without cease. (Harvey 1985b:150)

This tune is now played in the global arena where discourses on sustainable development and biodiversity conservation provide the 'discursive ground' for capitalist intervention and restructuring. Just as the concessions and benefits to workers were used as a tool to diffuse class conflict and prevent further deterioration of the production condition labour, capitalism's current restructuring takes the form of conceding certain 'rights' towards nature, by gradually shifting from exploitation and destruction towards management and conservation:

The primary dynamic of capitalism changes form, from accumulation and growth feeding on an external domain, to ostensible self-management and conservation of the *system of capitalized nature* closed back upon itself. (O'Connor 1993:8; emphasis in original)

Escobar (1996:48) refers in this context to 'two logics of ecological capital': 'modern' forms of nature's exploitation such as the continued and often unsustainable extraction of natural resources, and 'postmodern forms of capitalisation of nature' that usher in an ecological phase of conservation and sustainable development. In the case of tropical rainforests, for example, the latter often takes place with view to the pharmaceutical potential that these ecosystems are considered to hold in terms of high levels of biodiversity. Such a 'bio-logic' is clearly expressed in Colombia, for example, by the Proyecto Biopacífico, a

tempted to buy local labour peace and skills through compromises over wages and work conditions - thereby gaining the benefits of co-operation from labour and a rising effective demand for wage goods in local markets. Factions of labour that have, through struggle or historical accident, managed to create islands of privilege within a sea of exploitation may also rally to the cause of the alliance. Furthermore, if a local compromise between capital and labour is helpful to local accumulation, then the bourgeoisie as a whole may support it. The basis is laid for the rise of a territorially based alliance between various factions of capital, the local state and even whole classes, in defence of social reproduction processes (both accumulation and the reproduction of labour power) within a particular territory" (Harvey 1982:420).

biodiversity conservation development programme designed for the Colombian Pacific coast, which is implemented by the Ministry of the Environment with funds from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Development Programme of the United Nations (Gef-PNUD 1993, Proyecto Biopacífico 1998). According to the national co-ordinator, the project is conceived within a ‘national biodiversity strategy’ that “considers the defence of the biological and cultural diversity [of the Pacific coast] as a vital factor for the development of the region” (Casas 1993:11). It is inscribed in the search for a ‘new development strategy’ for the region that at the same time strengthens the option of Colombia’s geopolitical future as a “bio-power in the concert of international relations” (Casas 1993:10). These are grand claims, of course, and to some they may quite simply appear ridiculous. Nevertheless, what they do express is a clear discursive trend towards an ecological phase of conservation centred around biodiversity. While at the same time, modern forms of capitalisation of nature, such as large-scale and largely uncontrolled timber extraction and alluvial gold-mining employing heavy machinery and mercury, still wreak ecological havoc in the region, and the two logics of ecological capital can and do co-exist on Colombia’s Pacific coast, the impact of the globally induced ‘new round’ of development discourses can clearly be felt with the new discursive focus on ‘postmodern forms of capitalisation of nature’.³⁵

This discursive shift in dominant representations of space must hence be understood as a strategy of late capitalism to save its production condition of nature and

³⁵ In ‘real life’, however, this situation is far more complex. As I explain in Chapter 7 when discussing the notion of the ‘fragmented state’, a number of development programmes with quite different logics are implemented on the Colombian Pacific coast at the same time. There is in fact a certain spatial and territorial overlapping of ecological logics at play ‘on the ground’, not just a mere co-existence. And although Escobar recognises the possibility of co-existence of the two forms of capitalised nature, he explains the emergence of the ‘postmodern form’ in rather deterministic and structural terms as a response to the actions and contestations of social movements: “Although the two forms may coexist, the first is prelude to the second, which appears when brute appropriation is contested by social movements” (Escobar 1996:47). Such a linear causal explanation is misleading, and it incidentally also entails a prioritising of time over space. While Escobar’s claim cannot even be sustained in the case of his particular empirical studies on Colombia’s Pacific coast, there are also biodiversity conservation projects in other parts of the world where social movements have played no part in. This is the case, for example, of the Mount Kupe project in Western Cameroon, a conservation programme jointly run by the Cameroonian government and the World Bank. It has been conceived in the above mentioned global bid of capitalism’s restructuring of nature-capital relations, and was implemented in this particular region on grounds of exceptionally high biodiversity levels found there. There have been no popular contestations of ‘modern’ forms of capitalised nature in the region. If we can talk about a social movement at all in the area, then popular protest has emerged as a *result* of this second form of capitalised nature, in that locals now demand participation in these projects and see them as a way of enhancing their lifestyles. Thus popular action can be thought of as having been generated by this particular form of capitalist restructuring, and not, as Escobar suggests, the other way around. (Information on the Mount Kupe case study derived from personal communications with Stuart Cable, botanist from Kew Gardens, London, who worked as one of the project co-ordinators in Cameroon).

thereby itself, a fact recognised by Lefebvre in the early-1970s, long before conceptualising in postmodern terms became in vogue:

During the 1960's, the natural environment was a poetic, symbolic type of space. [...] Nowadays it is known that the natural environment also is created, molded and transformed, that it is to a large degree a product of man's [*sic*] activities, that the face of the earth (in other words, the landscape) is a human product. The natural environment is still considered by some planners as an easily understood concept and as a technical problem. It is to be conquered and mastered. To the extent that it is conquered and mastered, it disappears. Now, suddenly, it is realized that in the process of being mastered, the natural environment was ravaged and threatened with destruction. The destruction of the natural environment in turn threatened the human environment which, although being the cause of the destruction, was still dependent on the natural environment for survival. From this situation came the *need for a strategy* to save the natural environment. Thus, the natural environment becomes a political issue. (Lefebvre 1976:32; emphasis mine)

This 'need for a strategy' has thus been addressed by a shift towards conservationist forms of capitalisation of nature which have been accompanied by the discursive fix, effectively producing the discursive transformation of 'nature' into 'environment'. The discursive fix itself is hence a strategy in the continuous domination of representations of space. It has also been wholeheartedly embraced by the 'global concerned community'. Our languages today abound in references to the 'environment', a terminology that due to its wide and mainly uncritical application has often become rather meaningless. It is intriguing, for example, to realise how little this term *means* to local people in areas 'full of environment', that is in areas which are frequently regarded as holding high levels of biodiversity or a fragile ecosystem. On the Colombian Pacific coast, for example, the term environment (*medio ambiente*) only appears in the official discourses which are applied to intervene politically and economically in the region, whereas locals talk about the hills (*el monte*) and the river (*el río*), two of 'their nature's' most important features. The local imaginaries then represent a different kind of space from the dominant discursive interventions and representations of space. These knowledges of space are derived from direct personal, individual and collective experiences, and to Lefebvre, they are *representational space*, the third 'moment' in the production of space.

Representational space and the entangled quest for a counter-space

To Lefebvre, *representational space* consists of the directly lived spaces, which are produced and modified over time. They represent less formal and more local forms of knowing (*connaissances*), and they are dynamic, symbolic and saturated with meanings which people themselves have constructed over time. These constructions are rooted in experience, and they constitute a repertoire of articulations that are not bound by some overarching logic but are characterised by their flexibility and capacity of adaptation without being arbitrary:

Representational spaces [...] need obey no rules of consistency or cohesiveness. Redolent with imaginary and symbolic elements, they have their source in history - in the history of a people as well as in the history of each individual belonging to that people. (Lefebvre 1991:41)

These spaces find their articulation in everyday life where they embody complex symbolisms, as I have briefly hinted at in the case of the black communities on Colombia's Pacific coast and on which I will significantly elaborate in Chapter 5. These spaces are neither homogenous nor autonomous. They are constantly involved in a complex dialectical relationship with dominating representations of space, which intervene, penetrate and attempt to colonise the life-world of representational space. Representational space, therefore, is also the dominated space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It is both subject to domination and the source of resistance, and it thus embodies the complex spatial entanglements of domination and resistance. As Sharp and others (2000) have convincingly argued, domination cannot exist independently of resistance, as much as resistance needs domination for meaningful interaction. And, whereas dominating power is diffused to different degrees throughout society, resistance also implies the workings of power internally with dominations integral to resistances. The very practices and powers of resistance and domination are therefore themselves entangled:

Resistance involves power, it requires it, releases it and generates effects of power, just as much as does domination; and it is only because there is power in resistance that we can be [...] optimistic [...] in supposing that resistance will happen. (Sharp *et al.* 2000:31)

Maybe the quantitative assumption 'just as much' is a bit 'out of place' here, but it is clear that the concept of power cannot be simply relegated to practices and discourses of

domination, although this seems to be its most common application.³⁶ Foucault's (1979) concept of a 'microphysics' of power has helped us to understand power as "a social relation diffused through all spaces" (García Canclini, quoted in Alvarez *et al.* 1998:11). Therefore, power also exists in resistance, as what has been termed 'resisting power':

[...] that power which attempts to set up situations, groupings and actions which resist the impositions of dominating power. It can involve very small, subtle and some might say trivial moments [...] but it can also involve more developed moments when discontent translates into a form of social organisation which actively coordinates people, materials and practices in pursuit of specifiable transformative goals. (Sharp *et al.* 2000:3)

Resisting power as a positive and constructive concept then does not only "refuse to acknowledge [dominating] power" (Lefebvre 1991:10), but it also expresses itself in the before mentioned quest for a counter-space as actively building alternative imaginaries to dominant representations, and thereby confronting the colonisation of the life-world in a constructive fashion.

However, one has to be careful not to construct too romantic a view of resistance practices and movements. As I pointed out earlier in this chapter, some resistances can be deeply reactionary. Moreover, there exists not only resistance in domination, but also domination in resistance, in that certain practices of domination can be replicated within resistances, such as acts of marginalisation and/or the imposition of exile. There are important implications for social movement research associated with such an understanding of power, in that we must examine the ways in which power is diffused *within* a resistance movement, and what patterns of domination emerge *within* its structures, activities and internal social relations. Although I do not directly address these issues empirically in this thesis, which is more concerned with the preconditions of social movement action than movement structures themselves, my research has shown that these considerations can partly explain the moments of fragmentation that currently occur within the social movement of black communities in Colombia.

It is clear that the three moments in the production of space (spatial practices, representations of space, representational space) must be regarded as interconnected and, in fact, interdependent. There exists a dialectical relationship within the triad of the perceived,

³⁶ This is precisely what Sharp and others (2000) challenge with their concept of the 'entanglements of power'. They draw extensively on the contributions of Foucault, particularly in understanding power as a relational entity that does not work on its own but always between two or more people. More than just repressive, power is also a productive force in that it makes things happen.

the conceived, and the lived. The implications for empirical research are clear; we cannot treat these moments independently one from another, a conduct that Lefebvre accuses many social scientists of:

Ethnologists, anthropologists and psychoanalysts are students of representational spaces, whether they are aware of it or not, but they nearly always forget to set them alongside those representations of space which coexist, concord or interfere with them. (Lefebvre 1991:41)

Escobar's (1995) call for an 'anthropology of modernity' seems to address this imbalance, in that he proposes to investigate some of the intersections that Lefebvre laid out in his spatial triad. Applying this concept of an anthropology of modernity to the Colombian Pacific coast, Escobar and Pedrosa write:

From this perspective, we are interested in analysing the concrete mechanisms through which it is attempted to integrate the region of the Pacific to the country's modernity. Thus, we endeavour an ethnography of the practices of those social actors that represent the advancement of modernity in the Littoral: development planners, capitalists, biologists and ecologists, experts of all sorts, and finally, activists of the social movements, as agents of possible alternative modernities. (Escobar & Pedrosa 1996:10; my translation)³⁷

Representational space and everyday life are, of course, in themselves enmeshed within the wider dialectical relationship between space and capitalism. On the one hand, 'impeding geographical space' (Harvey 1982) presents a barrier to capital accumulation which capital tries to overcome with technology and a range of spatial (and now also discursive) fixes. On the other hand, space must be seen as the organisational resource and force of production of capitalism (Smith 1990). Most recently the phenomenon of time-space collapse as a result of the increased and accelerated spatial mobility of capital, especially in information and communication technologies, has been conceptualised as 'time-space compression' (Harvey 1989). These processes have revolutionised the objective qualities of space and time, and therefore also our visions and the forms in which we perceive, feel and represent the world. The term 'compression' implies here the specific experiential dimension which makes one feel as if the world is collapsing on us, as a result of an unprecedented acceleration of the pace of life. Everyday life is affected by these processes in that it is a domain which is enframed, constrained and colonised to differing degrees by

³⁷ "Desde ella, nos interesa analizar los mecanismos concretos por medio de los cuales se busca integrar la región del Pacífico a la modernidad del país. Así, procuramos una etnografía de las prácticas de aquellos actores sociales que representan la avanzada de la modernidad en el Litoral: planificadores del desarrollo, capitalistas, biólogos y ecólogos, expertos de todo tipo y, finalmente, activistas de los movimientos sociales, como agentes de posibles modernidades alternativas."

the space of the commodity and the territory of the state. It is, therefore, itself a product of modernity. The extent to which the everyday is enframed in these processes depends partly on place-specific social, economic and cultural relations, a matter that I will address below with my concern for a place perspective in social movement research. For the moment, though, it is important to stress the myriad of traces and memories of spatial practices (representational space) which are untouched by modernity's estrangement (representations of space), and which feed the multiple imaginaries of resistance (quest for a counter-space).

In these contexts, memory functions as a 'site of resistance' (Foucault 1980),³⁸ in that the process of remembering "transforms history from a judgement on the past in the name of a present truth to a 'counter-memory' that combats our current modes of truth and justice, helping us to understand and change the present by placing it in a *new relation to the past*" (Arac 1986; my emphasis). In practice, these 'new relations to the past' are being articulated in Latin America, for example, by indigenous movements that challenge official discourses of nationhood and citizenship through their 'rethinkings' of the historical relationship between people, places, communities and nations (Radcliffe & Westwood 1996). In Colombia, these 'new relations to the past' and black communities' 'rethinkings of their historical relationships' with the state and the nation have, at least discursively, found expression in the new Constitution, even though on the practical level these new relations are far from being implemented unambiguously. With reference to the Zapatista struggles in Mexico, Routledge (1998:244) emphasises the resilient nature of memory, and the fact that some 'traces of resistance' always survive: "Memories of rebellion live on in people's imaginations, stories and dreams, and in the tactics and strategies of subsequent struggles". And I am surely not alone in seeing the ghosts of Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa of the Mexican Revolution of 1910 emerging in the 'new experiments' of resistance led by the Zapatistas:

The ghosts of all the revolutions that have been strangled or betrayed through Latin America's tortured history emerge in the *new experiments*, as if the present had been foreseen and begotten by the contradictions of the past. History is a prophet who looks back: because of what was, and against what was, it announces what will be. [...] All memory is subversive [...] and in the history of humankind every act of destruction meets its response, sooner or later, in an act of creation. (Galeano 1997:8,285; my emphasis)

³⁸ Foucault's (1980) notion of 'sites of resistance' must be understood as a series of places and contexts where resistance occurs. These contexts include, for example, the memory, the imaginary, the body, and spatial and discursive practices. The notion of 'site' is particularly interesting to geographers since it conceptualises the various spatial manifestations of resistance as physically and materially embodied.

Precisely because memory is subversive, many place-based social movements draw on collective memories to frame their struggles and to nurture their imaginaries in the quest for an alternative counter-space. Often, as in the case of black communities on Colombia's Pacific coast, these collective memories are stored in the oral tradition rather than in written form in some archive. In Chapter 5 I unlock the collective memories and a local sense of place among black communities by accessing local people's oral tradition. This information, being fed back to the social movement itself, contributes to the *writing* of a local history, which has so far only been told and stored in the *oral* tradition. Local history, with all its traces and memories of disappearing traditional life forms, can thus be mobilised in the active reconstruction of a differential space. And local history, more than an assemblage of 'important events' that are chronologically ordered, is steeped in meaning, symbolisms, myths, laughter and tears. Local history that gets mobilised by social movements tells the story of historical place, and thereby place itself gets mobilised and turns into a political tool. History and geography talk to one another in such an approach, and my own efforts at conceptualising the aquatic space in the Colombian Pacific as a historically evolved and thoroughly spatialised social relation is a concrete exercise of 'doing' *historical geography*, one based on oral texts and living testimonies - and thus I am maybe also illuminating parts of the 'still greater mystery' of this particular strand of our discipline (Philo 1994). How then can we possibly ignore place when examining social movements? More so, I argue that place, an integral understanding of place in both its objective and subjective aspects, is crucial for our understanding of social movement agency and their particular articulations. As Merrifield points out:

Social practice is place-bound, political organization demands place organization. [...] Equally place is *more* than just lived everyday life. It is the 'moment' when the conceived, the perceived and the lived attain a certain 'structured coherence'. (Merrifield 1993:525; emphasis in original)

Thus, place contextualises and 'grounds' Lefebvre's conceptual triad (the conceived, the perceived, the lived). A place perspective on social movements (as creators of counter-space) is, therefore, not only a necessary approach on the empirical level, but it must also be conceptually addressed in social movement theories. This is what I mean by 'grounding' the above discussed social movement theories in place, and this is what I shall address in the following section.

A place perspective on social movements

Harvey (1996:208) recently noted that “place has to be one of the most multilayered and multipurpose keywords in our language”. And he strikes here the chord which hints at the apparent fuzziness of the concept and the myriad ways in which it is embraced to explain all sorts of phenomena. Some concentrate mainly on the material and territorial qualities of place, as reflected, for example, in certain strands of economic geography that attempt to theorise place as manifesting a certain specificity within the context of general processes (Massey & Allen 1984). Others have focused more explicitly on the meanings and inner connections of place as expressed in the notion of a ‘sense of place’, a key concept in the 1970s in a humanistic geography that distinguished its approach from positivist geographers in that it proposed to investigate the micro-episodes of everyday life and their embeddedness in specific contexts, or *milieux* (Tuan 1976, Ley & Samuels 1978). I have already mentioned the impact of place in structuration theory, in that place is both constituted *by* social practices and constitutive *of* these very practices. Referring to the sometimes confusing use of the concepts of ‘place’ and ‘locale’ in Giddens (1979), Pred explains:

Place is not only what is fleetingly observed on the landscape, a locale, or setting for activity and social interaction. It also is what takes place ceaselessly, what contributes to history in a specific context through the creation and utilization of a physical setting. (Pred 1984:279)

More recently, Entrikin (1991) has emphasised the nature of the ‘betweenness of place’, which tries to incorporate both the totality of the concept through an objective pole of scientific theorising and its contextuality through a subjective pole of empathetic understanding. Entrikin draws here on earlier phenomenological approaches to place as “comprising both the objectivity of the map and the subjectivity of experience” (Ley 1977:509). An experiential perspective on place has been drawn up by Tuan:

Place is a center of meaning constructed by experience. Place is known not only through the eyes and mind but also through the more passive and direct modes of experience, which resist objectification. To know a place fully means both to understand it in an abstract way and to know it as one person knows another. At a high theoretical level, places are points in a spatial system. At the opposite extreme, they are strong visceral feelings. (Tuan 1975:152)

There hence emerges the full complexity of the concept, in that it stresses the interactions between the very material aspects of physical location and the experiential dimensions of a subjective understanding that derives from living in a place:

Places are thereby constructed and experienced as both material ecological artefacts and intricate networks of social relations, being the focus of the imaginary, of beliefs, desires and discursive activity, filled with symbolic and representational meanings. They are also the products of institutionalised social and political-economic power. (Sharp *et al.* 2000:25)

This intersection takes us neatly back to the previous discussion of the entanglements of power, in that place is the locus where these entanglements are not only acted out quite physically, but also where dominant representations of space manifest themselves. The association of certain places with stereotypical characteristics produced in dominant representations of space has given rise in Latin America to what Radcliffe and Westwood (1996) have referred to as ‘racialised geographies’, in that, for example, the Andean regions of Ecuador and Peru, which are mainly inhabited by indigenous peoples, are commonly equated with backwardness. Similarly in Colombia, the region of the Pacific coast, which is mainly inhabited by black populations, is also equated with backwardness and poverty in dominant representations of space (Wade 1993).

In order to disentangle on a theoretical plain the concept of place, I will turn to Agnew (1987), who identifies three main elements in his perspective on place, emphasising, just as Entrikin (1991) does, both the objective and the subjective qualities of place. I should immediately point out that this apparent separation or dissection of place only occurs here on a theoretical level. In practice, these different elements are in constant interaction with each other and re-define one another in the process. Place is then a dynamic concept in itself, it is anything but static. More so, it is in a constant process of ‘becoming’ and the dynamic site of conflict and resolution. Place can, therefore, never be dead place.

Agnew’s concept of place is constituted of three elements: 1) locale, 2) location, and 3) sense of place. Broadly speaking, *locale* refers to the formal and informal settings in which everyday social interactions and relations are constituted. The term was originally proposed by Giddens (1979) in his development of structuration theory. It denotes not only the physical settings in which interaction occurs, but also implies that these settings and contexts are actively drawn upon in the processes of interaction, and that this happens routinely as social actors go about their everyday interactions and communications. Certain locales can then be identified as physical settings which are associated with the typical interactions that compose collectivities as social systems (Giddens 1981:39). For example, as I will show in Chapters 5 and 6, the locale for rural black communities on the

Colombian Pacific coast can be conceptualised in terms of the ‘aquatic space’. The aquatic space is precisely the physical setting within which everyday social interactions take place, and which is drawn upon in the specific articulation of these interactions. The aquatic space in particular, and the locale in general, hence provide the soils out of which social movements emerge and which social movement agency mobilises.

Location can be defined as the geographical area encompassing the locale affected by economic and political processes operating at a wider scale. It thus stresses the impact of a macro-order in a place and the ways in which certain places are inscribed, affected and subject to the wider workings of economic and political structures which normally originate from outside the area itself. The notion of location must be understood here as an antidote against lapsing into subjectivism when discussing place, rather than a determining framework within which social interactions are fixed as pre-determined acts waiting to happen. I have already referred to certain aspects of the location of the Colombian Pacific coast in, for example, the ways in which the region has become inscribed by representations of space in discourses on biodiversity, as well as in the fact that external capital exploits the natural resources in the region using both modern and postmodern forms of capitalisation of nature. I will further examine these issues in Chapter 6, including the region’s physical geographical location and its area characteristics.

The notion of *sense of place*, the third constituent element of the concept of place, tries to express the subjective orientations which are derived from living in a particular place. Individuals and communities develop deep attachments to places through experience, memory and intention. Phenomenological approaches to place have emphasised “the dialogical nature of people’s relationship to place” (Buttimer 1976:284), and indeed the ‘poetic modes’ of construing nature, place and time (Bachelard 1958). The poetics of place are certainly an important element in the identity construction processes among black communities on Colombia’s Pacific coast. As I will show in Chapter 5, these ‘poetic identities’ are expressed in the oral tradition and they are closely related to local perceptions of the aquatic space (see also my forthcoming article on the unedited poets of Colombia’s Pacific coast; Oslender 2002). The sense of place thus creates a sense of belonging to a particular place which is often accentuated when this place is left behind as a result of migration. This notion plays an important part in understanding the Colombian Pacific coast, which has rightly been described as a “society of migrants” (Taussig 1979:131). It also partly explains the establishment of associations in the larger cities of the

interior of the country of like-minded people originating from the same areas in the Pacific region. In these so-called ‘colonies’ (*colonias*) the emigrants do not only recreate cultural life forms from their place of origin, giving rise to hybrid urbanised-rural cultural forms, but they also live in constant contact with their place of origin, sending money back home to their families (those who can afford it) or otherwise trying to support their relatives on the Pacific coast. Sense of place thus gives a strong subjective orientation to the concept of place. As far as uncovering the lived meanings of the sense of place is concerned, the method of ‘thick description’ is frequently used (Geertz 1973). The methodological approach is one of interpretation which is derived from intensive interrogations of an informant’s actions and his/her interpretations in order to shed light on the specific structures of signification. I have applied thick description in Chapters 5 and 6, and will also discuss these methodological aspects in Chapter 4.

As already mentioned, the three components of place should not be viewed in rigid separation. Instead, they are fluid moments which are multiple in themselves and interplay with one another. Indeed, it is precisely this fluidity which gives the concept of place its analytical strength. A particular sense of place informs the social relations and interactions within the settings and contexts of locale, and both elements actively rework the wider political and economic structures of location, rather than being just passive objects of its workings.³⁹ Central to such a concept of place is the emphasis put on feeling, subjectivities and individual and collective ways of perception, while acknowledging the more objective characteristics that frame, enable or otherwise constrain the subjectivities to some extent.

Within social movement research we find such concerns sometimes reflected (although rarely explicitly addressed as such) in IOP, which, as I have discussed in Chapter 2, emphasises the role of cultural reproduction and the ways in which individual actors collectively assume control over their historicity. Social movements must be understood in conjunction with the submerged cultural networks of everyday life (Melucci 1989), and thus with the sense of place out of which they emerge. Furthermore, identities are socially constructed in always dynamic processes of becoming (Hall 1992, Gilroy 1993, Jackson & Penrose 1993, Wade 1993). And since identities are place-specific, place plays a constitutive role in identity construction processes. This place-specific context not only

³⁹ Pred and Watts (1992), for example, insist on how local cultures process, rework, change and influence the conditions of global capital and modernity. And Peet and Watts’s (1996:263) argument for ‘liberation ecologies’ stresses the importance of local constructions of ecology and ‘environmental imaginaries’ as primary sites of contestation.

grounds particular identities in very tangible ways, it also helps to address the question of *why* social movements occur *where* they do, a line of inquiry which is conspicuously absent from much social movement research.⁴⁰ In my particular case study this means that I will show how the sense of place has been derived from experiencing a particular setting or context (*locale*), best expressed in the notion of the aquatic space. This in turn is inscribed in wider economic and political structures of the location of the Colombian Pacific coast, both on the national and the international levels. All three elements combined explain why and how the social movement of black communities emerged on the Pacific coast (and not, for example, on the Caribbean coast).

Precisely because “particularities of place inform and affect the character, dynamics and outcomes of movement agency” (Routledge 1993:21), we should direct our attention towards a place perspective on social movements and their politics of place. Also drawing on Agnew’s concept of place, Routledge (1993) has attempted to spell out such a place perspective when examining social movements in India. For a better understanding of movement agency, he emphasises the concept of a ‘terrain of resistance’, which must be understood as the real geographical ground on which resistance is acted out. These are the fields, the forests, the hide-outs, but also the buildings and edifices in urban areas, the physical sites where resistance practices literally take place:

A terrain of resistance refers to those places where struggle is actively articulated by the oppressed, rather than being a metaphor defining for the oppressed where and how struggle should take place [...], a site of contestation among differing beliefs, values and goals that are place-specific. (Routledge 1993:35-36)

The place of politics - the politics of place

Since resistance is not autonomous, but must always be seen in relation to practices of domination, exploitation and subjection (Routledge 1997a, Sharp *et al.* 2000), a terrain of resistance reflects the spatialised dialectical relationship between domination and resistance. In the case of state/social movement relations, the state may respond to social

⁴⁰ See, for example, the commonly expressed argument that ‘Chiapas could have occurred anywhere in Mexico’, referring to the Zapatista uprising in Mexico’s southern state of Chiapas. Indeed, the question why it was precisely in Chiapas that the rebellion occurred seems to attract little attention or is simply brushed aside. A place perspective would analyse the socio-economic and political structures of the *location* of Chiapas in relation to the specific *locale* of peasant farmers and indigenous people. A critical analysis of the *sense of place* would uncover the lived meanings of traditional indigenous peasant cultures and their lifestyles, and how these place-specific experiences have been articulated as resistance and in demands to ‘recover people’s spaces’ (Esteva 1987) long before the Zapatistas declared ‘today we say it is enough’ (‘hoy decimos basta’) on 1 January 1994 (EZLN 1996).

movement activities by coercion (repression), co-option (seduction) or mediation of social movement demands, or indeed a mixture of all three processes. In contemporary societies there is an increasing tendency for this relationship to be one of negotiations. Contemporary social movements are characteristically seen as aiming at securing some degree of political participation within state structures, rather than overthrowing the state itself as aimed for in guerrilla struggles (Laclau & Mouffe 1985).⁴¹ As Davis points out for the Latin American case:

Latin American social movements are often organized for the purposes of gaining control or participatory access to these [political] structures [and it is often] the peripheral state's willingness and capacity to respond [which] determines whether or not such movements direct their energies into formal politics. Indeed, when the state responded with policy reforms or opened formal channels for participation, guerrilla movements generally lost their popular support and remained a marginal fringe of intellectuals. (Davis 1989:232,230)

Mouffe (1995) also draws attention to the changing nature of societal conflicts that have moved away from regarding the state as 'enemy' who must be defeated towards a perception of the state as interlocutor and 'adversary' with which to struggle for rights.⁴² She stresses the essentially antagonistic character of societies and distinguishes between 'the political' as "the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in all human society" and 'politics' which "refers to the ensemble of practices, discourses, and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and to organize human coexistence in conditions which are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimension of 'the political'" (Mouffe 1995:262-263). The role of 'politics' hence "consists in domesticating hostility and in trying to defuse the potential antagonisms that exist in human relations" (Mouffe 1995:263). This process is crucial when envisaging a project of radical democracy,

⁴¹ I am not denying the fact that guerrilla movements still play an important part in some parts of the world. A case in point is, of course, the recent Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, Mexico. In Colombia, various guerrilla groups are still very active indeed, and some would say they are stronger and more powerful today than they were ever before (see Chapter 1). However, compared to 20 or 30 years ago when violent conflicts and repressive dictatorships were the order of the day in most of Latin America, in today's 'recently democratised societies' (however ambiguous and volatile this term may be) negotiations between guerrilla movements and governments are seen as the main path for conflict resolution.

⁴² Such a claim is opposed, of course, by Marxist critics of global capitalism who argue that the capitalist state is still enemy number one that has to be defeated through class struggle on the way to a truly socialist society (Miliband 1985, Harvey 1989). They argue that the postmodern fragmentation of identity politics and the 'unscientific post-Marxisms' of Laclau and Mouffe are detrimental in bringing about social change that addresses issues of social justice. Others would agree with Mouffe's main argument that a more democratic politics should be an inclusive one, which can be accommodated within contemporary capitalism. Corbridge (1998), for example, is highly critical of Harvey's (1996) incapacity to spell out a real alternative to capitalism, and he argues for considering which particular form of capitalism we should envisage for a more just society, rather than simply nurturing hopes for a utopian socialism.

expressed through articulatory politics. However, Mouffe's vision of politics has a normative touch to it, conceptualised from an almost elitist perspective and only conceiving of dominant or dominating politics. There does seem to be no room in Mouffe's conceptualisation for a 'cultural politics', for example, which Alvarez and others (1998) have argued to be one of the most important underlying organising principles for social movements in Latin America today. The project of radical democracy and the universal ethic that it proclaims can be accused of Eurocentricism, in that it does not seem to allow for other ways of conceiving societal relations. Massey, too, has a whole range of questions to ask about the universal validity of the concept of radical democracy:

How much can its concrete form vary between cultures with different histories, different values, and different commitments? How much can the line between enemy and adversary vary before the boundaries of 'radical democracy' are overstepped? [...] What is the reply to those who claim cultural specificity as the basis for adhering to other principles entirely? In other words, is there a way of avoiding the possibility of a hegemonising cultural specificity in the promulgation of the project of radical democracy? (Massey 1995:288)

These are important questions, and they not only concern the project of radical democracy, but all of us who are committed to a respect for difference and also still believe in the need for a political project that somehow incorporates (universal) notions of social justice and equality.

What remains powerfully conveyed in Mouffe's argument, however, is the changing nature of societal conflicts and the changing ways in which they are acted out in the realm of contemporary politics. If 'the political' counts as "the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in all human society" (Mouffe 1995:262), then the spatial dimension of this antagonism can be expressed in the geographies of the interrelated and interdependent dyad of domination/resistance (Sharp *et al.* 2000) to give rise to a spatialised politics that asks questions over *how* and *where* these antagonisms are acted out. This is partly what Routledge (1997a) has tried to address examining Nepal's revolution of 1990. He lists five points as constituting what he refers to as a 'spatiality of resistance':

- 1) The notion of 'homeplace' as developed by hooks (1991), who conceptualises these places as social spaces that are free from control and surveillance and within which resistance can be imagined, conceived, planned and organised. These homeplaces can then

become sites of resistance from which opponents are excluded and can be challenged, be it in the imaginary, the symbolic, or in practices which are physically acted out in space.

2) Resistance practices in themselves are ambiguous and fractured, and they are subject to mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. They can, therefore, reproduce practices of domination such as marginalisation, for example, which may occur when certain structures of hierarchy get established within a social movement.

3) Resistances are interconnected with broader processes at the regional, national and international level, a point also made by Slater (1997).

In today's cyberspace these issues become of central importance to some movements, as, for example, brilliantly articulated by the Zapatista rebels in Mexico, who have made use of state-of-the-art information technologies to spread their message world-wide and thereby to mobilise international solidarity for their cause (Nash 1996, Castells 1997, Routledge 1998).

4) There exists a mutually constitutive relationship between resistance practices and places.

5) The meanings of places are dynamic and subject to change when they become terrains of resistance.

Thinking about the spatialities of resistance hence implies a whole range of interrelated processes, and how these are spatially articulated. The 'space' of this thesis does not allow for a detailed empirical discussion of all the theoretical and methodological claims made in Chapters 2 and 3. However, it has been important to point out the connectedness of the various theoretical debates, since my own conceptual contribution of 'grounding' social movement theories in space and place draws on different theoretical insights in order to show how they can be meaningfully applied 'on the ground' without necessarily leading to a grand synthesis of social movement theories on the conceptual level. It is furthermore my intention to elaborate on some of the theoretical claims made here in subsequent papers and publications, and Chapters 2 and 3 provide a good basis for that and point to the ways in which this could be done. The main thrust of this thesis is now to show in empirically grounded terms how the aquatic space, the locale of black communities on Colombia's Pacific coast as a particular set of spatialised social relationships, has been drawn upon by social movement agency in their articulations of a cultural politics that affirms difference as a fundamental right. In particular, I will show how the aquatic space has informed the spatial organising structures of community councils along river basins. The representational space of black communities has thus

acquired a new dynamic within political mobilisation. The locale within this new context provides opportunities as well as constraints for black communities who have embarked on the quest for a counter-space. The ways in which they are effectively able to create a differential space is what the following narrative and analysis are about to explore. Before that, however, I conveniently split the theoretical and the empirical discussions, and insert at this stage my methodological observations in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

Methodology

'Write, Guzmán, write, what is written remains, what is written is true in itself, for it cannot be subjected to the test of truth, or to any proof at all; that is the full reality of what is written, its paper reality, full and unique, write: ... wait, Guzmán, what are we saying, what are we writing out of mere habit? Do you never doubt, Guzmán? Does a Devil never approach you and say, that wasn't how it was, it was not only that way, it could have happened that way but also in a thousand different ways, depending upon who is telling it, depending on who saw it and how he chanced to see it; imagine for an instant, Guzmán, what would happen if everyone offered their multiple and contradictory versions of what had happened, and even what had not happened; everyone, I tell you, Lords as well as serfs, the sane and the mad, the devout and the heretical, then what would happen, Guzmán?'

'There would be too many truths. Kingdoms would be ungovernable.'

'No, something worse; if everyone could write the same text in his own manner, the text would no longer be unique; then there would be no secret; then ...'

'Then nothing would be sacred.'

Carlos Fuentes (1978:224)

Introduction

This PhD provides an inquiry into the spatialities of the social movement of black communities on the Colombian Pacific coast. It is told through the lens of my interpretation, and the text provides an insight not only into the workings of the social movements but also into how I have observed, analysed and described them, as well as participated with them. There are indeed a 'thousand different ways' of telling the story of both the work and its subjects 'depending upon who is telling it, depending on who saw it and how he [sic] chanced to see it'. I am not Guzmán, neither a Lord nor a serf, not totally sane nor completely mad, not particularly devout but not heretical either. I am somewhere in between. Never just myself, I am also the other, who is part of myself, my 'constitutive outside' (Derrida 1976). Or, as the Cuban poet Cintio Vitier lyricised the blurred boundaries of self and other:

I am never with myself. The other.
 The other, within, outside,
 in between, arousing oblivion.
 I come and go, decomposed,
 toy of a profound magnet, child.
 The other. We are never together.

(Vitier 1993:5; my translation)⁴³

However, within this work something of myself (however multiply constituted) does acquire a crucial defining and structuring role through the authority of the text, my (re)presentations of the black communities on the Colombian Pacific coast, and my own particular positionality towards them. Talking about the methodology of my research and of the writing-up process is therefore more than merely a descriptive act of the particular methods chosen in this process. It also requires a philosophical understanding of the ethics of doing research, the motives and the impact it has or can have on myself, as well as on the people who I have studied. This implies a critical understanding of the power/knowledge relations in which I am inscribed as a researcher in an always dynamic field of everyday interactions with the subjects of my study.

In Part I of this chapter, Theoretical Reflections, I will therefore discuss issues of representation, the ethics of doing research and the need for a politics of positioning within a fieldwork situation that is imbued with political content. In particular, I will discuss a specific research methodology, participatory action-research (PAR), that emerged in Colombia in the 1970s, and which has influenced my methodological approach chosen in the field. In Part II of this chapter, Practical Experience, I will discuss the application of the specific ethnographic tools that I have chosen in my fieldwork, drawing on a number of fieldwork experiences to contextualise an otherwise dry debate. Adopting a chronological narrative in the second part, I will also lay out and explain the limitations encountered in the field and which I consider to be constitutive of the fieldwork experience itself. I will furthermore reflect upon how these limitations were dealt with, and how they could be avoided in future fieldwork situations.

⁴³ “Nunca estoy conmigo. Otro.
 El otro, por dentro, afuera,
 entre, despertando olvido.
 Voy y vengo, descompuesto,
 juguete de imán profundo, niño.
 Otro. Nunca estamos juntos.”

Thanks are due at this stage to my faithful companion during the long and at times strenuous travels around the tropical Pacific Lowlands of Colombia; to the one who reflects the richness of these extraordinary experiences, the fascination, joys and excitements, but also the frustrations and temporary weaknesses; to the one who shared the hot and sweaty nights under the mosquito-net with me, to the one who I only left behind on occasional visits to the coastal dark sand beaches or to one of the countless pebble beaches exposed at low tide in the crystal-clear waters of the rivers of the Pacific. Thanks are due to you, my diary!

PART I: THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS

Representation as ‘darstellen’: reflections on the complexities of translating concepts

If the great Dutch language disappeared from literary usage and a Dutchman wrote in German a story of the Lekside peasants, one may hazard he would ask and receive a certain latitude and forbearance in his usage of German. He might import into his pages some score or so untranslatable words and idioms - untranslatable except in their context and setting; he might mould in some fashion his German to the rhythms and cadence of the kindred speech that his peasants speak. Beyond that, in fairness to his hosts, he hardly could go - to seek effect by a spray of apostrophes would be both impertinence and mistranslation. The courtesy that the hypothetical Dutchman might receive from German a Scot may invoke from the great English tongue.

Gibbon (1998:14)

And so, as a German, I too hope to receive courtesy from ‘the great English tongue’, even though outrageously I set out to accuse some of its shortcomings here, as its vocabulary at times fails to capture subtle differences in meaning.⁴⁴ As it has become clear in the discussion of the concept of space in Chapter 3, the French expressions *savoir* and *connaître* are both translated as ‘to know’ in English, a fact that posed serious problems for the translator of Lefebvre’s (1991) *Production of Space*. *Savoir* refers to knowledges that are acquired through a process of reasoning, knowledges which are derived from a particular logic and which comprise technical and rational knowledges. These knowledges are often connected to an institutional apparatus of power and dominant representations of space generated by a hegemonic logic of visualisation. The notion of *connaissance*, on the contrary, represents less formal and more local forms of knowing. They are dynamic,

⁴⁴ This statement, coming from a German native speaker who is well aware of his own linguistic limitations, is not meant to wreak insult onto the English language and its users, but it aims at raising awareness over the complexities of languages in general, and in particular over issues of translation of certain concepts and meanings from one language to another. These concerns are particularly important when, as in my case, research is conducted in a cultural and linguistic field different from the one of my narrative.

symbolic and saturated with meaning, and have been constructed by people over time. I suggest a distinction between these two forms of knowing by referring to them as ‘reasoned knowledge’ (*savoir*) and ‘experiential knowledge’ (*connaissance*). The German and the Spanish languages make the same distinction, translating *savoir* as *wissen* and *saber* respectively, and *connaissance* as *kennen* and *conocer*.

A similar problem arises in the English language when we examine the term ‘representation’. Again, in German we distinguish between *vertreten*, meaning to represent someone or to speak on behalf of or for someone, and *darstellen*, referring to the ways in which we explain, illustrate or speak of/about something. The distinction between these two forms of representation is a subtle but important one. Whereas *vertreten* implies some kind of consent on the part of the person who is represented (spoken for) by another, *darstellen* does not normally need this acquiescence for it to happen. It would be wrong, though, to assume that the latter is a more neutral process, free of bias as if conceived outside of a field of power/knowledge relations.⁴⁵ As Spivak (1988:271-280) argues, representations both in terms of ‘speaking for’ (as a delegate, *vertreten*) and ‘speaking of’ (depicting, *darstellen*) often hide political, cultural and ideological power relations. In fact, both possibilities are always the result of a political act on the part of the person who does the representing. They are both problematic, therefore, and must be examined in more detail rather than be taken at face value.

Representing ‘community’: disentangling fantasies of pure identity

For the purpose of this thesis I will use the term ‘representation’ in its meaning of *darstellen*. I am not speaking here on behalf of the black communities in Colombia, simply because I do not have their explicit mandate to do so. As a white, male, middle-class, European researcher, I could also be accused of not being able to represent ‘black communities’ in Colombia, since the cultural difference may be too wide. This very

⁴⁵ References throughout this thesis to the power/knowledge dyad are informed by Foucault’s (1980) understanding that emphasises the entanglements of power and knowledge, in that both exist and are played out in constant interaction and interdependence. One does not exist without the other. Rather than a dialectical relation between two separate items or concepts, the dyad annotation emphasises the ‘togetherness’ of the concept. Power produces knowledge as much as knowledge acts as a necessary basis for power to operate. Both concepts are mutually constitutive, although entangled in contingent relations in that there is no necessary outcome of certain power/knowledge relations. Therefore, power/knowledge relations always act within a context of domination/resistance (Sharp *et al.* 2000). As much as they can be found in domination, they can also be located in resistance practices, and dominating power as well as dominating knowledge can hence be subverted at all times.

argument was used by one of the black movement leaders at some point, when she appeared to be getting fed up with my questioning. This ultimately unsolvable problem nevertheless calls for a conscious positioning on the part of the researcher in a given research situation.

It is important in this respect to acknowledge that the term ‘black communities’ is in itself problematic. Restrepo (1996c) argues that ‘black community’ in Colombia has been invented as a category by anthropologists. Although I do not intend to engage here in a prolonged discussion over the problematic concept of ‘community’, it requires some clarifying comments. As Stacey (1969) already pointed out in the 1960s, the term community is used very widely and has a great number of often quite separate and implicit definitions, a point reiterated by Bell and Newby (1978). More recently, Rose has critiqued the notion of community which too often in her opinion implies an “oppressive uniformity of ‘community’ membership ... [giving rise to a] *fantasy of pure identity*” (Rose 1997:185; my emphasis). It may suggest a comm(on)unity, as if the people to which it refers comprise a homogenous group, defined by rigid patterns of sameness shot through with clear and transparent common aims and articulations. This is of course not necessarily the case. For example, the dispersed geographical distribution of black people in the region of the Colombian Pacific coast over some ten million hectares means that there are inevitably considerable differences to be observed between the various black populations. The most clearly marked differences in terms of cultural heritage and expressions, as well as in political organisation, can be observed between the northern and the southern part of the Pacific. This distinction is commonly made both by academics and activists, and has been explained as historically rooted in the colonial administrative division of the Pacific lowlands:

[...] the lack of communication between the two zones imposed by the colonial system, certainly in order to avoid uprisings and escapes of slaves, [...] linked to the artificial territorial division, aggravated certain ‘nationalisms’ and localisms in every subregion and subzone. (Vanín 1993:553; my translation)⁴⁶

Talking about ‘black communities’ in the Colombian Pacific coast thus implies a whole range of different experiences, both cultural and political, while at the same time these

⁴⁶ “[...] la incomunicación impuesta por la Colonia entre las dos zonas, de seguro, para evitar levantamientos y cimarronajes, [...] unido a la artificial división territorial, exacerbó ciertos ‘nacionalismos’ y localismos en cada subregión y subzona.” Alfredo Vanín is a poet and expert in local history and traditional cultures of black people from the Cauca coast.

communities do distinguish themselves significantly from other ethnic groups in Colombia, for example, from the indigenous indian populations, and from the dominant mestizo population.⁴⁷ As I have explained elsewhere, reflecting on the processes of constructing a black ethnicity in Colombia:

A black ethnicity in Colombia should be constructed based on a plurality of local identities which may differ one from another, but which share common aims that outweigh the differences that could impede a collectively conceptualised strategic politics. (Oslender 1999:30; my translation from the Spanish original)⁴⁸

This enables a conceptualisation of black communities in Colombia as the sum of a whole range of ‘localised identities’:

I understand this conceptualisation as a process of construction of particular identities, which differ from other similar identities through the particularities of a specific place and its meaningful connotations. In this way one can conceive of the black communities in the Colombian Pacific as a plurality of ‘localised identities’, while at the same time they form a ‘strategic ethnicity’. (Oslender 1999:39; my translation from the Spanish original)⁴⁹

I therefore agree with Restrepo on his definition of ‘black community’:

[a] differential ethnic group that consists of a group of families of Afro-Colombian descent that besides owning a common history and culture express consciousness of their ethnic identity and develop traditional productive practices in agreement with

⁴⁷ The term ‘mestizo’ is derived from *mestizaje*, which means race mixture. However, mestizo as a category usually refers to people of mixed indian and European origin. In Colombia, people of mixed black and European origin are generally referred to as *mulatos*, people of black and indian origin as *zambos*. Race mixture does, of course, imply a wide spectrum of different proportions of any one race, which increases in diversity with every generation. The above mentioned denominations are only the principal categories normally used. There is, however, a collective tendency to over-emphasise the proportion of European origin. This trend has been explained in the notion of ‘whitening’ (*blanqueamiento*) (Wade 1993), a powerful socially constructed ideology that imposes sanctions on the non-white by placing it outside the socially acceptable norm. Whitening is therefore also used as a strategy of social upwards mobility by non-whites, a tendency which has been found characteristic for most Latin American countries (Wade 1997, Whitten & Torres 1998). I am using the small letter spelling of the category ‘indian’ here to bring it into line with the usual spelling of the category ‘black’, thus stressing the equal importance I give to these categories and raising awareness with this somewhat provocative linguistic practice over the inequality with which the category ‘black’ is usually treated.

⁴⁸ “Se debe construir una etnicidad negra en Colombia sustentada en una pluralidad de identidades locales diferenciadas de una forma u otra, pero con unos objetivos comunes que sobrepasan las diferencias que pudieran impedir una política estratégica colectivamente conceptualizada.” This approach applies the concept of ‘strategic essentialism’ (Spivak 1990) which I will discuss in the following section of this chapter.

⁴⁹ “Yo entiendo esta conceptualización como un proceso de construcción de identidades particulares, que se diferencian de otras identidades parecidas por las particularidades de un lugar específico y de sus connotaciones significativas. De esta manera, se puede pensar entonces a las comunidades negras del Pacífico colombiano como una pluralidad de ‘identidades localizadas’, mientras que forman una ‘etnicidad estratégica’”. See also Harvey (1989) on the notion of ‘place-bound identities’ as linking concerns about identity construction and place.

the reproduction of their lives and the ecosystems. (Restrepo 1996c:238; my translation)⁵⁰

More specifically, I use the term ‘black community’ as a political concept in that it suggests a social network of interacting individuals who share a sense of belonging and modes of thought or expression which are being evoked and articulated as a tool in the cultural politics of black people on the Colombian Pacific coast.

The category ‘community’, rather than representing a purist and essentialist notion of belonging and rigid membership, is here taken as a social construct which is strategically evoked, used and applied in a liberatory political project where constructing unity is strategically essential when confronting dominant power networks.⁵¹ Linking this conceptualisation of community to my earlier reflections on the domination/resistance dyad, the construction of community can be seen as a process articulating the power that exists in resistance, since the boundary construction inevitably entailed in the sense of community as an us/them construct is both defensive, or negative, in terms of excluding non-members, and productive, or positive, in its active construction of a sense of community. Community thus becomes an inherently powerful construct from which projects of resistance can be imagined, negotiated and articulated. As the following chapters will show, this is precisely the case in the social movement of black communities in Colombia. No matter how much certain anthropologists point to the ‘*invention* of this political community’ (Restrepo 1998; my emphasis), thereby potentially undermining its power by stressing the invented or ‘not-real’ character of it, the black communities in Colombia have emerged as a new political subject: one based not on a rigid adherence of individual members and on homogeneity, but on articulating a cultural politics that emphasises the positive and productive difference that exists between ‘them’ and the ‘others’ (the various other ethnic and cultural groups and dominant society in Colombia). Thus, the cultural politics at play here can be conceived as a ‘politics of difference’ (Hall 1992) that represents a common struggle based upon solidarity and identification without suppressing the real heterogeneity of interests and identities. Such a conceptualisation implies some degree of essentialising, of course, yet we need to essentialise in some

⁵⁰ “grupo étnico diferencial compuesto por un conjunto de familias de ascendencia afrocolombiana que, además de poseer una historia y cultura en común, expresan conciencia de su identidad étnica y desarrollan unas prácticas tradicionales de producción acordes con la reproducción de su vida y de los ecosistemas”.

⁵¹ I am here following Spivak’s (1990) notion of ‘strategic essentialism’ which I will discuss in the following section.

measure if we want to make meaningful statements at all; and such an essentialising becomes even more important in a political field which is saturated with unequal power relations.

Demystifying transparency: the politics of strategic essentialism

Writing from a post-structuralist and post-colonial perspective, Spivak has conceptualised these ways of ‘essentialising somewhere’ in the notion of a ‘strategic essentialism’:

[...] it is not possible, within discourse, to escape essentialising somewhere. In deconstructive critical practice, you have to be aware that you are going to essentialise anyway. So then strategically you can look at essentialisms, not as descriptions of the way things are, but as something that one must adopt to produce a critique of anything. (Spivak 1990:51)

In other words, those categories and labels are used for a specific strategic purpose and must be understood as “something chosen, despite its faults, for the positive, political purchase it offers” (Jackson & Penrose 1993:5). Following this understanding, I momentarily accept a category such as ‘community’ as important and enduring, and mobilise politically on its behalf, while recognising that in a deeper intellectual sense it is easy to see limits and problems associated with the claimed category; but this does not mean that a chosen category is invented or artificial. Human thought requires categories as fundamental communicative devices, and they do not necessarily have to be ‘real’ or ‘authentic’, especially given the problematic nature of the latter two concepts themselves.⁵² In any case, “all constructions of ‘reality’ must be seen as a product of the human capacity for thought and, consequently, are subject to change and variability” (Jackson & Penrose 1993:3).

Therefore, social construction does not equal artificiality. Social constructionism challenges our acceptance of inequalities which are constantly justified by specific ways of categorising. It calls for a re-evaluation of given categories by identifying components and processes of category construction, and by being sensitive to the particular field of power relations within which certain categories are constructed and used. It is important in critical politics when deconstructing certain categories, as Restrepo (1996c) does with the category of ‘black community’, to bear in mind that one runs the risk of undermining the work and

⁵² Spivak (1988:275), for example, rejects the notions of authenticity and ‘concrete experience’. She sees them as deeply problematic in that they suggest a transparent self-reflexivity on the part of the subject, as if the subject completely and at all times understood himself/herself. This ‘myth of transparent reflexivity’ has also been exposed by Rose (1997).

the effectiveness of certain subordinate groups that have mobilised around a particular category construction. Recognising this danger, hooks questions:

Should we not be suspicious of post-modern critiques of the 'subject' when they surface at a historical moment when many subjugated people feel themselves coming to voice for the first time? (hooks 1991:28)

It seems ironic that the very dominant power structures which much postmodernist critique intends to break are actually reinforced in practice if we fail to address a practical strategy of resistance. And hooks furthermore reminds us:

[We] need to consider the implications of a critique of identity for oppressed groups. Postmodern theory that is not seeking to simply appropriate the experience of 'Otherness', to enhance the discourse or to be radically chic, should not separate the 'politics of difference' from the politics of racism. (hooks 1991:26)

She argues that there is a real collective experience by African-Americans of continued displacement, profound alienation and despair, and insists that these issues must be addressed with practical strategies, including within the academy. In critical postmodern enquiry we can re-construct certain categories, *but* always bearing in mind their constructedness and flexible character, with the positive political purchase in mind that such an activity offers. This has been the kind of strategic conceptualising that Hall has applied when considering the category 'black' in the British context:

[It became an] organising category of a new politics of resistance, amongst groups and communities with, in fact, very different histories, traditions and ethnic identities. [...] 'The Black experience' as a singular and unifying framework based on the building up of identity across ethnic and cultural difference between the different communities, became 'hegemonic' over other ethnic/racial identities - though the latter did not, of course, disappear. (Hall 1992:252)

'Crisis of representation' or representational angst?

'They describe us', the other whispered solemnly. 'That's all. They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct.'

Rushdie (1988:168)

Hall's interventions are a clear backlash against what has been termed the 'crisis of representation' in the social sciences:

a conceptual shift, 'tectonic' in its implications. [...] We ground things, now, on moving earth. There is no longer any place of overview from which to map human ways of life, no Archimedean point from which to represent the world. (Clifford 1986:22)

This crisis not only refers to how certain things are represented, but it is also critical of the authority of the author and addresses questions over who is representing who. Groundbreaking in this direction was Said's *Orientalism* (1978), in which the author raises methodological questions about the representation of other cultures by exposing how the West has created an 'imaginative geography' of the East, the Orient, born out of specific power relations that give the West the authority to represent itself as privileged, developed and positive while the 'other', the Orient, appears as backward, exotic and quintessentially negative. The question of 'who talks for whom' has subsequently been used in the feminist critique of a mainly masculinist science and by an ethnic critique against a racist science (hooks 1991, Jackson 1991a). However, deconstructionist practices and the crisis of representation have led in many cases to a kind of representational angst whereby any act of representation can be questioned and indeed challenged, thus possibly leaving us without much to say. One of the perils of theoretical relativism is then precisely that it may lead to inaction in practice.

Many writers as well as activists have reacted against this representational inertia by pointing out that, precisely because of unequal power relations, the powers of representation are also unequally distributed, and that this unequal relationship has to be addressed not by falling into silence but by creative responses such as Hall's conceptualisation of the category 'black' as organising category of a new politics of resistance. Others such as Harvey (1996) still advocate the need for a meta-narrative, Marxist in his case, to understand the history and the contemporary trends of a restructuring capitalism in order to envisage a meaningful project of resistance, not to be searched for in fragmented identity politics and in the cacophony of ecoradical voices, but in a unified struggle to replace capitalism as the dominant economic and political system altogether.⁵³ Harvey claims for himself the authority to represent the world in these ways. For all of us who struggle (or think we should struggle) for a fairer world in which social justice is the norm rather than exploitation and oppression, and who are convinced that we need to articulate these issues if we want to change anything at all, the solution cannot be to succumb to the guilt-ridden representational angst that stifles our creative productive activities. Rather, the problem seems to be lying in the problematic positioning of the self

⁵³ Yet, Harvey (1996) is rather vague when it comes to the conceptualisation of what exactly an alternative to capitalism should look like. His references to socialism do not reveal any fleshed out perceptions of a concrete project that might replace capitalism, a critique also made by Corbridge (1998).

in relation to the other, in which case the dominant groups usually perceive themselves to be outwith the process of definition, implying a norm (as in normal) for themselves as opposed to the other who needs to be defined in relation to themselves. These norms are, of course, reflected in discourse, both in the sense of speech and writing, but also in the wider Foucauldian sense of discourse as reflected in institutions and official politics towards the 'other', for example, the 'mad' and other outsiders in society (Sibley 1995). These discourses and forms of representation can be challenged by, for example, studies of whiteness (hooks 1992) and/or masculinity (Jackson 1991b).

hooks' (1992) concerns over 'representing whiteness in the black imagination', derived from her Afro-American perspective, also show up important parallels to the Afro-Colombian context, where blackness is defined within a field of national identity construction as a result of the double process of 'whitening' and *mestizaje* (Wade 1993, Whitten & Torres 1998). Whereas the Colombian nation is characterised by a tri-ethnic race mixture of various native indian populations, black groups and descendants of white European origin,⁵⁴ processes of whitening operate as the socially required norm for social upwards mobility in order to achieve higher recognition within dominant society. As Wade (1993) has shown in the Colombian context, black people often adopt non-black cultural practices in order to improve their social conditions, climb upwards on the social ladder and receive recognition. These practices range from lack of self-respect, to moving into the cities and consciously preferring to socialise with white people, to marrying a partner of lighter skin complexion. Yet, whilst there is sufficient proof that these practices exist and prevail, they are only one side of the coin. Black movements are contesting these forms of whitening with a cultural politics that emphasises the positive notions of blackness and the positive contribution that black people have made in the construction of a Colombian national identity. We now witness a much more complex process that I would term 'entangled whitening', in which processes of whitening and the concept of whiteness itself are contested.

Again it is helpful here to refer to hooks' concerns in the Afro-American context, which has provided for many of the Afro-Colombian movements an ideological reference for their particular struggles, especially the experiences of Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and the civil rights movements of blacks in the United States. On the one hand,

⁵⁴ See footnote 47 in this chapter which explains my choice of spelling using small first letters for the categories of 'indian' and 'black'.

“ideologically, the rhetoric of white supremacy supplies a fantasy of whiteness [which] makes whiteness synonymous with goodness” (hooks 1992:338). On the other hand, a much more complex imagery emerges when looking at how these images of whiteness are represented in the black imagination, which does not merely accept and internalise these images but reworks them in their own specific ways:

Though systems of domination, imperialism, colonialism, racism, actively coerce black folks to internalize negative perceptions of blackness, to be self-hating, and many of us succumb, blacks who imitate whites (adopting their values, speech, habits of being, etc.) [aka whitening] continue to regard whiteness with suspicion, fear, and even hatred. (hooks 1992:338)

There are then *internal* contestations of whiteness and whitening operating in the black imagination, even if *externally* these processes of whitening are registered. The latter is, of course, what academics such as Whitten (1986) or Wade (1993) observe, and is clearly what distinguishes their position as white male researchers from hooks’ position as a black female academic and activist with an inside view into the black imagination.

This diversion into the specific problems of representation when researching images of blackness and whiteness serves to exemplify many of the ambiguities that I have encountered in the field, and which I have had to address critically in my efforts at representing the black populations of Colombia.

‘It’s a black thing ... you wouldn’t understand’: so what of cultural translatability?

Inge’s eye. [...] He would have liked to be inside her pupil. Looking at his own world from that European angle. The crude customs. The struggle to escape barbarism. This long and dark night of 400 years. Old Africa transported on the shoulders of his ancestors. [...] And now this civilisation appeared to share his misery. Inge. She undressed him with her blue eyes, with her sense of smell, with her words. Facing her he felt as if his skin wrinkled up in order to shut out her exploring looks. [...] Why wouldn’t she leave? Nothing could bind her to them. He wanted to find the thin thread that held her back. What interest could she have? A writer? He didn’t see her taking notes.

Zapata Olivella (1985:98-99; my translation)⁵⁵

⁵⁵ “El ojo de Inge. [...] Hubiera querido estar metido en su pupila. Mirar su propio mundo desde ese ángulo europeo. Las costumbres rústicas. La lucha por salir de la barbarie. Esa noche larga y tenebrosa de cuatrocientos años. La vieja Africa transportada en los hombros de sus antepasados. [...] Y ahora esa civilización entraba a compartir su miseria. Inge. Lo desnudaba con sus ojos azules, con su olfato, con su palabra. Frente a ella hasta sentía que la piel se le arrugaba para cerrarle el paso a su mirada exploradora. [...] Por qué no se iría? Nada podía ligarla a ellos. Quería hallar el hilo delgado que la retenía. Qué interés podría tener? Una escritora? No la había visto tomar apuntes.”

More than the problem of power relations, there is the added question of the ‘translatability of cultural difference’ (Barnes & Duncan 1992), the question of how far our view is the same or different from the subjects who we study. Or as Ruby (1991:57) asks, discussing the dilemma of documentary makers: “Can a person who is not from a culture learn enough about it to produce works that accurately represent their world?” Certain doubts hence arise over the legitimacy of representation that raise questions and complications about the understanding of the ‘other’. As Jackson (1991a) found in Toronto, Canada, in 1990, a number of black people were wearing T-shirts which read in large letters: ‘It’s a black thing ... you wouldn’t understand’. This was a thought-provoking campaign which testified to marked inequalities and racism in Canadian society, and which aimed at being at the same time an affirmation of racial autonomy. If this, however, ultimately means that a non-black person cannot articulate his or her opinions nor express solidarity or respect on black issues, then we are not getting anywhere. Furthermore, one has to be careful not to equate all articulations by a black person with the ‘truth’ on black issues. In any case, “what people say about themselves are data to be interpreted, not the truth” (Ruby 1991:54).

Gilroy (1993) has also pointed to the ‘dangerous obsessions with racial purity’ which circulate inside and outside of black politics in this respect. In fact, claims to racial purity were mobilised against me on one occasion by an Afro-Colombian politician who felt that the interpretation that I presented at a conference questioned his integrity. According to my sources of information and analysis, he had abused political clientelist structures to his own benefits at the expense of local black organisational processes. And it was the very black people he claimed to represent who accused him of misconduct. Therefore, focusing exclusively on the category of race in questions of representation, one runs the risk of ignoring class, gender and other important categories that inform people’s orientations, aspirations and articulations. As Slater (1995) indicates, examining issues of speech and representation in Canadian native literature, even male native writers cannot represent female native issues adequately. Being black therefore does not *necessarily* enable a person to represent black issues more authentically, although it does perhaps initially provide a privileged position from which to speak, but again not necessarily so. As with all given conditions and circumstances, it depends on what one makes of them. hooks (1991:145-153) argues, for example, that the experience of oppression can provide the oppressed with a privileged position, the “margin as a space of radical openness”. By

choosing to speak from the margins, one does not just add new voices to racist and masculinist discourses, but can effectively challenge and transform the very nature of those discourses. Jackson (1991a) emphasises that subaltern groups must ultimately speak for themselves, and that spaces must be created for this to happen. Yet, Spivak (1988:276) calls such naive visions wishful thinking, and claims that to say that “oppressed subjects speak, act and know for themselves, leads to an essentialist, utopian politics”, given the specific dominant power relations within which representations and politics take place.

Bearing this in mind, we can build alliances on grounds of solidarity between black and non-black people that transcend the boundaries set up by racial difference, and focus in so doing on a strategic politics of combating racism. Contributions by non-black researchers have been important in Colombia, drawing attention to and actively combating the ‘invisibility’ of black people in Colombian society (Friedemann 1984, Friedemann & Arocha 1986). Debating the invisibility of black people in Latin American societies in general, the Minority Rights Group’s publication (1995) *No Longer Invisible: Afro-Latin Americans Today* is a further step in this direction. It contributes to the accumulating knowledge of ‘black histories’ which black people themselves can draw upon to define their aims and objectives as black people in Latin America.⁵⁶ Part of this project is a recuperation of black history which has largely been forgotten. As Itabari (1990, quoted in hooks 1992) painfully recognises: “So institutionalised is the ignorance of our history, our culture, our everyday existence, that, often, we do not even know ourselves”. In a similar way, in the Afro-Colombian context Losonczy has argued that one of the collective characteristics of black communities can be found in the fact that their African cultural heritage has been forgotten by black people in Colombia:

Black Colombian memory paradoxically seems to be constructed on a double void: that of African origin and that of slavery. [...] Nevertheless, the collective ceremonies around the dead and the saints keep showing traces of African heritage, although never recognised as such; [...] slavery [is] covered by a massive collective amnesia. (Losonczy 1999:16; my translation)⁵⁷

⁵⁶ We can draw a parallel here to the more empirical ambitions of the Indian ‘subaltern studies’ group - principally historians recovering Indian (but also classed and gendered) histories of struggles and creativity over and against colonial and co-opted forces of oppression (Guha & Spivak 1988).

⁵⁷ “La memoria negrocolombiana parece paradójicamente construirse sobre un doble vacío: el del origen africano y el de la esclavitud. [...] Sin embargo, las ceremonias colectivas en torno a los muertos y a los santos guardan huellas de la herencia africana, nunca reconocidas como tal; [...] la esclavitud [es] cubierta por una amnesia colectiva masiva.”

In this context, research and representations by non-black people are not only a possibility but an important contribution in addressing the multiple questions that surround the unequal power relations and overt or covert structures of racism within which black people are universally inscribed. Furthermore, since class, gender and power relations are important categories to be considered *within* black populations, I suggest that in certain respects a non-black researcher may even be better positioned to examine these complex interactions. And here maybe lies a way out of the crisis of representation and the ultimately unsolvable question over cultural translatability and legitimacy of representation: the conscious positioning of the researcher.

Putting an end to the myth of detachment: a politics of positioning

We who have a voice must speak for the voiceless.

Archbishop Romero, El Salvador

We should recognise the positive contribution which debates over the crisis of representation have made in social science research. If a “crisis (or perception of crisis) serves as the catalyst in dislodging entrenched constructions opening the way for alternative readings” (Jackson & Penrose 1993:203) then the crisis of representation, or the perception of this crisis, has helped to open up for critical examination the authority of the author and also any claimed power to represent others. It has exposed the powers that ascribe ‘race’ (the ‘other’) as lying with the dominant groups in society. Precisely because there are no definitive nor disinterested answers to such a crisis of representation, we should focus not so much on claims of truth, but more on aims and political goals. This does not mean falling into a less rigorous analysis, but it is a call for a consciousness of position on the part of the researcher. Every representation takes place within a specific field of always unequal power relations saturated with interests, and every representation is therefore a political act in itself. These politics of representation have to be clearly spelled out, since not doing so is equivalent to reifying dominant constructions and politics. Within the field of social movement research and investigating subordinate groups, it becomes indispensable not only to address these issues but to spell out clearly one’s own positionality as a researcher. Such a politics of position attends to existing structures of power, and examines both the position that we choose to adopt as a researcher and the multiple ways in which we are positioned (in my case, as a white male middle-class researcher from a foreign institution entering a specific fieldwork context). This inevitably

raises questions over the ethics of research. As Taussig (1992:52) points out, researchers in the Americas have a responsibility to ask themselves “who benefits from studies of the poor, especially from their resistance? The objects of the study or the CIA?” This formulation might sound a bit dramatic, but the questions as to ‘who we research’ and ‘for what reasons we do research’ are most important.

It should be emphasised at this point that these questions have already been intensely debated in Colombia since the 1960s. Within a climate of a political crisis, social unrest and the emergence and consolidation of rural guerrilla organisations, some Marxist orientated academics and researchers searched for new ways of doing research not only *on* but also *for* and *together with* subordinate groups in society, so as to address specific problems of social injustice with possible solutions (see my discussion of PAR in the following section of this chapter). Such a movement within the academy remained for a long time on the margins, because its methodology was criticised as insufficiently scientific and objective, and as too imbued with personal and political interest. It has also been argued that these hostile reactions can be explained by a situation of ‘mental colonialism’ which the Latin American academy in general and the Colombian one in particular suffer in relation to European and North American intellectual currents.⁵⁸ These radical theoretical and methodological currents and advances in Colombia faced not only a hostile reception within the Colombian traditional academy, but they were also not considered seriously in Western academies, which still gave preference to their own theoretical developments and rejected potential inputs from the world’s periphery. The power/knowledge play could not be more apparent here, as ‘objective’ knowledge was conceived to be produced exclusively in the West, whereas other non-Western production of knowledges were qualified as subjective and not scientific, thereby reifying existing power relations between a dominant West and a subordinate non-Western periphery.⁵⁹ These power structures have recently begun to be challenged, especially by post-structuralist and post-colonial contributions that emphasise cross-fertilisation of ideas, the liberatory potential of ‘travelling theories’ (Said 1983, Escobar 1992) and the subversive

⁵⁸ Personal communications of various Colombian scholars at ICAN and at the National University in Bogotá.

⁵⁹ Although see Chapter 2, footnote 12, on the widely influential and respected development and theoretical contributions of Dependency Theory.

powers of indigenous theorisations and subaltern studies (Guha & Spivak 1988, Spivak 1996).⁶⁰

In the following section I will discuss a radical methodology which was initially developed in Latin America in the 1970s, later applied in Africa and Asia, which has more recently also received recognition by Western scholars: participatory action-research (PAR).⁶¹ Within this perspective an interesting cross-fertilisation of ideas has flourished, and alliances have been struck between Western academics/activists and Latin American radical scholars. I have personally reflected on applying PAR in my research with black communities on the Colombian Pacific coast. For various reasons and limitations, I was not able to apply PAR in its full context and meaning, although on a much smaller and also more personal scale I have used and applied some of its notions and insights in my own fieldwork.

Participatory action-research (PAR): a methodological input from the periphery

In Colombia PAR has become mainly associated with the Colombian sociologist Fals Borda, who regards “the participatory action-research approach as an original input from the world periphery, [as a] dialogical research oriented to the social situation in which people live” (Fals Borda 1987:336-337). Another of PAR’s leading figures, Rahman describes the theoretical stance of PAR in these words:

The basic ideology of PAR is that conscious classes and groups, those which at present are poor and oppressed, will transform their environment progressively via their own praxis. In this process other people can play a catalytic and supportive role, but they will not be able to dominate the process. (Rahman 1991:23; my translation)⁶²

PAR was initially conceived in the 1970s as a response to

the miserable situations of our societies, to the excessive specialisation and the void of academic life, and to the sectarian practices of a great part of the revolutionary left. We felt that transformations of society as well as of scientific knowledge, which had generally remained in the Newtonian era with its reductionist and instrumental orientation, were necessary and urgent. To begin with, we decided to embark on the search for adequate answers to the dilemmas of those who had been victims of the

⁶⁰ See Chapter 2, footnote 13, for a brief discussion of subaltern studies.

⁶¹ The original term in Spanish is ‘investigación-acción participativa’ (IAP).

⁶² “La ideología básica de la IAP es la de que clases y agrupamientos auto-conscientes, aquellos que en el presente se encuentran pobres y oprimidos, irán transformando su medio ambiente progresivamente, a través de su propia praxis. En este proceso otras personas pueden desempeñar papeles catalíticos y de apoyo, pero no podrán dominar el proceso.”

oligarchies and their politics of development: the poor rural communities. (Rahman & Fals Borda 1991:39; my translation)⁶³

Until 1977 PAR was characterised by activism and even anti-professionalism. Esteva (1987:128) stresses the ambiguous positionality of the activist and researcher, and promotes the idea of a ‘de-professionalised intellectual’ as the only way of working with oppressed groups and against established academic models and paradigms. Many of the early PAR activists actually renounced their academic posts as they became more deeply involved with PAR projects.⁶⁴ The early efforts of PAR were strongly influenced by other participatory research methodologies such as *intervention sociologique* (Touraine 1988) and Freire’s (1971) concept of *conscientização* as a process of learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality. The latter concept in particular provided the basis for a more clearly articulated methodology: one in which the traditional division between researcher (subject) and the researched (object) is substituted by a subject/subject relation, wherein a dialogue with the people about their actions takes place (Freire 1971:38,39) and mutual trust exists between researcher and the subjects of the study (pp.46,47), leading to a reflective participation on the part of the people (p.52). Such a process also implies the ‘rebirth’ of the researcher himself/herself (p.47), a notion which has consequently been developed both by Spivak (1996), who insists on the need to unlearn one’s own privileges when conducting research, and Esteva (1987:141), who stresses the need for unlearning the language of domination. Freire was mostly concerned with a new ‘pedagogy for the oppressed’, rejecting the traditional ‘banking concept of education’, which feeds students with information in a teacher/subject - student/object relation without encouraging critical thinking, thereby serving the interests of oppression (Freire 1971:64). He advocated a ‘problem-posing

⁶³ “las míseras situaciones de nuestras sociedades, a la excesiva especialización y al vacío de la vida académica, y a las prácticas sectarias de gran parte de la izquierda revolucionaria. Sentimos que eran necesarias y urgentes las transformaciones tanto de la sociedad como del conocimiento científico, que generalmente había quedado atrás, en la era newtoniana, con su orientación reduccionista e instrumental. Para comenzar, decidimos emprender la búsqueda de respuestas adecuadas a los dilemas de aquellos que habían sido víctimas de las oligarquías y sus políticas de desarrollo: las comunidades pobres del campo.”

⁶⁴ Similarly in the late-1960s, with the emergence of radical geographies, Bunge argued against the ‘tyranny of professionalisation’ in the academy and quite literally took geography out into the streets of Detroit to apply the discipline practically in attempts at solving real and tangible social problems (Bunge 1977).

education', which would respond to the essence of consciousness in the student as intentional historical subject, taking historicity as starting point.⁶⁵

PAR took these considerations a step further by emphasising the factor of 'action' in the dialogical research between oppressed groups and researchers. The International Symposium on Research Action and Scientific Analysis, which took place in Cartagena, Colombia, in 1977, provided a first international space of reflection on the advances of PAR in the theoretical and methodological fields as well as a first measurement of its practical implications and success. Some 75 researchers and activists from different parts of the world analysed the advances of their participatory research methodologies as applied in the field. These exchanges and discussions resulted in two volumes which came formally to constitute PAR. As Rahman and Fals Borda state retrospectively:

We began to understand PAR as a research methodology with an evolution towards a subject/subject relation in order to form symmetrical, horizontal and non-exploitative standards in social, economic and political life, and as a part of *social activism* with an ideological and spiritual commitment in order to promote (collective) *popular praxis*. (Rahman & Fals Borda 1991:40; my emphases and translation)⁶⁶

These aims were further articulated during the Tenth International Congress of Sociology in Mexico in 1982. As a result of the collective exercise of self-reflection on the part of the researchers and activists involved, a wider field of action was explored, transcending the initially somewhat restricted peasant and communitarian questions to include dimensions of urban, economic and regional life.

PAR thus developed into a 'revolutionary science', which "becomes a real possibility, not only a felt necessity" (Fals Borda 1987:330). It now implies a demystification of research, not conducted any longer exclusively by detached 'expert' academics, but as collective research where researchers and the subjects of the study work together in defining the aims and methodology of the study. Fals Borda conceives of PAR as contributing to a 'people's power':

the capacity of the grass-roots groups, which are exploited socially and economically, to articulate and systematise knowledge (both their own and that which comes from

⁶⁵ See my discussion in Chapter 2 of the notion of historicity (Touraine 1988) in the context of social movement research, whereby a social movement provides the space in which the social actors assume control over their historicity as conscious historical actors.

⁶⁶ "Comenzamos a entender la IAP como una metodología de investigación con evolución hacia la relación sujeto/sujeto para conformar patrones simétricos, horizontales y no-explotadores en la vida social, económica y política, y como una parte del activismo social con un compromiso ideológico y espiritual para promover la praxis popular (colectiva)."

outside) in such a way that they can become protagonists in the advancement of their society and in defence of their own class and group interests. (Fals Borda 1987:330)

People's power hence acts as a "countervailing power exercised against exploitative systems" (Fals Borda 1987:331).⁶⁷ In this sense PAR actively seeks to provide a participatory discourse to set against dominant developmentalist discourses as an endogenous dialectical response to the actions of the developed world. It is therefore also a contribution to the search for the Lefebvrian counter-spaces that I have discussed in Chapter 3. The emphasis on action differentiates PAR from other forms of participatory research such as Touraine's (1988) *intervention sociologique*. It shares with these research methods the view that the outsider/researcher is crucial in setting off and guiding processes of self-reflection of the subordinate, suppressed groups or social movements, and of providing contexts that go beyond the immediately visible implications for any one group.⁶⁸ Therefore, PAR also addresses concerns for local/global relations:

Catalytic external agents play a crucial role in linking up the local dimension to regional and, at a later stage, to the national and the international levels. (Fals Borda 1987:334)

Yet, increasingly social movements build these links themselves, often making use of modern information technologies, linking their local struggles to resistances in the national and international arenas. The PCN in Colombia has built up links with the globalising resistance network People's Global Action (PGA), for example, thereby plugging into a network of grassroots organisations and activists from all over the world that functions as a

⁶⁷ Again a comparison can be drawn between the PAR approach and debates in geography in the late-1960s, when calls for a *people's geography* were made by early radical geographers who lamented the disjuncture between an established academic geography and real world socio-economic problems and struggles. To them, a people's geography would study these problems with an eye to devising viable solutions in a way that included the ordinary people who were subject to those problems and solutions. Reminiscent of earlier debates on geographical activism that can be traced back to the anarchist geographer Kropotkin (1995[1899]), radical geographers wanted research to focus on politically charged questions, in which geographers themselves became involved with the people and communities under study to work together on solution finding processes. One of the most original attempts at such a people's geography can be found in Bunge's 'Geographical expeditions' in Detroit (Bunge 1977).

⁶⁸ An objection can be raised to this claim of the outsider/researcher setting off processes of self-reflection in the subordinate, in that it seems to imply that the subordinate cannot make their own connections and reflections, and that the role of the researcher is one close to an intellectual vanguard. There is a danger that PAR gives a priority to the role of the researcher by denying the self-reflective capacities of the people. However, rather than rejecting the researcher's possible contribution in these self-reflective processes altogether, we should stress his/her potentially, although not necessarily, positive impact by adding a dynamic and giving some kind of orientation to these processes.

'convergence space' (Routledge 2001) in the articulation of resistance practices against global neoliberal politics and economics.⁶⁹

Four points have been identified as major supporting columns of the emerging edifice that is PAR:

1) collective research on group basis. This process implies a conscious dialogue between the researcher and the people which allows for a social validation of objective knowledge, and is regarded as a service to the community. It takes the form of meetings and workshops which the researcher organises and where locals are encouraged to engage in a process of articulated self-reflexivity, which is intended to raise awareness and consciousness of their situation (the process of conscientisation, *conscientização*). The researcher acts here as the catalytic agent to stimulate and to contribute to this debate.

2) critical recovery of history. The aim is to tap into the collective memory that exists within communities, but which is often invisible or buried. Traces can mostly be found in the oral tradition, especially with the elderly, in the form of stories, poems, and legends. These stories are rich in symbolisms and metaphors. Furthermore, they are commonly place-specific in that they are rooted and grounded in particular environments, with references to specific places, customs and people. As I will show in Chapter 5 in the case of the black communities in the Colombian Pacific, the aquatic space functions as a crucial reference point and repertoire of imagination in local stories and poems which name specific rivers and describe long journeys on certain rivers. By their poetic description, they let the reader, listening audience and/or researcher feel and smell the moist heat and the vivacity of the people of the Pacific.⁷⁰ The recovery of a community's collective memory in this respect has been argued to function as a "grass-roots corrector of official history" (Fals Borda 1987:341).⁷¹ It makes practical use of the concept of 'memory as a

⁶⁹ PCN's presence in this global network was most recently articulated in March 2001 with the tour of six of its members through Europe raising awareness over the precarious human rights situation in Colombia.

⁷⁰ See, for example, the poem *River Guapi* by Guillermo Portocarrero at the beginning of Chapter 5, where he describes his beloved river Guapi by applying the stylistic means of personification of the river's attributes.

⁷¹ Some may worry about this suggestion that there exists a 'truer' or 'more authentic' account of history. However, I believe that there *is* in fact a more authentic history to be recovered from 'other voices', and that it is a postmodern conceit to think that this is not the case, and that we should not think in these terms (see also my previous discussion in this chapter of hook's (1991) concerns in this respect). The notion of a 'corrector of official history', rather than arguing for a complete replacement of official history by a 'people's history', stresses the need to take seriously those 'other voices', and to uncover those previously unheard, ignored or silenced histories that shed a new light on and thus 'correct' official versions of History with a capital H (see also my previous discussion in this chapter of the 'invisibility' of black populations in Latin America, as well as the impact of the subaltern studies group in India that aims at recovering the people's histories and thereby 'correcting' official history).

site of resistance' (Foucault 1980), in that new visions and alternative projects can be imagined and put into practice based on a people's historical experiences.

3) valuing and applying folk culture. Closely connected to the previous point, aspects of local folk culture such as traditional music, dances, story-telling and religious beliefs are actively applied in the articulation of a people's struggle:

All these elements of oral culture may be exploited as a new and dynamic political language which belongs to the people. [...] Feelings, imagination and the sense of play are apparently inexhaustible sources of strength and resistance among the people. These three elements have a common basis which cannot be ignored in the struggle to promote mobilisation and people's power in our countries: religious beliefs. (Fals Borda 1987:343)

My own narrative strategy in this thesis, which privileges local voices and sense of place over and even against institutionalised discourses and representations of space, hence makes use of PAR's principle of 'valuing and applying folk culture', as I offer a detailed analysis of the oral tradition of black communities (see Chapter 5). I have also observed the conscious application of these cultural elements in a political context within the women's network Matamba y Guasá in Guapi, who use the traditional poetic form of *décima* in the booklets that they produce to articulate their views, aims and demands. It must be pointed out, however, that the application of these forms of folk culture did not come about as the result of PAR, but rather as a particular dynamic that already existed within the movement. These forms of a new political language also put the 'cultural' as place-specific and experienced cultural form into 'cultural politics', which significantly enriches the latter concept.⁷²

4) production and diffusion of new knowledge. As a final step there has to be a systematic dissemination of the knowledge derived from dialogical research. As Fals Borda (1987:344) stresses, "there is an obligation to return this knowledge systematically to the communities and workers' organisations because they continue to be its owners".

The presentation and diffusion of research findings can comprise a 'double history' which applies two different narrative styles parallel to one another, one for academic

⁷² 'Cultural politics' has been defined as the "process enacted when sets of social actors shaped by, and embodying, different cultural meanings and practices come into conflict with each other" (Alvarez *et al.* 1998:7). This definition, however, is far too vague regarding the concretely articulated cultural politics of any one set of actors. I therefore prefer to define 'cultural politics' as the conscious application of concrete cultural experiences of a group of people as a new political language in their articulations and demands. The specific cultural experiences are applied intentionally in this respect as a tool of political expression and articulation.

purposes and another one for local consumption. This takes a form of publication in which the left page narrates, analyses and explains the research and its results in an academic vocabulary, whereas the right page uses a more colloquial language explaining to the academically non-initiated reader the content, context and analysis of the problematic.⁷³

This kind of presentation of research results has been criticised by some, however, as exposing a patronising attitude that some PAR has developed, and also the lack of a closer identification of the researcher with the subjects of the study. This is because there is still a differentiation in the language chosen, thus emphasising the perceived intellectual superiority of the researcher. At the same time PAR has been and still is criticised by the reactionary elements in the academy as ‘non-scientific’ and subjective. These elements, of course, hide behind claims of objective scientific research, untenable in any case, and simply do not engage with the subjects of their study. Knowingly or unknowingly, they promote the “continuation of a hierarchical idea of knowledge that falsifies and maintains structures of domination” (hooks 1991:128).

The dialogical character of research as conceived in PAR has been stressed as an important methodological advance and has found increasing application in social sciences. Talking about her experience in the early 1970s, Rouch, for example, conceives of this kind of dialogical research as a ‘shared anthropology’:

It is this permanent ‘ethno-dialogue’ which appears to me to be one of the most interesting angles in the current progress of ethnography. Knowledge is no longer a stolen secret, devoured in the Western temples of knowledge; it is the result of an endless quest where ethnographers and those whom they study meet on a path which some of us now call ‘shared anthropology’. (Rouch 1971, quoted in Ruby 1991:63)

Such is maybe the nature of a ‘postmodern ethnography’ (Clifford 1988), which in its discursive production sees discourse as a “dialogue between researchers and those they study [and] which replaces the monologue of an author, a self-authorised ‘authority’ who represents ‘others’ [thereby leading to a] polyvocality in ethnographic texts” (Barnes & Duncan 1992:9). What many of these postmodern ethnographers nevertheless ignore at times, or at least what they do not seem to address explicitly, are the unequal power relations within which research inevitably takes place. It is all fine and good to include the subject of the study in the production of the ethnographic texts, but does that necessarily challenge dominant power structures or is it just a postmodern way of justifying one’s

⁷³ The best known example of this kind of writing is Fals Borda’s *Historia Doble de la Costa*, a project published in four volumes between 1979 and 1986.

academic interventions? Commenting on these issues regarding the representation of minority groups, Ruby states:

The ways in which diversity has been introduced does not seriously threaten the power structure already in place. Diversity is 'mainstreamed', that is, it has the appearance of minority representation without seriously challenging anything. (Ruby 1991:61)

The mere inclusion of minorities in these ways does not add much to critical research, nor does it address and challenge dominant structures of oppression and social injustice. We can also see reflected here the Marxist critiques of writers such as Harvey (1996) and Habermas (1987), who argue that the inclusion of minority representations does not provide a challenge to dominant power structures, and that the currently 'fashionable' diversity and fragmentation of interests and identity politics effectively serve the interests of a globally restructuring capitalism without challenging its foundations. It is precisely these structures that PAR intends to break down, which makes PAR much more than just an observational or representational activity, but a participatory research methodology with an active input into efforts to change the structures of social injustice.

Bringing down the rhinoceros: PAR's mosquito bites against neoliberalism

The global dimension of PAR has become most clearly expressed recently during the Eighth International Congress on PAR - 'Convergence in Knowledge, Space and Time' - held in Cartagena, Colombia, between 1st and 5th of June 1997, exactly twenty years after the first meeting of its kind at the same place. The number of participants also increased from 75 in 1977 to 1,850 in 1997. Among the participants were renowned international academics and critics such as the Colombian post-structuralist Arturo Escobar, the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano, the North American sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, and the Hungarian philosopher Agnes Heller, to name but a few. As a unique document in the history of political science, the Brazilian president Fernando Cardoso sent a special video to the congress in which he discussed the practical-theoretical tensions of concrete politics. The Mexican anthropologist Stavenhagen presented an eighth 'mistaken thesis' on Latin America:⁷⁴

⁷⁴ The other seven 'mistaken theses' being, according to Stavenhagen: (1) the thesis of the dual societies, (2) that of progress as a means of diffusion from modern zones to backward ones, (3) that of traditional zones being an obstacle for the development of capitalism, (4) that of the contradiction between the interests of the bourgeoisie and the landholding oligarchy, (5) that of the absence of a middle-class in Latin America, (6)

Globalisation, competition, the market, production, these are the big lies of neoliberalism. I don't think that privatisations are the solution to the big problems of Latin America [...] Globalisation is inevitable. We have to rethink *what kind of globalisation* we want. We have to think the world as global and interdependent, but this has to be for the benefit of the people, and that's what we have to work on. (Alternativa 1997:3,4; my emphasis and translation)⁷⁵

Such a global critique was also highlighted by the Chilean 'anti-economist' and winner of the alternative Nobel prize Max-Neef, who explained his 'threshold hypothesis'. This suggests that for the most part economic growth contributes to improving life quality, but that once a certain threshold is reached it no longer does so:

There exists a period of quantitative economy, which then becomes a qualitative one. Of course, a country that has not reached its threshold point yet has to grow. But once it crosses this point, the growth which is generated each time contributes less to generating authentic development and it concentrates more on resolving problems generated by the very growth. What one has to do to complement the economic equation is to have a healthy and prosperous micro-economy. What I call an *economy at human scale*. This in technological terms means favouring those technologies which, instead of being more efficient in the exploitation of resources, are more efficient in the use of those resources. (Alternativa 1997:5; my emphasis and translation)⁷⁶

Max-Neef further refers to the Club of Rome, which, in a recent report, released in Germany, shows how quality of life can be increased while reducing consumption levels. The study shows 54 cases in which consumption could be reduced to a fourth, while still maintaining quality of life levels. Using this kind of scientific evidence Max-Neef concludes:

The important thing is not that we are ruined. The point is that now we know what things there are and what we have to do, and that it is possible to do it. So that we are

that of Latin American countries as homogenous race mixtures (*países mestizos*), and (7) that of the necessity of a workers-peasants alliance to achieve revolution (Alternativa 1997:3).

⁷⁵ "La globalización, la competitividad, el mercado, la productividad, ésas son las grandes mentiras del neoliberalismo. No creo que las privatizaciones sean la solución a los grandes problemas de América Latina. [...] La globalización es inevitable. Hay que repensar qué tipo de globalización queremos. Hay que pensar el mundo como global e interdependiente, pero esto debe ser para el beneficio de los pueblos y por allí es por donde hay que trabajar."

⁷⁶ "Existe un período de economía cuantitativa, que pasa después a uno cualitativo. Evidentemente un país que está antes de su punto umbral necesita crecer. Pero una vez cruza ese punto, el crecimiento que se genera cada vez va a contribuir menos a generar auténtico desarrollo y se va a ir concentrando más en resolver problemas generados por el propio crecimiento. Lo que se debe hacer, para complementar la ecuación económica, es tener una sana y próspera microeconomía. Lo que yo llamo una economía a escala humana. Esto en términos tecnológicos significaría favorecer aquellas tecnologías que, en vez de ser más eficientes en la explotación de recursos, sean más eficientes en la utilización de éstos."

facing the possibility of not being ruined any more. (Alternativa 1997:5,6; my translation)⁷⁷

What we then have to do, according to Max-Neef, is to fight the rhinoceros of neoliberalism not by creating a similar beast to confront it but to attack it in a swarm of millions of mosquitoes whose bites will finally bring it down to its knees. The strategy in opposing neoliberalism thus becomes a constant fight of multiple struggles in every corner of the planet. The radical academic's responsibility lies precisely in facilitating these mosquito attacks, in liaising between the different swarms, in providing the venom and searching for the vulnerable part of the rhinoceros, just as the *Nibelungen Lied* tells us of Siegfried's vulnerable spot on his back which was not bathed in the dragon's blood (although I do not suggest that Siegfried was a capitalist!). PAR is regarded as an incisive methodological tool in this respect.

PART II: PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

Researching the spatialities of the social movement of black communities on the Colombian Pacific coast required a wide range of ethnographic tools depending on the various contexts in which enquiries took place. I will briefly outline here the principal tools used, before narrating in a more detailed fashion how I went about dealing with specific fieldwork situations. In this narrative I will also analyse the concrete limitations of fieldwork as I encountered them, revealing how I tried to resolve them. I am employing a chronological narrative style here which reproduces my gradually unfolding understanding as I experienced it during the twelve months of fieldwork in Colombia from September 1998 to September 1999.

'El gringo curioso': specific ethnographic tools and their application in the field

I.) To get a clearer picture of how the social movement of black communities are interacting with the various government institutions, I arranged *structured and semi-structured interviews* with government officials. The latter could be divided into three groups:

- (a) those who exercised their functions in a very bureaucratic style and who felt little concern for the concrete struggles of black communities in the country;

⁷⁷ "Lo importante no es que estemos jodidos. El punto es que ahora sabemos qué cosas hay y qué hay que hacer, y eso es posible hacerlo. De manera que estamos ante la posibilidad de no estar jodidos."

- (b) those who felt solidarity for the movements and who were involved in one way or another in discussions with movement leaders and with me over progress, strategies and problems of the movements; and
- (c) those *black* government officials who were at times actively involved with the very movements themselves and who exercised certain functions within the movements. This group of people was of particular interest to me as they exposed the entanglements of official government politics, the agency of given governmental representatives, and the multiple ambiguities in which these people found themselves embroiled during decision-making processes.

The specific forms of the interviews varied, and they tended to become more informal from (a) to (c). Especially with the government representatives grouped together in (c), I conducted several follow-up interviews, and we engaged in fairly informal conversations that at times drifted into friendly meetings and social outings.

II.) A second group of people who I interviewed in Bogotá, Cali, Buenaventura and Tumaco were the leaders of the social movement of black communities in Colombia at the national level, in particular leaders of the PCN. I also interviewed Juan de Dios Mosquera in Bogotá, leader of the movement Cimarrón. It was in these mostly *semi-structured interviews* and the following more *informal discussions* that I explained my positioning towards the organising processes of black communities, my aspiration to work together with the movements as rooted in the ideology of PAR, and to create a working relationship and more meaningful interaction with the movements and myself. I outlined the twofold benefits which would be derived from this interaction in my eyes: a closer relation would provide me with a more in-depth understanding of the organising processes, their aspirations, strategies and concrete actions and problems; and my research would be helpful to the movements themselves in that it would provide a space for self-reflection on the internal processes and a self-critical analysis of current problems.

III.) Participant observation and in-depth research at the regional level was conducted in the town of Guapi and the surrounding rivers on the Cauca coast, where I spent altogether five months. After Buenaventura and Tumaco, Guapi is the third most important town on southern Pacific coast. It has an urban population of some 10,000, but its significance as an urban centre extends to the rural areas of the municipality of Guapi and beyond (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Population in the municipality of Guapi, 1964 to 1993

	1964	1973	1985	1993*
urban	3,066	4,879	6,885	9,927
rural	11,915	10,958	13,594	12,902
total	14,981	15,837	20,479	22,829

Source: adapted from Dane 1991

* adapted from Dane 1993

As the regional centre for co-ordination and mobilisation in the surrounding rivers, most meetings between the different community councils take place in Guapi, therefore making it a privileged fieldwork site for observing these interactions.

The *interviews* which I held in Guapi with the regional movement leaders were *formal* at the beginning, and then became more *informal* and friendly as time went by. The relations eventually turned into friendships with most leaders, although to differing degrees, and we shared meals, drink and dances together. My concrete *participation* with the three movements in Guapi took on different forms:

- *Cococauca*, the first regional co-ordination of black communities to emerge on the Cauca coast in 1993 is mainly made up of young radical activists. They formed part of the national strategy of PCN until 1996, when a rift occurred between the leaders of both organisations. Cococauca has increasingly become isolated since then from the local base in Guapi as well as from the national organisation structures of black communities. Nevertheless, they have the most clearly articulated (and most radical) political discourse of the different organisations in Guapi. They saw in my presence a source of information on international political issues, and we had a number of meetings where we discussed wide-ranging topics such as the Gulf War, the end of apartheid in South Africa, ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, and the Russian war against Chechenia. We also had a number of meetings reflecting on the fragmenting processes occurring within the organisations in Guapi, during which they were keen on my observations, ideas and opinions.
- *Matamba y Guasá* is a network of women organisations on the Cauca coast that is mainly concerned with issues bound up in the reproduction of the household and the improvement of living conditions at home. Their discourse is less political and radical

than that of Cococauca. My contacts with this movement were mostly personal ones with the different leaders and participants. We had fewer formal meetings in the form of group interviews, partly because the participants seemed to be less concerned with self-reflection on their organisation and more with the practical side of getting things done. I also had to be careful where and how to meet with the individual women of this movement, particularly after rumours of an ambiguous nature spread in Guapi speculating on what exactly was happening in the *gringo*'s house when a woman on her own entered for a conversation and only emerged some two or three hours later. In spite of very friendly relations with many of the movement's participants, sharing numerous chats, meals, travels and dances throughout my stay in Guapi, a more active participation with Matamba y Guasá did not crystallise. It was only towards the end of my stay in Guapi, when I talked to some of the members about my experience of having given a workshop on social cartography on the island of Gorgona, that some of the women approached me asking me to do something similar in two populations on the river Guapi. Unfortunately, due to organising difficulties these workshops did not take place in the end, although the project as such was not cancelled, and may be undertaken on one of my returns to Guapi in the future.

- The third organisation present in Guapi, the 'Federation of Black Communities on the Cauca Coast', locally referred to as *Federación*, was the one with which I had least contact, partly due to their relative invisibility in the organisational landscape as I perceived it. Their presence was one of discourse rather than of action. However, I had a number of fruitful discussions with one of their leaders, a young anthropologist. He also organised a two-day meeting of young people of the rivers Guajuí and Napi in the village of San Antonio de Guajuí, where I participated by giving a talk analysing the current situation of the organising processes of black communities in Colombia. This was perhaps one of the most fruitful and rewarding fieldwork experiences for me in Guapi, talking in front of some 100 students who were all very keen to hear what this *gringo* had to share with them.



Meeting of young people of the rivers Napi and Guajuí;
San Antonio de Guajuí, 28-30 May 1999



San Antonio de Guajuí

This meeting also touched on one of my concerns over the lack of participation of college students in any of the movements in Guapi, perhaps a surprising situation given that Guapi functions as a regional educational centre with three colleges and the post-college learning centre for apprenticeship SENA (Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje). However, the structures of an educational system that does not stimulate critical thinking amongst students, as in Freire's (1971:64) 'banking concept of education', helps to explain this apparent apathy of the youth about getting involved in local organising processes.

IV.) Participant observation was also the principal research tool at the local level. I travelled up and down the various rivers around Guapi, staying with local families and immersing myself in local lives and lifestyles, a methodological approach which can be termed 'deep ethnography', emphasising lengthy observation. I stayed more than five months in the field in Guapi and the surrounding rivers, sharing with locals their everyday worries, delights, frustrations, ecstasies, family woes and bereavements, as well as their parties and, of course, their political concerns. I explored how the organising processes at the local level had taken hold, and what political identities were in the process of being constituted. In particular, I worked and talked with the legal representatives of the newly emerging community councils to assess whether or not these can be regarded as new political actors, at times integrating into existing regional and national movement structures, at other times creating their own independent associations. This was also the field where my participation was strongest, as I had frequent meetings with the community council representatives discussing legal and operational issues where I contributed my opinions and analysis.

Time and space: a chronological narrative of an unfolding understanding of the spatialities of resistance on the Colombian Pacific coast

On arrival in Colombia's capital Bogotá in October 1998, I installed myself in the offices of the Colombian Institute of Anthropology ICAN (Instituto Colombiano de Antropología) where I was given office space and a computer.⁷⁸ My contacts with ICAN go back to 1996 when I conducted fieldwork for my undergraduate dissertation in Colombia. This time I

⁷⁸ ICAN was merged in January 2000 with the Colombian Institute of Hispanic Culture (Instituto Colombiano de Cultura Hispánica) to form what is today the Colombian Institute of Anthropology and History ICANH (Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia).

was invited to join a team of anthropologists and historians (note the absence of geographers!) on the research project 'Black Populations and Modernity: Collective Action, Civil Society and the State in the Colombian Pacific'. This institutional link was highly beneficial to me. Not only did ICAN provide me with a computer and access to e-mail, which facilitated regular contacts with my supervisors in Glasgow, but they also gave me access to their well-stocked library in which I consulted numerous Spanish-language publications on issues of blackness and social movements in Colombia. ICAN also published two articles of mine, one based on my research for the undergraduate dissertation in 1996 (Oslender 1999) and another debating spatial perspectives on social movements (Oslender 2000).

In the initial stages in Bogotá I managed to get a much clearer picture of the historical and socio-cultural background to the region of the Pacific coast and its people. This was achieved through widespread reading and in conversations with researchers and with activists of the social movement of black communities. I also befriended researchers from Colombia's Geographical Institute IGAC (Instituto Geográfico 'Agustín Codazzi'), who have recently finished the four-year long project 'Ecological Zonification in the Pacific Coast' (IGAC 1999). This has been an important if at times highly criticised project, since it represents the first serious attempt at a cartography of the region under Colombian auspices. Most maps available until recently had to be ordered from the US Defence Mapping Agency. The project team collected their data in local communities of black and of indian populations, where they organised workshops on social cartography (Vargas 1999). I later employed a similar methodology when giving a workshop to the resident population on the island of Gorgona, some 56 kilometres from Guapi.

'Charluando y decimeando': reflections on writing oral tradition

From 26 to 29 November 1998, I attended the sixth annual Meeting of Oral Literature on the Pacific Coast in Buenaventura (it was here that I started my first trip into the field). This shed an interesting light on the importance of the oral tradition in black communities (Pedrosa & Vanín 1994, Vanín 1999). The encounter was subtitled 'so that our people won't lose their memory'. It provided a privileged space to observe how oral tradition was constructed and lived on a daily basis, and the importance that it still has in the reproduction of everyday life forms, particularly in the rural areas in the Pacific. However, it was also a space which affirmed the precarious situation of the oral tradition in the

Pacific given the increasing presence of agents of modernity such as television (satellite TV in most cases) and engine-driven river transport, which contribute to the replacing of traditional socio-cultural patterns of story-telling at home and during long distance travels in dugout canoes, both key spaces for the reproduction of oral tradition. What struck me was the fact that the cultural and social importance of the oral tradition was stressed during the conference, along with the need to recuperate these values and memories, but no connection was made to its political nature and potential. This was an observation that I would continue to make. On the Colombian Pacific coast, the oral tradition seems to linger somewhere in the space of the 'folkloric', that which should not be forgotten for all its cultural richness and importance as a historical document, but the concrete link to a cultural politics of blackness has not yet been made. My fascination for the various forms of oral tradition practised in the Colombian Pacific, and the conviction that these are important if unwritten historical documents that could be effectively mobilised in the cultural politics of black communities, led me to reflect on a project of writing the life history of a particular person of the region, an elderly wise person, locally referred to as *sabio*. This person I was to encounter later in the most coincidental of ways in doña Celia Lucumí Caicedo from Guapi.

Of 'pianguas, cununos, arrullos, y balsadas': sampling the tastes and sounds of the Pacific lowlands

On 1st December 1998 I travelled by boat from Buenaventura to Guapi to observe the patron saint festivities there on 8 December. The journey at night took twelve hours in a heavily overloaded cargo ship that threatened to bow to the rolling waves of a furious albeit moon-lit Pacific Ocean. That these cargo ships *do* in fact sink I found out some four months later, when it was precisely the boat on which I had voyaged that sank some two hours after leaving Buenaventura. The news spread through Guapi like a fire since many families expected their sons and daughters to return on this boat for their term holidays. Miraculously no-one drowned, some survivors 'bathing' up to nine hours in the sea before being picked up by local fishermen. The miracle was ascribed to the *Virgen del Carmen*, patron saint of all seafarers, and one of the most important saints amongst black communities on the Pacific coast.

On arrival in Guapi I installed myself in the small but comfortable Hotel Río Guapi. While the fan was desperately trying to cope with the midday heat, I watched the European

Champions League on ESPN, where the then almighty Bayern of Munich were toiling in the snow covered pitch of the Olympia Stadium to grind down a resisting Feyenord Rotterdam. I felt very globalised. In Guapi I had initial meetings with representatives of the various organisations that were active in the region. It quickly became apparent that local organising processes were plagued by fragmentation, open hostilities between various movement leaders and a lack of unity in their struggles. Impressive conspiracy theories were spun over the creation of one of the groups as having the sole aim of destroying the other. Although the negative implications of a locally fragmented organisation process were clear to all movement participants, no real attempts were undertaken to change this situation and to work more meaningfully together. I felt strongly about what seemed to me an unhelpful fragmentation of the various movements, and in numerous meetings, both formal and informal, I proposed discussing these issues with various of their leaders. However, my repeated proposals of having a meeting with representatives from all groups and myself (as the outside researcher suggesting the need to embark on processes of self-reflection among the movements' participants, as suggested in PAR) were constantly evaded, although never directly rejected. Such a meeting just never took place, and I was frustrated by these various events not transpiring. Although I felt that I had done everything to explain my positionality towards the movements and to 'offer' myself, my qualifications and capacities to contribute to the various movements' activities, I had to realise that things were slightly more complicated, that maybe the process of 'manufacturing trust' between the movements and myself had not yet been completed. It seems clear now that the movement participants themselves needed time to reflect on these proposals of PAR by an outside researcher.

Returning to Guapi in July 2000 shed an interesting light onto this interpretation. One of the movement's activists approached me in Guapi on my return and excused herself to me regarding the lack of enthusiasm that they had previously shown when I suggested the idea of leading workshops on social cartography in the various rivers where they were organised. She explained to me that now, one year later, they had understood that this could be a very useful exercise to them, but that at the time they had not realised this. It is clear that in order to build a PAR strategy the factor of time is important, and that prior to research activity in the field, contacts have to be established between the researcher and the organisations/movements expected to participate in the research. This would facilitate an understanding of the research process, but also create a conviction on the part of the

movement participants that this kind of research is helpful to them. This latter point is indispensable in any kind of meaningful participatory research, since it is not enough for the researcher to appeal to his/her 'compromise' with the cause of the movements and with its people. Although I was not able to resolve this problem during my fieldwork, time has shown that now, one year later and back in Glasgow, a much more meaningful participatory research can be envisioned and put into practice; one in which the movement participants themselves are convinced of the mutual benefits of such an exercise. It is also satisfying to me now that they have in fact expressed an interest in conducting PAR in the future.

My observations on the patron saint festivities in Guapi were very revealing and provided exciting material for the development of my concept of the aquatic space. The story of the arrival centuries ago of the navigating patron saint, the Virgin of Immaculate Conception (La Inmaculada Concepción), is every year re-enacted by locals on 7 December. Rafts (*balsadas*) were adorned with images of the patron saint, palm twigs and lights. Local musicians played the traditional *arrullos*, religious songs with frenetic singing, and the mesmerising percussive beat of the *bombo*, *cununo*, and *guasá*, filled the air. Tradition and modernity were entangled in this spectacle, as the traditional *balsadas* were lit by electric light, not candles any more, and powered by engines, not paddles. While older people sang traditional *arrullos* on the main square, the younger ones listened to modern salsa and vallenato blasting out of powerful sound systems. There was still the odd bottle of *viche* being passed around, the traditional unrefined sugarcane spirit of the region, but most locals, as well as myself, delved into its modern equivalent, the industrially produced *aguardiente*.

Non-violent resistance in a context of civil war: enter guerrillas and paramilitaries

During the patron saint festivities another factor made itself felt for the first time, and it was to hang over the rest of my stay as a constant possibility/threat: rumours of an imminent guerrilla attack on the town. It never happened in the end, but telling signs, such as the gradually built-up sand bag barricade mounted in front of the local police station, fell on fruitful soil in vivid local imaginations and in the *bochinche*, the much-loved gossip, leading everyone to join in the speculations of a guerrilla attack. In fact, the patron saint festivities began and ended earlier this year as a result of these rumours being taken seriously.

There are important implications for doing research in areas where there is a guerrilla or paramilitary presence. Research here often becomes a wait-and-see strategy. Plans to travel may have to be modified or cancelled; it might even be advisable to leave a region altogether. My presence in Guapi was no doubt known to the surrounding guerrilla groups, but all it ever came to were some warnings which at the time, however, I did take seriously. On one occasion I cancelled a journey that I had planned to explore the more remote upper parts of the river Napi on the Cauca coast. As much as I later regretted not having undertaken the trip, at the time I thought it wiser to avoid an encounter with the *muchachos* (boys), as locals refer to the guerrillas.

Understanding Colombia's internal conflict and its terrible and painful manifestations has become an almost impossible task, in spite of the increasing number of analyses provided by the so-called *violentólogos*, expert analysts in issues of violence (Pizarro 1987, Pécaut 1999, Fals Borda 2000). This is not the place to add yet another analysis of this escalating conflict, but there are important implications for non-violent mobilisation in a context of civil war that could be drawn out. Colombia must be the only country in Latin America where one feels safer in the cities than in the countryside, where paramilitary massacres, guerrilla attacks and kidnappings are the order of the day. Not one day passes where the national media do not report on massacres and human pain of indescribable extent. Powerful guerrilla movements and right-wing paramilitary groups fight a dirty war in the rural areas over territorial control, although only rarely do they engage in direct military confrontation with each other. The peasants are typically caught up in this conflict and bear the brunt of it, in that they are accused by both sides of supporting the other. Massacres, intimidation and spreading terror among rural populations become the principle strategies of paramilitary groups to 'dissuade' local peasants from supporting the guerrillas. As a result, the countryside is slowly being evacuated by unprecedented levels of peasant displacements to the cities (Arocha 1999, Pécaut 1999, Castillejo 2000). The right-wing paramilitaries' self-proclaimed aim is the destruction of the guerrillas, and in the perverse logic of Colombia's dirty war, this means killing anyone who is remotely suspected of sympathising with the latter: a category which includes intellectuals, left-of-centre politicians, union workers, university professors, radical students, NGO workers, social movement leaders, peasants and lately also comedians.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ The popular and much-loved Colombian comedian Jaime Garzón, who was 'suspected' to have been involved in the 'peace process', was shot dead in his car on 13 August 1999 by *sicarios*, hooded assassins on

Within this national context of violence and terror the social movement of black communities organises in defence of territorial rights which the state has officially granted, but is unable to guarantee in practice. As Arocha (1999:176) documents, for example, the representative of the first community council in the Pacific coast to be granted collective territorial rights was assassinated, probably by paramilitaries. My own fieldwork sources told me how on 12 February 1998 a black community leader in Nariño was assassinated while carrying out the population census in one of the territories to be titled collectively. The assassins were apparently known to him and to the community, and they left a note with the body: 'For hassling us with Law 70'. As so often in Colombia, impunity won out over justice, and the people responsible for the killing were not found, although there is a widespread consensus that the murder was arranged by the companies that exploit African palm for palm oil in the area. They had suffered a setback to their activities in a court case where Law 70 was applied to show that they had illegally felled 800 hectares of forest to plant African palm trees. The murder was seen as a revenge and a form of intimidation to other community leaders in the area.

On 10 May 2000, right-wing paramilitaries of the AUC (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia) entered the community of Zabaletas on the river Anchicayá on the Pacific coast near Buenaventura, killed twelve people, kidnapped four others, and burnt numerous houses down. Two days later PCN distributed the following statement via email:

The black communities of the Colombian Pacific have been fighting for the right to legalise their collective lands together with the right to administer them autonomously and in agreement with their traditional practices and values. The Colombian constitution recognises this right through Law 70 of 1993. The grassroots organisations of the river Anchicayá have advanced significantly in their land titling process. The collective appropriation by the black communities of the Colombian Pacific is seen as a threat by those who maintain an interest in capitalising on the enormous natural wealth of the area, which includes: valuable and highly commercial tropical timber, gold and the potential of establishing intensive commercial cropping. [...] The ancestral rights of the black and indian communities, reflected in the constitution, are seen as an obstacle to this exploitation and development. Under the false pretext that these communities are collaborating with the guerrilla, violence and

a motorbike, the common way of eliminating unwanted intellect in Colombia. One year later, in August 2000, the head of the paramilitary organisation AUC (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia), Carlos Castaño, was declared to be responsible for the killing by the National Prosecutor. However, Castaño only appears in TV interviews and not in court to defend himself. To the list of victims of paramilitary violence we must add the recent illegal raid on the offices of the magazine *Alternativa*, from which I have extensively quoted in the section on PAR, conducted by right-wing elements (Fals Borda 2000).

intimidation are used to displace them forcefully and debilitate their grassroots organisations. (my translation)⁸⁰

In this context, what does it mean for non-violent resistance such as the social movements of black communities when seeking to organise and to defend their territorialities? What strategies are these organisations to adopt in confronting violent actors such as paramilitaries and guerrillas? How can their territories be meaningfully defended? This PhD does not pretend to find answers to these questions, but these issues are increasingly affecting the organising processes of black communities on Colombia's Pacific coast and must be urgently addressed. As a PCN activist wrote to me in a personal email commenting on the massacre in the river Anchicayá: "We cannot simply run away, can we?"

Analysing the Colombian context of violence and terror, Pécaut writes:

It seems to me that the terror progressively induces effects of fragilisation of the territories, explodes temporal referents, and endangers the possibility of the subjects to affirm themselves within contradictory referents. (Pécaut 1999:13; my translation)⁸¹

Affirming territorialities in a non-violent way can be fatal in this context. In fact, we can observe changing landscapes where places acquire new meanings in terms of a changing sense of place and the articulation of specific geographies of fear.

⁸⁰ "Las Comunidades Negras del Pacifico colombiano han estado luchando por el derecho a legalizar sus tierras colectivas conjunto con el derecho a administrarlas de manera autónoma y de acuerdo a sus practicas y valores tradicionales. La Constitución colombiana les reconoce este derecho por medio de la Ley 70 de 1993. Las organizaciones de base del rio Anchicaya llevan un proceso avanzado de titulacion de sus tierras. La apropiación colectiva por parte de las comunidades Negras del Pacifico colombiano es visto como una amenaza por aquellos que mantienen un interes en capitalizar sobre la enorme riqueza natural de la zona, la cual incluye: preciosas maderas tropicales altamente comerciables, oro y el potencial de establecer cultivos comerciales de manera intensiva. [...] Los derechos ancestrales de las Comunidades Negras e Indigenas, reflejados en la Carta Constitucional, son vistos como un obstaculo a esta explotacion y desarrollo. Bajo el falso pretexto de que estas comunidades son colaboradores de la guerrilla, se utilizan la violencia y la intimidacion para desplazarlos forzosamente y debilitar sus organizaciones de base." (original text of email message of 12 May 2000)

⁸¹ "Me parece que el terror induce de manera progresiva efectos de fragilización de los territorios, hace estallar los referentes temporales, pone en peligro la posibilidad de los sujetos para afirmarse en medio de referentes contradictorios."

Taking the case of the river Anchicayá, its sense of place seems to have shifted from one of poetics and beauty as expressed in don Agapito's poem⁸² to one of fear and terror after the paramilitaries' massacre. Whereas don Agapito talks about the beautiful girls that descend from the river Anchicayá onto Buenaventura, the news of the massacre tells us of murder, burnt houses, disappeared and displaced people. Yet spelling out the geographies of fear in Colombia would be a different project, which cannot be the aim here.

'Cali Pachanguero, Buenaventura y Caney': connecting networks

From 9 to 12 December 1998 I attended a seminar in Cali, hosted by the Universidad del Valle, an important research institution relating to the Pacific coast, and the French Institute for Development Research IRD (Institut de Recherche pour le Développement). The latter presented their results from a twelve months research project in the Colombian Pacific. This was also a good opportunity for me to meet up with other black movement leaders who were invited as well.

The last four days before Christmas I spent in Buenaventura with members of PCN in their head office. The reception, however, was not as warm as the surrounding tropical heat. It proved an uneasy encounter at first, since some leaders were absent and others were not too interested in my research plan nor did they see any benefits in my potential collaborations. On my third visit we started to engage in longer political discussions, though, and on my last day I even shared their Christmas celebrations with them. In this informal ceremony, each participant voiced his/her personal hopes and wishes for the coming year, followed by an invocation of the name of a universal black leader, which was greeted by the other participants with the cry of 'presente'. This ritual also confirmed PCN's orientation towards the universal struggle of the black diaspora against racism and in defence of the rights of black people wherever they are in the world (see Chapter 1 on PCN's principles). As one after another of the black leaders known to me was called out,

⁸² *El puerto de Buenaventura,
un puerto bien venturoso,
donde apegan los navíos
y los hombres de reposo.*

The port of Buenaventura,
a very fortunate port,
where vessels land
and men relax.

*El puerto de Buenaventura,
¿cuándo estaremos allá?
viendo muchachas bonitas
que bajan del Anchicayá."*

The port of Buenaventura,
when will we be there?
to see beautiful girls
who descend from the Anchicayá.

(recorded with don Agapito Montaña, Guapi, 23 April 1996)

and the person preceding me shouted ‘Malcolm X’, thereby depriving me of my last option, it was finally my turn. Without much time for reflection, I called upon ‘William Wallace’, exclamation which was greeted with puzzled looks and an awkward silence. I quickly set out to explain the historical struggles of the Scots against the English, for which William Wallace stands representative. Thereby I hoped, at least for the sake of the occasion, to connect the Scottish cause to the struggle of black minorities in Colombia. This somewhat surreal connection was suddenly established when I dropped the name *Corazón valiente*, Braveheart. An acknowledging ‘ahh’ made its round, and an enthusiastic ‘presente’ filled the hall. The film had been a hit in Buenaventura, and its particular take on Scottish history had thus reached Colombian Pacific shores.

I spent Christmas with friends in Cali sampling some of the world’s best Salsa bands who annually come to the Feria de Cali in December, and who make a whole city dance and sweat until the early morning hours during two solid weeks. Forget the notion of a tranquil Christmas period which allows time for calm self-reflection and inwards meditation when you come to Cali; this is collective, solid, non-stop partying. A short trip to Ecuador at the beginning of January to prolong my visa status also served as a welcome time off to reflect on first impressions during fieldwork.

In January 1999 I travelled to Tumaco, where I stayed for ten days working with movement leaders of the Palenque de Nariño, a regional organisation that forms part of PCN. The main aim of my visit to Tumaco was to appreciate regional organisational experiences in the department of Nariño. I also set up a number of interviews with leaders of the peasant organisation ANUC (Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos) in the region. These were very interesting sessions, particularly because some of the peasant leaders were critical of many of Palenque’s younger activists who, they claimed, had not learnt from past experiences, and were instead leading a closed organising process that did not open up to other members of local society. In mid-January I travelled by speedboat from Tumaco to Guapi, a journey of around seven hours over the open sea and through mangrove swamps, which allowed for a visual assessment of the area, giving me the chance of getting to know a number of villages on the way where we stopped for lunch and various other missions.

'Mi comadre Celia': my extraordinary encounter with local wisdom

In Guapi I installed myself in a large house with a lovely patio which received daily visits by two hummingbirds and a number of other tropical birds that I did not identify. I rented the house from doña Flor Yacup, who I had met and befriended in Guapi in 1996. I had initially planned to rent just one room in the house to share with her. Unfortunately doña Flor had fallen seriously ill before my arrival in Colombia, and was being looked after by her sister in Buenaventura. Tragically she was to die some four months later. On arrival in Guapi it turned out that the person who had been living in the house for the previous six months, and who was looking after it for the ill owner, was not aware of my moving in. Since the house was far too large for my sole purposes anyway, I offered her to stay in the second room. This was the beginning of a friendship of mutual respect that turned into a mother-son relationship as time progressed. Doña Celia Lucumí Caicedo also became for me a person with a tremendous amount of stories to tell, which, in the typical fashion of the region, she re-enacted with gestures, imitating voices in direct speech and breaks for dramatic effect. Doña Celia was and still is a traditional healer and mid-wife respected within the community. How far it was down to her *botellas curadas*, the cured bottles filled with a variety of balsamic herbs and *viche*, the unrefined locally produced sugarcane spirit, that I never contracted malaria I cannot say; but I certainly believed in their curative powers, so maybe my imagination was strong enough to resist the much-loathed blood-sucking anopheles mosquitoes.

Due to doña Celia's presence in the house I observed a number of traditional practices that she would effect at home, for example, the curing of the 'evil eye' (*el ojo*), a 'cultural illness' common in the region from which small children frequently suffer and which can result in the child's death. Modern medicine usually explains the child's illness as a virus accompanied by diarrhoea, which the doctors, however, are frequently unable to cure. The *curandera*, the traditional healer, treats the symptoms with a variety of magic-religious rituals including the application of specially prepared balsamic oils and prayers. The fact that many parents have seen the apparent incompetence of a doctor in the hospital and the following successful treatment of a *curandera* has contributed to the strong belief system among black populations of the existence of *el ojo* and of the healing powers of the *curandera*. Both aspects not surprisingly are rejected by modern medicine as fantasies.

In numerous conversations with doña Celia I taped and transcribed some twenty hours, in which we covered aspects of her life as a child while working in the gold mines in

the upper reaches of the river Guapi, or learning about traditional medicine from her grandmother. Doña Celia also talked at length about her various migrations, first as a young girl to Guapi, then as a woman to Buenaventura and later to Cali, before she finally returned to Guapi again. In many ways these conversations were the first-hand input into my knowledge of the region and its cultures. It was also in these conversations that I ‘unlocked’ the sense of place of the Colombian Pacific coast, and the concept of the aquatic space as a historically sedimented set of spatialised social relationships began to take on concrete forms in doña Celia’s narrative. I will draw extensively on these conversations with doña Celia in Chapter 5.

‘Leaving the field’: a return to Glasgow and the interpretation of field data

In August 1999 after having spent some five months altogether in the area around Guapi, it was time to ‘leave the field’. The various farewell ceremonies lasted a whole week, ranging from invitations to traditional meals, the *tapao*, via drinking sessions to parties and dances. The farewell of doña Celia was particularly emotional. I knew I had possibly spent another ‘time of my life’ in Guapi, and I also knew then that I would be back some day - which in fact happened in July 2000 when I visited *mi pueblo*, my village, for a week. Miller, a good friend and English teacher at San José College, took me to Guapi’s airstrip on his motorbike that Wednesday morning, and a number of friends had come along to see me off. Walking towards the aeroplane I turned around one more time and read the inscription printed in large letters on the front of the airport building: *Bienvenido al aeropuerto Julio Arboleda de Guapi* - Welcome to the airport Julio Arboleda of Guapi. I then knew that there was still something I had to do in Guapi ...⁸³

I had promised to send a report of my fieldwork results to the various organisations in Guapi, which I personally handed over on my return to Guapi in July 2000. This report had also been presented previously on a seminar during the IX. Congress of Anthropology in Colombia in the town of Popayán, held from 19 to 22 July 2000.

On my return to Glasgow I continued transcribing the numerous interviews that I had conducted and taped in Colombia, a task already begun in Bogotá, but which would still take me some three more weeks. These transcriptions and other primary data such as original documents were subjected to a discourse analysis which became one of my main

⁸³ This enigmatic remark will become clear in Chapter 6, where I reflect on the naming of Guapi’s airport after one of the region’s most brutal slave owners.

interpretative tools. I did not code the transcripts in a purely technical way, but re-read and compared the different interviews regarding their content, their context, as well as with a view to the language used in them. I quickly identified a set of easily recognisable ‘discourse patterns’, especially on the part of the movement leaders. I was not surprised to find out that, in spite of the multiple divisions and fragmentations between the different movements in Guapi, their discourses on ethnicity, territoriality and cultural rights to difference were very much the same, discourses aimed at and used in negotiations with the government and NGOs but also towards me. The interviews received a ‘mental coding’ by me, in that it was clear to me that some discourses were clearly ‘directed at me’ with a specific aim in mind, while others were ‘less interested’ in terms of thinking of immediate material benefits and were rather born out of an interest in having discussions where they perceived value in my potential collaboration (in terms of understanding certain implications of the new legislation and how to go about implementing it).

Following my methodological ‘in-the-field’ approach of ‘deep ethnography’, I will apply ‘thick description’ (Clifford 1986) in my narrative to reveal the local meanings of concepts such as the ‘aquatic space’. Assuming the writing-up process as a process which in itself is constitutive of meaning, my narrative will be one of polyvocality in that I am trying to let other voices speak through my writings by using extensive quotations, all of which I have translated. This might at times lead to some awkwardness in the English expressions, and in this way it reflects the difficulties of accurately translating local variations of Castilian Spanish on the Colombian Pacific coast amongst black populations and their precise meanings. Granda (1977), for example, found a large number of dialectal variations of Castilian Spanish in some of the rivers of the Pacific. A particularly interesting area in this context is the isolated village of Balsitas, the last settlement in the upper reaches of the river Guapi, where doña Celia was born. There a lot of localisms have survived that have not been registered or systemised until today (personal communication from Alfredo Vanín). Other interesting areas in this respect are parts of the river Timbiquí, where some French expressions have survived in the local dialects from the times of the French mining companies in the first half of this century. In my narrative I have kept the original quotes as footnotes in the text, so that the reader can compare my translations with the original. I must point out, though, that due to the richness and the large amount of imagery and particular expressions used in local areas, even a Spanish native speaker might find it hard at times to understand the original quotes.

CHAPTER 5***Meandering poetics: oral tradition as conveyor of an ‘aquatic sense of place’*****Río Guapi**

*Desde las cumbres viajas altanero,
pero esclavo en el riel de tus orillas,
desciendes hasta el mar de ondas sencillas
a tributar tu arroyo placentero.*

*Cuando estoy lejos, tierno yo te quiero,
con todo el potosí de aguas tranquilas;
con tu fauna de sábalos y anguilas
y con tus noches llenas de luceros.*

River Guapi

From the summit you travel aloof,
yet a slave to the track of your river banks,
towards the sea of plain waves you descend
paying homage with your pleasant stream.

When I am far away, tenderly I love you,
with all the fortune of calm waters;
with your fauna of perches and eels
and with your nights full of bright stars.

Guillermo Portocarrero (1995:70; my translation)

Introduction: of a desperate scientist and a local fisherman

A story in Colombia tells of a scientist who, during a whole week, observes a black fisherman who is stretched out in his hammock slung between two coconut trees on a Pacific coast beach. The scientist makes careful notes of the black man's every move, which do not seem to be many. He just rises now and again to pick up a coconut that has fallen onto the beach. With his machete he cuts the coconut open and gulps down its refreshing juice. After one week of intense observation, which lasts from 10am to 5pm, the scientist gets restless faced with the evident laziness of this fisherman who has a sea of resources in front of him without making the slightest move to catch any fish. So he finally decides to speak to the black man and to enlighten him on the enormous potential that the sea and its resources hold for him, if only he was willing to exploit them, instead of whiling away his time stretched out in his hammock. 'Look', the scientist tells the black man, 'why do you spend the entire day in your hammock, when out there the sea is full of fish that just wait for you to go and catch them?' The black man, slightly puzzled by the scientist's zeal, looks up at him and answers: 'Why would I want to catch all the fish in the sea?' The scientist, excited that the fisherman at least responded, explains: 'The more fish

you catch the more you can sell on the market, and the more money you make'. 'And what would I do with all this money?', asks the black man back. 'Well, you can then build a refrigeration storage centre and make even more profits.' The black man, still relaxed in his hammock, enquires further: 'And why would I want to do this?' The scientist, now getting slightly desperate with the seeming incomprehension of the fisherman, bursts out: 'Gosh, you can then employ other fishermen who do the fishing for you.' The black man still does not get excited over this prospect and asks again: 'Why would I want to do this?' Now the scientist almost loses his nerves. 'For heaven's sake, then you don't have to work any more, and you can spend the entire day lying in your hammock!' At this the black man smiles, and stretching out he answers: 'Well, this is what I am already doing.' The scientist looks at the object of his study, and shaking his head he leaves the beach to finish writing up his fieldwork notes, in his head already planning the layout of his upcoming publication on the lost causes of developing Colombia's black fishing communities. He was never to find out that the fisherman, whom he had observed so intensely during this week, actually rose at 2am every morning to go fishing according to the tidal rhythm, and that his working day finished at 8am when he returned from sea to rest. But this is another story.

To tell this other story we have to approach the black communities on the Colombian Pacific coast with an attitude different from this scientist's. To tell the story of fishermen who act according to the tidal rhythm of the sea; to tell the story of the multiple forms of human adaptation to the humid tropical environment of Colombia's Pacific coast; to explore the implications of these specific adaptive life forms for the organising processes of black communities today. And to tell all of these stories, I make use of the concept of the 'aquatic space' as an explanatory framework for understanding the 'place' that is the Colombian Pacific coast. By the term 'aquatic space', I mean the specific ways in which aquatic elements such as the constant physical and/or symbolic presence of the sea, intricate river networks, streams, waterfalls, mangrove swamps, as well as high levels of precipitation, significant tidal ranges and frequent large-scale inundations, have strongly influenced and shaped everyday life patterns in the region, and how these have evolved into specific sets of spatialised social relationships around the river basins of the Pacific coast.

The aquatic space is reflected in and constitutive of all three elements that make up Agnew's (1987) concept of place - location, locale, sense of place - as I apply it to the Pacific lowlands. The *location* as the geographical area of the Pacific coast is physically

constituted of tropical rainforest and criss-crossing river networks. These objective features have provided the resources through which the region has been inscribed into the economic macro-order of things: as resource base for alluvial gold mining since colonial times; for the extraction of rubber, ivory nut (*tagua*) and timber in boom-and-bust cycles typical of primary material extractive economies; for today's agro-industries such as shrimp-farming and African palm tree plantations; and most recently for interests in its allegedly rich biodiversity (see in Chapter 3 my discussion of the struggle over nature and of how Colombia's Pacific coast has been inscribed in it). The aquatic space as *locale* frames the formal and informal settings and social relationships that black communities have built over time in their adaptive responses to the aquatic environment, and how they are embodied in space following an 'aquatic logic' displayed, for example, in the settlement patterns along rivers. I will analyse the aquatic space with relation to both location and locale in Chapter 6. In this Chapter, however, I examine how the aquatic space is reflected in the *sense of place* on the Pacific coast among black populations - to the extent that we can talk of an 'aquatic sense of place' - and how the subjective feelings that are derived from living in this place are expressed in the everyday use of language and oral tradition.

I unpack the concept of place in this way for a better analytical understanding of how the aquatic space works on all these different levels from the subjective (sense of place) to the objective (location). It is important to bear in mind that all three elements interact with one another, both in practice and in theory, and that they are entangled in complex, dynamic and fluid processes that are subject to change and transformation. I should also make clear from the start that by conceptualising the everyday spatialised social relationships, water-based practices, evocations and political articulations in terms of the aquatic space, I do not intend to over-totalise the concept nor to silence the different experiences and practices that are found on the Pacific coast. In fact, all of these aquatic realities are cross-cut by various axes of difference. Not everyone in the region embraces the totality of practices, relations and evocations in the full or in the same way as I analyse them here, and I will constantly refer to these differential experiences and practices with concrete examples. Yet I consider the aquatic space a powerful explanatory tool in the conceptualisation of the 'place' that is the Colombian Pacific coast, and in the discourses and practices of the social movement of black communities that has emerged out of this place.

Structures of 'sentipensamiento' and local aquatic epistemologies

These odours of damp earth, sea, rivers, swamps, cascades, [...] odours they are of earth fertilised by the waters of Mother Yemayá, after giving birth to the Orichas, her fourteen children, in a single stormy delivery.

Zapata Olivella (1998:16-17)

The black communities on Colombia's Pacific coast are frequently considered as 'differing' from Western norms of rationalisation, in that they show no interest in capitalist accumulation or frenetic consumption (Funcop 1996:48, Arboleda 1998), and their local epistemologies are said to entail relations to time and space differing from those perceived in the West (Arocha 1999:148). This may partly explain the incapacity of the scientist in the story above to understand the black fisherman, for whom the notion of 'waste of time' has a different meaning if, indeed, it exists at all. Instead, 'tranquillity' is maybe a notion which adequately expresses the rural black relation to time:

Tranquillity forms part of the ways in which [Afrocolombians] relate to their environment and, therefore, of the creativity with which they get around the difficulties which the latter poses. (Arocha 1999:149; my translation)⁸⁴

This tranquillity is an expression of how black people in rural areas see and regard the world in which they live, and it is a constitutive part of the 'ecosofy' (*ecosofía*), the local ecological philosophies which embrace the realms of fauna and flora:

The relation that [Afro-Colombians] created with their river, their streams and forests was not only one of respect, but one of sisterhood. [...] So that [...] amongst Afro-Colombians neither plants nor animals exist *per se*, but further complemented and qualified through the word, through people's mind. (Arocha 1999:155-156, emphasis in original; my translation)⁸⁵

⁸⁴ "La tranquilidad hace parte de la forma cómo los ombligados de Ananse se relacionan con su medio y, por lo tanto, de la creatividad con la cual le salen al paso a las dificultades que éste les plantea." Arocha (1999) talks throughout his book of black people in Colombia as *ombligados de Ananse*, referring to the traditional practice of the *ombligada* amongst black people, during which pulverised substances, in some cases spider parts (Ananse) as Arocha emphasises, are applied to the belly button (*ombligo*) of the new-born. This practice is supposed to endow the new-born with the qualities of the respective substance, and here in particular with those of the spider such as shrewdness. The new-born is thus supposed to be initiated in the sisterhood of Ananse, a goddess of the fanti-ashanti people who live in the golf of Benin in Africa (Arocha 1999:13). Arocha uses this symbolism to sustain his arguments about an existing historical and cultural 'bridge' between Africa and the Americas that originated with the slave trade, and which has been conceptualised in Colombia as *huellas de Africanía*, or 'traces of Africanism' (Friedemann 1989). However, it is important to point out that relatively few Afro-Colombians are initiated with Ananse. Far more new-born are 'belly-buttoned' (*ombligados*) with other powdered substances such as gold dust (to bring wealth to the child) and herbs such as *paico*, *ruda* and *centavitos*. Arocha's attempts to link almost any socio-cultural manifestation amongst black communities to the sisterhood of the spider arguably represents more the author's zeal to defend his theories against 'new' forms of doing anthropology in Colombia (Restrepo 1996c, 1998) than a well-documented and sustained observation in the field.

⁸⁵ "La relación que los afrobaudoseños crearon con su río, sus quebradas y selvas no sólo era de respeto, sino de hermandad. [...] Así pues [...] entre los afrocolombianos ni las plantas ni los animales existen *per se*, sino adicionados, complementados y cualificados mediante la palabra, por la mente de las personas."

The river as constant reference point, both in its physical material presence and as a source of people's creative imaginations and mythological constructions, is central to local ways of knowing the world, or to what I term 'local aquatic epistemologies'. These water-based ecosophical relations are not only expressed in words but are frequently articulated in what Bateson (1972) refers to as 'discourses of non-verbal communication', which develop as specialised instruments in the expression of people's emotions and their relations with each other and with the environment. Since "body-language preceded the word" (Zapata Olivella 2000:8), the sense of place is not only revealed in the spoken word, but also in gestures, dance, music, rituals and so on. My examination of the sense of place on the Colombian Pacific coast has taken all of these manifestations into consideration, even if here, in my narrative, I largely rely on the spoken words of my informants.

The local epistemologies of black people in the Colombian Pacific can maybe best be understood as forms of *sentipensamiento* (Fals Borda 1978): the ways in which feelings and emotions (*sentir*) and thinking and reason (*pensar*) amalgamate into a culturally and place-specific logic which often defies Western ways of reasoning, and which is therefore often regarded and treated as superstitious and/or magic. Arocha (1999:142-147) regards the funeral rites of black communities on the Pacific coast as the synthesis of the Afro-American *sentipensamiento*; for example, the death wakes (*velorios*) in which the dead person is accompanied by yearning chants (*alabaos*), or by playful songs (*arrullos*) in the case of the *chigualo*, when the dead person is a young child under seven years of age (*angelito*). In these and other manifestations, soul and body, reason and heart, so radically separated in Western thought, become one:

Why does one write, if not to join one's pieces? From the moment we enter school or church, education tears us apart: it teaches us to divorce soul from body, and reason from the heart. Wise doctors of ethics and morality must be the fishermen of the Colombian coast who invented the word *sentipensante* in order to define the language that speaks the truth. (Galeano 1996:107, emphasis in original; my translation)⁸⁶

The implications of these considerations for social movement research are clear: if we intend to represent (*darstellen*) the movements with the 'language that speaks the truth',

⁸⁶ "¿Para qué escribe uno, si no es para juntar sus pedazos? Desde que entramos en la escuela o la iglesia, la educación nos descuarta: nos enseña a divorciar el alma del cuerpo y la razón del corazón. Sabios doctores de ética y moral han de ser los pescadores de la costa colombiana, que inventaron la palabra *sentipensante* para definir el lenguaje que dice la verdad."

without hiding behind some anxious postmodern insecurity over if such a thing - the truth - exists or not, then we must perceive, understand and somehow represent the local epistemologies, the ones that speak the truth from the local point of view. I will begin by diving into the local aquatic epistemologies of black communities on the Colombian Pacific coast, which were revealed to me by two of the region's *sabios* who so generously gave me access to their *sentipensamiento* and to their discourses of non-verbal communication. The local voices act in this narrative as personal keys to unlock a more analytical understanding of the sense of place.

*Doña Celia Lucumí Caicedo and the rivers of her Pacific*⁸⁷

I was born in Balsitas, in the upper parts of the river Guapi, three streets below the village of Balsitas, in a place called La Corriente. I was still a little girl when my mother used to send me to Balsitas to run an errand. Not being able to swim. No, I didn't know how to swim. When the current came, I took my little dugout canoe, and chee, chee, chee [sound of feet splashing in the water], on foot, I took it up to the top of the current. Then I sat down in my canoe, and cheem, cheem, cheem [sound of paddle in the water], that's how I went up all three currents. Because they were only three. The one near the house was street, street, street, until one got to another street.⁸⁸ And then there was a little stream, but not a strong current. From there I went up on the right side, and when I was already quite high up, poom, I crouched down where the feet usually are. Little devil since small, smart, but I didn't know how to swim. But my mother wasn't afraid that I wasn't able to swim. That I could perhaps wrongly place the paddle and turn over in the water. That's how I got to Balsitas. [...] In Balsitas I went to the already deceased Joaquín Ledesma, father of Andelmo Ledesma. Who was a good friend of my father and my mother. My mother put some things into a handkerchief. And then she sent the paper to the late Joaquín. Then I took the paper of the late Joaquín and put it there. Then he put it in my bag and said: "Take this, my child, take it to Mrs. Lucha. And tell Mrs Lucha not to send you anymore, because you cannot swim. Sit down, child, you hear me!" There, comfortable and well sent I was, I put my things in the prow of the canoe, and then I took my little paddle and proom, I sat down on the bottom of the canoe. [laughing] Look, when one is growing up, hmm ...

⁸⁷ The following quotes in italics in this section were recorded in interviews with doña Celia Lucumí Caicedo between March and July 1999 in Guapi. All quotes are my translations, and the original quotes are footnoted.

⁸⁸ The notion of 'street' (*calle*) needs an explanation here. In the rural areas of the Colombian Pacific there are few streets, simply because the humid, often inundated environment with its myriad of rivers and smaller streams is highly inappropriate for the construction of roads or streets. If Afro-Colombians talk about streets in this environment, it can be argued that they effectively 'urbanise' their rivers by applying an urban logic and urban descriptive parameters to a rural landscape. What they measure with the denomination 'street' is the distance between two points on a straight line when looking ahead along a river. This line finishes at a river bend, where again one looks ahead on a straight line to the next river bend. The distance between these visible reference points is measured in streets. So when doña Celia talks about travelling three streets upstream, this means navigating some three river bends before reaching her destination. The measure street is a flexible measurement as the metric distance between river bends changes. Measuring distances in streets is a local reference, therefore, and assumes that one knows the river and the river section in question. It is a specific characteristic of the local aquatic epistemologies of black communities on the Colombian Pacific coast.

*And now, pay attention, I arrived home faster than running the errand. When my mum thought that I was just arriving at Balsitas I was already back home. So I arrived and gave her what I had. I arrived and told her: "Mum, the day you go to Balsitas, you should go and see don Joaquín." Because I told her what he had asked me to. "The day you go to Balsitas you should go and see don Joaco."*⁸⁹

Some say that black children in the rural areas of the Pacific coast move around in small dugout canoes well before they actually learn how to walk on their feet. The river along which they inevitably live is not just the place where they play, it is also the main road that connects with neighbours and relatives who live further along the same river or along the banks of a tributary. From an early age, children are incorporated into adult life. The girls help their mothers in the household, wash clothes, clean dishes, and look after their smaller brothers and sisters, while the boys go fishing to supplement the family's meals. Doña Celia, like many other young girls, also worked alongside her mother and grandmother in the gold mines, panning sands and gravel in her *batea*, when she was only eight years old.⁹⁰ And, as doña Celia tells us here, her mother used her as a kind of 'fluvial messenger' to send information or goods to friends, neighbours and relatives. The river in this context functions as the main road that little Celia had to navigate, an action in which she acquired considerable skill.

⁸⁹ "Nací en Balsitas, Guapi arriba, tres calles abajo del pueblo de Balsitas, en un punto que se llama La Corriente. Estaba yo muchacha cuando mi mamá me mandaba a Balsitas a hacer mandados. Sin saber bañar. No sabía bañar, no. Cuando llegaba la corriente, cogía mi potrillo, y chi, chi, chi, a pie, así lo subía al cabezón de la corriente. Así me embarcaba, y chim, chim, chim, así me subía todas las tres corrientes. Porque tres no más eran. La de allí que uno cogía de la casa era allí calle, calle, calle, hasta que llegaba a otra calle. Y que tenía después un regaderito, pero no corriente maternal. De allí me iba subiendo por este lado derecho, y a cuando ya llegaba bastante arriba, pum, y me acostaba al lado de los pies. Diablita desde chiquita, sabida, pero que no sabía bañar. Pero que mi mamá no tenía ese temor que yo no sabía bañar. Que de pronto podía meter la palanca mal metida y podía dar carambolas al agua. Así hasta que llegaba a Balsitas. [...] Llegaba a Balsitas andel finado Joaquín Ledesma, el papá de Andelmo Ledesma. Que era muy de amigo con mi papá y mi mamá. Cogía mi mamá, y en un pañuelo, amarraba alguna cosa. Ahora sí, le mandaba el papelito al finado Joaquín. Ahora sí, cogí el papelito del finado Joaquín, ponía allí tal cosa, y tal cosa. Y ahora sí, lo echaba en mi talega y me decía: "Tenga, hija, llévale a Misia Lucha. Y dígame a Misia Lucha que no la mande, que Usted no sabe bañar. Siéntese, oyó, hija!" Allí como'ita y bien manda'ita llegaba yo, ponía mis cosas en la proa del potro, y ahora sí, cogía mi canaletico y prum, me sentaba al plan del potro. [laughing] Vea, uno cuando se está criando, oyó ... Y ahora sí, póngalo cuidado, hasta que llegaba a la casa, más rápido que hacía los mandados. Cuando mi mamá creía que yo iba llegando a Balsitas, era cuando iba llegando allí a la casa. Ahora sí, llegaba y le entregaba. Llegaba y le decía: "Mamá, a Don Joaquín, que el día que suba pa' Balsitas, que se vean, oyó." Porque yo le avisaba la razón que él le mandaba. "A Don Joaco, que el día que suba pa' Balsitas que se vean'."

⁹⁰ A *batea* is a round, shallow bowl carved out of wood, the diameter of which varies between 50 and 90 centimetres. It is used in traditional placer gold mining on the Colombian Pacific coast to wash the auriferous sands and gravel, and the *jagua*, a black concentrate consisting of a mixture of tiny flakes of heavy magnetic iron oxide, ilmenite, and gold dust. This activity is usually performed by women and small girls, the *bateadoras*. As West (1952:72) suggests, the word *batea* is of Carib origin which indicates that it is an indian instrument. See also the monograph by West (1952) for a detailed description on *Colonial Placer Mining in Colombia*.



Doña Celia Lucumí Caicedo; Guapi, April 1999



A 'fluvial messenger': little girl in *potrillo* (dugout canoe); river Guapi

Celia, the fluvial messenger on her aquatic road to the upper reaches of the river Guapi, remembers:

One day something happened. My mother liked her bad habits more than anyone. She didn't take the pipe out of her mouth. When we were eating, and I hadn't finished yet, she had already her second pipe lit. And big pipes these were, because the tobacco which she put in was a piece this big, sticking out of the pipe. [laughing] And she smoked this, and immediately, chac, the next one. And it so happened that she ran out of tobacco, yes, she was without tobacco. And it was pouring down with rain, thunder and lightning. Ay, my brother, it was still light, around six o'clock in the afternoon, when my dad gave her a big piece of tobacco, because my dad had less of a bad habit. He smoked, well, when he remembered to. And he gave her a piece of tobacco. And still being day, my mum, my saintly mother, who is forgotten on this earth, but I always remember her. When it was seven o'clock at night, and my mum realised that she would be without tobacco during the night: "Alejandra, and Celia, get dressed and go and buy me some tobacco in Balsitas!" The waning moon seemed to swallow us up. And we couldn't say, "we're not going to the river". It was raining cats and dogs. And lightning that seemed to strike us, and thunder crashing. [laughing] As good as I could, I threw myself into the prow of the canoe, I wasn't that small anymore, I had already small tits. And then, pum, pum, pum [sound of paddle in the water], I was just accompanying her. Pum, pum, pum, till we got to Balsitas.⁹¹

From an early age Celia learnt to move around the aquatic space, where the only means of transport was the river, where it frequently and heavily rained, and where her whole life evolved around the river Guapi and the surrounding forest.⁹² Helping in the household also meant looking after her grandfather, who was living nearby separated from Celia's grandmother:

So it happened that my mother sent me to my granddad Juan Gregorio. To take to him these things which she prepared. I arrived, took these things, took my little canoe, and I left. I arrived there, greeted my grandfather in the name of God,⁹³ and then he came, gave me his blessing, and I told him, "Granddad, here, my mum sends this for you." He was a fisherman

⁹¹ "Sucedió una mano. Mi mamá era más viciosa que lo que no había. La cachimba no la sacaba de la boca. Sólo cuando ella estaba por comer, yo no acabé de comer, ya iban dos cachimbadas de tabaco. Pero señoras cachimbas, porque el trozo que le echaba era un trozo así, así afuera de la cachimba. [riéndose] Y fumaba esa, allí mesmo, taquí, la otra. Y sucedió que estaba sin tabaco, sí, sin tabaco. Y había UN aguacero, UNA tronamenta, un relámpago. Ay hermanito mío, 'tando del día, cuando se iniciaron las seis de la tarde, le pasó mi papá un pedazo de tabaco así, porque mi papá era más menos vicioso. Él fumaba así, pues, cuando se acordaba. Y le pasó un pedazo de tabaco. Y 'tando de día, mi mamá, mi Santa madre, que está olvidada de esta tierra, pero yo siempre me acuerdo de ella. Cuando se dijeron las siete de la noche, y que mi mamá, vido cierto que se iba oscureciendo sin tabaco: "Alejandra, con Celia, se acomodan ligerito y me van a comprar un tabaco a Balsitas!" Una manguante que parecía a uno lo borra. Y eso no era para nosotros decir, 'no vamos al río'. Va aguacero a chuzo. Va relámpago que raya, va trueno que revienta. [riéndose] Yo, hermanito, como pude me eché a la proa, ya estaba grande, ya estaba con teticas así. Ahora sí, pam, pam, pam, yo apenas era por acompañarla. Pam, pam, pam, hasta que llegamos a Balsitas."

⁹² No data on precipitation exists for the area around Balsitas, but in accord with similar areas in the coastal zone of the Cauca department at a similar distance from the sea, we can assume that rainfall in Balsitas averages some 5,000 to 6,000 mm per year.

⁹³ It is common among black people, also in urban areas, to greet older relatives such as parents, uncles or grandparents by 'giving them a greeting in the name of God' (*dar en nombre de Dios*), as an expression of respect.

catching mojarra [a common perch-like river fish]. Many a time at lunchtime when I brought him his lunch, I found him sitting there on a beach. There he caught mojarra, he caught sábalo, he caught a round sabaleta [other common river fish] like this. They grow as big as this [measuring the fish against her arm], but it is delicious this sabaleta. And maybe he had caught already two fish, two sábalos, and two sabaletas. And then he told me, "Take it up to my house!" And I took the lunch I had brought him up to his house, and then I returned with a container to take the fish he had caught. My grandad Juan Gregorio, the father of my father. It was he who fished. [...] That was custom then. He loved my mother, and she also came to love him, so my mother cooked the food at home and sent it to his house with us. We lived one street apart, for example, we lived here in this street. And in the street above lived my grandfather.⁹⁴ Around the corner. One had to take the canoe. There was no path. Where we lived, it was all very steep. And over there on the other side it was all cultivated fields. And I tell you, when my grandad had already caught some fish, "Look, my child, take this fish, there in the basket, and take it to your mum." This fish went to my mum. I arrived, and immediately she prepared the fish. If it was midday, she prepared the meal, and again sent it to my grandfather. I was a little girl when she prepared this fish. And I also went to my grandmother, taking food to her too, to my grandmother Juana María. Well, my grandmother lived further away, she lived much higher up with her other sons. She came down to my mother only occasionally. Because my grandfathers, I knew them all divorced from their women.⁹⁵

Celia in her function as the fluvial messenger also acted as the connection between the different family members who could live in places quite dispersed along the river banks. She had a happy childhood, spending time with her grandfather watching him while he was fishing, and with her grandmother in the gold mines or in her house observing her when she prepared infusions of medicinal herbs to alleviate illnesses. The latter was to be of help to Celia when, later in her life, Felix, her second son, fell seriously ill with what she diagnosed as 'the evil eye' (*el ojo*), a 'cultural illness' amongst black communities

⁹⁴ See footnote 88 above on the use of the term 'street' in this aquatic context.

⁹⁵ "Entonces, sucedía que mi mamá me mandaba adonde mi abuelo Juan Gregorio. A traerle estas cosas que encontraba ella. Llegaba yo, cogía esas cosas, cogía mi potrillito, y me iba. Llegaba allá, le daba en nombre de Dios a mi abuelo, ahora sí, llegaba, me echaba su bendición, y yo le decía, "Abuelo, aquí le manda mi mamita." Él era pescador de mojarra. Muchas veces cuando era hora de almuerzo que yo le llevaba su comida, le topaba sentado allí en una playa. Allí cogía mojarra, cogía sábalo, cogía una sabaleta redonda que es así. Y ya había cogido, sea posible, dos machos, dos sábalos, y dos sabaletas. Ahora sí me decía, "Súbalo pa' encima de la casa mía". Y subía yo con ese almuerzo que le llevaba, ahora sí, bajaba con un envase, pa' subí el pescao él había cogido. Mi abuelo Juan Gregorio, el papá de mi papá. Él era que pescaba. [...] Eso era costumbre pues. Tanto él la quería a mi mamá, y ella lo llegó a querer a él, entonces mi mamá hacía la comida en la casa, y con nosotros se la mandaba ahí a la casa de él. Vivíamos de calle, por ejemplo [*sic*], nosotros vivíamos aquí en esta calle. Y en la calle arriba vivía mi abuelo. En la vuelta. Tocaba ir en potrillo. No había camino. Por este lado donde vivíamos nosotros todo era loma. Por allá por el otro lado, pues, era rastrojo. Y le digo, que ya cogía mi abuelo, "Vea mijita, coja el pescado, ahí en el canasto y llévese allá a su mamá". Ese pescado iba pa' donde mi mamá. Llegaba, no más que arreglaba ese pescao. Si era de mediodía, ahora sí hacían merienda, y le mandaba otra vez a mi abuelo. Así es que yo era una sardinita cuando quedaba ella arreglando ese pescado allí, y iba yo donde mi abuela, iba llevando a mi abuela Juana María. Bueno, mi abuela ya me esperaba más dispersa, vivía arriba bastante, donde los otros hijos. Ella bajaba ande mi mamá por turno. Porque yo a mis abuelos toditos los conocí divorciados de las mujeres."

frequently suffered by young children and babies. The evil eye is traditionally healed with infusions of various medicinal herbs and prayers:

My son Felix was three months old. He could just about sit upright. And I went to the upper reaches of the river Guapi to a stream which is called Calle Honda [Deep Street], and they threw an evil eye on my son, ay, I hadn't learnt a thing yet. But I had the wisdom, from listening to the conversations of the old folks, but I hadn't done anything like this. Till, damn it, there was a certain Juan Eugenio, and he knew how to cure the evil eye and espanto ['fear', another cultural illness]. So I went upstream. He lived sort of on this side, and we lived sort of over there. I told him, "Compadre Juan Eugenio!", he was the husband of an aunt of mine, "Compadre Juan Eugenio, do me a favour!", and I landed at the river bank.⁹⁶ "Please, cure my boy of the evil eye, he is ill with a fever that doesn't go down." "I'm going river upstream to see a girl of the comadre Polenia" [doña Celia imitates the voice of an old man here]. Another woman who lives further upstream. "OK, when you come down again, come in to see us, to have a look at my boy, maybe he has the evil eye, maybe not. I haven't got the money to pay. But if you travel, you will come across the father, you know the father. And I know that he will pay you. Because he is a responsible man. He is not one of those irresponsible men", I told him. The man did not listen to me. He passed by downstream, and did not stop at my house to do me the favour.⁹⁷

Facing this dilemma, Celia had no other alternative than to try out the knowledges which she had acquired by observing her grandmother and her mother practising traditional healing methods. The way down the river towards the hospital in Guapi was too long, and Celia did not have the money anyway for her son to be attended there. So she started preparing a medicinal infusion, rubbed her son with it, and said the necessary prayers:

Finally, the next day I gave him the other two rubbings, and the other two infusions. And since then always with my son, because that man had played a bad trick on me. Well, I say bad trick. But he made me remember the knowledge that I had learnt. And ever since then it was healing espanto, healing evil eye, healing espanto, healing evil eye, right up to

⁹⁶ *Compadre* and *comadre* literally mean godfather and godmother. Among Afro-Colombians there are strong links and responsibilities attached to their function with regard to their godson or goddaughter. Yet, people are also addressed as *compadre* or *comadre* if the person is a relative in the sense of the extended family, which is the case here in Celia's account. The expression can also be used to establish a strong mutual relation of trust and friendship which inevitably carries with it responsibilities one to another. This was, for example, the case between doña Celia and myself, when we came to address each other as *compadre* and *comadre* respectively.

⁹⁷ "Llevaba mi hijo Felix tres mesecitos de nacido. Recién lo iba sentando. Y me fui pa' Guapi arriba a una quebrada que se llama Calle Honda, y me le pegaron un ojo al muchacho, ay, yo no había aprendido nada todavía. Pero tenía el sábito, de que a oír conversando rato a los viejos, pero yo no nunca me ha dado puesto. Hasta que, caramba, hay un señor que se llamaba Juan Eugenio, y él sabía curar ojo y espanto. De allí, yo iba subiendo pa'rriba. Él vivía como a este lado, y nosotros vivíamos como al lado de allá. Le dije yo, "Compadre Juan Eugenio", era marido de una tía mía, "Compadre Juan Eugenio, ¡haga el favor!", y arrimo. "¡Hágame el favor! Cúrame el ojo al niño, que lo tengo enfermo con una fiebre que no me le baja". "Yo voy pa'rriba a ver una niña a la comadre Polenia". A otra mujer más pa'rriba. "Sí señor. De bajada pues arrima, pa' que me lo vea, puede ser que tiene o no tiene. Que yo no tengo la plata. Pero Usted, si viaja, va de topar con el papá, que Usted conoce el papá quien es. Y yo sé que se lo paga. Porque es un hombre responsable. No es de esos hombres irresponsables", le dije yo. El hombre no me hizo escarbón. Bajó, su camino derecho, y no arrimó a la casa a hacerme el favor."

today, you see. And here it so happened that I healed that man's grandchildren - such is life [laughing].⁹⁸

Such is life, and such life in the Colombian Pacific meanders along the rivers, the fluvial thoroughfares of the tropics, to which black people are attached, not only physically by their settlement and communication patterns, but also emotionally as they create a sense of belonging and a particular aquatic sense of place. A close and intimate relationship between the individual and the river exists, in which the river is a central point of reference in identity formation and everyday discursive practices of black communities. As West had already observed in 1957:

People living on a given river consider themselves as a single community. [...] Negroes and mixed bloods speak of 'nuestro río', or mention, for example, that 'somos del Río Guapi', or 'somos Guapiseños' [*sic*], indicating their social attachment to a given river. (West 1957:88)

The river is hence the most immediate geographical reference for the people of the Colombian Pacific coast. Rather than referring to the name of a particular settlement or village, when being asked about their place of origin, Afro-Colombians name the particular river whose banks they inhabit:

If someone asks him, 'Where are you from?', then he says, 'I am from the river Chagüí', here in Nariño, or 'I am from the river Saija', in the Cauca department. Rather than talking of his village, first is the river.

(interview with Alfredo Vanín, Tumaco, 19 April 1996; my translation)⁹⁹

The rivers are hence the places out of which individuals emerge in the Pacific and in which they submerge again when the time has come for the final voyage, returning in body if possible, but always in spirit, to the river of origin the moment that death approaches. Such was doña Celia's imaginative journey when some years back she suffered from a high fever and felt that the time had come for her body to leave this life. She returned to her river, to her origin, in her imagination, and her life was coming full circle:

There I went to all the places of my river where I grew up. I was walking them the very moment as I was dying.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ "Totalmente, que al otro día le di los otros dos sobijos, y las otras dos tomas. Y dende allí con mi hijo, porque el tipo me hizo la mala jugada. Pero, digo yo, que fue mala jugada. Me dio por un saber. Me hizo recordar de un saber que yo había aprendido. Dende allí fue cura espanto, cura ojo, cura espanto, cura ojo, hasta hoy día, oyó. Y acá me ha tocado curarles a los nietos de él – así es la vida."

⁹⁹ "Si alguien le pregunta, '¿Dedónde eres tú?', dice, 'yo soy del río Chagüí', aquí en Nariño, o 'yo soy del río Saija', en el Cauca. Más que hablar de su pueblo, primero es el río."

¹⁰⁰ "Allí me fui a todos los puntos de mi río donde yo me crié. Los estuve caminando en ese instante que me morí."

*Don Agapito Montaña [q.e.p.d.], illiterate poet of Pacific rivers, far-away journeys and nostalgic farewells*¹⁰¹

The death of one of those old men is what the conflagration of a library of thinkers and poets would be to you.

*Sabato (1998:23; my translation)*¹⁰²

The attachment to a particular river of origin remains with the individual person for life, no matter if one leaves the river temporarily to migrate to other parts of the Pacific or indeed to the large cities in the interior of the country. Don Agapito Montaña was living in the town of Guapi when I met him in 1996.¹⁰³ Native of the river Guajuí (Figure 5.1), where he still had lands that he cultivated, he obviously did not forget his river:

*I am guapireño [from the river Guapi]. One changes. Temporarily or the terrain. Well, this is a change in terrain. Obviously I don't forget my river. There I cultivated plantain and made a living, because it is a river of much food. I killed a lot of rabbits there, sábalo [a common river fish], all these things. Well, I went, when I was young and healthy, to make a living there. A lot of rabbits, ay. I killed up to twelve rabbits in one night there in Guajuí. With my shotgun. At night. Bang. [...] And we cultivated plantain, rice, maize, coconut. There were large rice hulling machines here. Ships loaded with rice left from here to Buenaventura. Eggs, hens, all of this left from here. These days nothing leaves from here anymore.*¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ The quotes in italics and all poems in this section were recorded in interviews with don Agapito Montaña between 18 and 23 April 1996 in Guapi. All English versions here are my translations, the original quotes are footnoted, and the poems appear in both Spanish and English in the main text.

¹⁰² “La muerte de uno de esos ancianos es lo que para Ustedes sería el incendio de una biblioteca de pensadores y poetas.”

¹⁰³ Don Agapito Montaña was a *decimero*, a poet of the oral traditions of black people in the Pacific, well-known and respected not only locally but mentioned in anthologies (Pedrosa & Vanín 1994:13). He died in January 1998. He took with him an enormous wealth of *décimas*, poems, stories, and local wisdom, before locals, historians, anthropologists, linguists or leaders of black organisations, who so loudly and rightly call for the need to recuperate the collective cultural memories of black communities in the Pacific, took up tape recorder and pen to pay don Agapito a visit and record his life story and his *décimas*. I only managed to record a fraction of his oral poetry, and so don Agapito remains, together with so many others, one of the great unedited poets of the Colombian Pacific coast.

¹⁰⁴ “Yo soy guapireño. Uno cambia. Lo temporalmente o lo, el terreno. Bueno, eso es un cambio de terreno. Claro que yo, a mi río no lo olvido. Allá yo iba a sembrar plátano y a buscar la vida también, porque es un río de mucha comida. Y mataba muchos conejos, allá, sábalo, todas estas cosas. Entonces yo iba, cuando estaba alentado, a buscar la vida allá. Muchos conejos, ay. Mataba hasta 12 conejos en la noche allá en Guajuí. Con la escopeta. Por la noche. Bang. [...] Y se sembraba plátano, arroz, maíz, coco. Aquí habían grandes depiladores. De aquí salían los barcos cargados de arroz para Buenaventura. Huevo, gallina, todo salía de aquí. Hoy en día ya no sale nada de aquí.”

The town of Buenaventura, which translates into English as ‘good adventure’ (*buen aventura*) or as ‘good luck’ (*buena ventura*), is the largest port on the Pacific coast with a population of some 350,000. It is connected by road to Cali in the interior of the country, which can be reached in two to three hours. Furthermore, cargo ships operate between Buenaventura and Guapi, a journey of some twelve hours by sea. Black people on the Southern Pacific coast have traditionally regarded Buenaventura as the gateway to the interior of Colombia and to the rest of the world. It is not only its immediate function as the largest port on the Pacific coast, which creates its obvious interests in terms of diversion and city life; more than this, it is its imaginary function as the stepping stone to the rest of the world, to other life forms and to other cultures, which catches the imagination of Afro-Colombians. Cargo vessels leave from Buenaventura to neighbouring Panama and to the United States, nurturing distinctively strong images of the ‘American Dream’ amongst young Afro-Colombians.¹⁰⁵ As don Agapito explains:

*Every man must have been in Buenaventura. One goes to Cali, goes to Medellín, goes to the United States, he has to have been in Buenaventura. It's a sea port.*¹⁰⁶

And so the port of Buenaventura is also referred to in innumerable poems:

*El puerto de Buenaventura,
un puerto bien venturoso,
donde apegan los navíos
y los hombres de reposo.*

The port of Buenaventura,
a very fortunate port,
where vessels land
and men relax.

*El puerto de Buenaventura,
¿cuándo estaremos allá?
Viendo muchachas bonitas
que bajan del Anchicayá.*

The port of Buenaventura,
when will we be there?
To see beautiful girls
who descend from the Anchicayá.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Many black men try to embark illegally on one of the cargo vessels that leave Buenaventura in the hope of reaching the shores of the United States that way. These illegal passengers, known as *polizontes*, when found in their hiding places on the vessel, are often simply thrown over board by a ruthless crew. This practice is said to be particularly popular on Korean and Philippine vessels. Nevertheless, some of the *polizontes* reach the US in this way and manage to survive there, although rarely in the ways that they had dreamt before. The occasional letters sent back home, together with money and often suggestively posing photographs, contribute to the myth of the American Dream being constantly reproduced back home in Buenaventura. A neighbour of my girlfriend's family had made it to the US as *polizonte*. One day his mother back home in Cali walked around the neighbourhood proudly displaying a letter that her son, now supposedly successful in the United States, had sent her. In a photo that he had included he could be seen sitting inside a wardrobe full of fancy suits, shirts and countless pairs of shoes. His hand-written caption on the back of the photo read: ‘I can't decide what to wear today!’

¹⁰⁶ “Todo hombre tiene que haber estado por Buenaventura. Va pa' Cali, va pa' Medellín, va pa' Estados Unidos, tiene que haber estado en Buenaventura. E' un puerto marítimo.”

¹⁰⁷ The Anchicayá is a river immediately south of the town of Buenaventura.

When don Agapito says in the above quote, that “these days nothing leaves from here anymore”, he makes reference to the fact that agricultural productivity in the area around Guapi has drastically declined over the last thirty years. Whereas in the 1950s and 1960s agricultural products such as rice, plantains and bananas were exported to Buenaventura, Guapi now imports these very products, a tendency linked to the large scale introduction of coconut cultivation encouraged in the 1960s by INCORA, the Colombian Institute of Agrarian Reform, which led to a decline of subsistence agriculture in the region. The failure of the coconut as a viable export commodity, linked to the lack of an efficient commercialisation system and the disastrous effect of a plague known locally as *anillo rojo*, meant that local peasants were unable to repay INCORA the credits that they had received, and thus fell into debt with the institution. Moreover, they had lost food self-sufficiency, now having to import and to buy the very agricultural products which before 1960 they cultivated themselves.

The relation to land is central in the local epistemologies, where the lands of any one farmer can be quite dispersed at times, as they have been handed down from one generation to another:

This land of mine, it's from my ancestors, from my grandfather and my great-grandfather. In fact, I have some land which is from my great-grandfathers. My grandfather worked there, my father worked there, and now I am working it. That's how things are. And there I am going to die, and onwards it goes to the next generation.

Question: How much land do you have?

Well, since it is not measured ...

Question: Well, in how many places do you have land?

*I have lands along a small stream called La Plata. Well, in two parts. This land, I received from my mother-in-law, the wife's mother. We took the land in La Plata, and we worked it. The land in Guajuí is from my father's side. Here in Penitente I have large plots of land, from my mother's side. Through heritage as they say. I have in Guajuí. I have in Quiroga. But they have not been titled, like today. And there weren't any problems. Because one *feels* [emphasis in speech] that this land here is mine and then comes another person to title it, how am I going to allow this? Because now they only respect titles here. What is titled is respected more. But it is only now that they don't respect those without title. Before the old folks respected each other. For example, I was going to work here. And you over there. We put this post over there as limit. And I got to my side of the post, and I cleared my side, and you cleared yours. And everybody accepted this. But today not any more. Today they only respect titles.¹⁰⁸*

¹⁰⁸ “Esa tierra mía como la han tomado los viejos antecedentes, mi abuelo, mi bisabuelo. Realmente yo tengo una tierra que es de mis bisabuelos. Allí trabajó mi abuelo, trabajó mi papá, y ahora estoy trabajando yo. Es así. Y allí yo me muero y ya pa' otra generación.

¿Cuánta tierra tiene Usted?

No, pues, como no está medido...

Pues, ¿en cuántas partes tiene tierra?

Don Agapito hints at the changing land property relations that are currently negotiated on the Pacific coast. Amongst black communities the lands have traditionally been passed down from generation to generation, and few people have land titles legally inscribed in the municipal notary's office. Demarcation of the land takes the form of natural boundaries (*linderos* or *mojones*), such as certain trees, streams or rocks:

Although the land was not titled, we knew the boundaries. Although there are no fences. Natural boundaries are the fences. As they say, the peach palm, the breadfruit tree; these are the references. A small stream, these are the references. To draw boundaries.

*(interview with Raquel Portocarrera, Guapi, 27 April 1996; my translation)*¹⁰⁹

These boundaries are highly respected within the community, and the land is marked in the oral tradition such that knowledge of possession of one's land is passed on by showing someone around, indicating and pointing out:

When my grandfather had died, and I was tiny then, when then the very community told me, 'from this pumpkin to there is yours, because it was your grandfather's', and no-one crosses from there to here, no-one trespasses. This is sacred and was respected. Well, it was like land titles, you see. But it was like this, visible, it was a tree, a ditch, an opening in the land, something like that, and it was highly respected, this was sacred.

*(interview with Teófila Betancourt, Guapi, 23 April 1996; my translation)*¹¹⁰

These patterns of traditional land ownership and use, however, were ignored and made invisible by a legislation from 1959, which declared the rural untitled lands in the Pacific as *tierras baldías* (Villa 1998:436) or unoccupied state-owned public lands. This enabled the central government to increase the number of concessions handed out to companies that wanted to exploit the natural resources of the Pacific. In particular sawmill owners increasingly appropriated territories that traditionally had belonged to black communities,

Yo tengo una tierra en una quebrada que se llama La Plata. Pues, en dos partes. Esta tierra, yo la conseguí, eso fue por cuenta de la suegra, la mamá de la mujer. Lo de La Plata cogíamos, monteábamos. Lo de Guajuí, es por parte del padre. Aquí en Penitente tengo grandes terrenos, por cuenta de la mamá. Por herencia, que dicen. Tengo en Guajuí. Tengo en Quiroga. Pero no han sido tituladas, como ahora. Y no había problemas. Porque, uno por ejemplo, siente que ese terreno aquí es mío, y viene otra persona a titularlo, yo, ¿cuándo lo voy a dejar? Porque aquí respetan no más que los títulos. Lo que está titulado se respeta más. Pero es ahora que irrespetan los sin títulos. Y antes sí los viejos se respetaban entre ellos. Por ejemplo, yo iba trabajando por aquí. Usted trabaja por allá. Poníamos ese palo, ese poste, que es por allá, lo poníamos de lindero. Y yo llegaba al lado de mi poste, yo limpiaba mi lado y Usted lo suyo. Y todos lo aceptaron. Pero hoy en día no. Hoy en día respetan los títulos.”

¹⁰⁹ “Aunque la tierra no fuera titulada conocíamos los límites. Aunque no haya cercas. Las cercas las dan mojones naturales. Como quien dice, la palma de chontaduro, el árbol de pan; esos son las referentes, la quebrada tal, eso son las referentes. Para limitar.”

¹¹⁰ “Cuando se había muerto mi tatarabuelo, y yo me quedaba muy pequeñita, cuando entonces la misma comunidad me dice, ‘de este calabazo hacia allá es tuyo, porque era de tu abuelo’, y nadie se pasa de allí para acá, nadie se pasa. Eso es sagrado y era respetado. Era como una titulera, pues. Pero era así, visible, era con un árbol, una zanja, una apertura de tierra, algo así, y era demasiado respetado, eso era sagrado.”

and territorial conflicts ensued. The new Constitution of 1991, however, guarantees collective territorial rights for black communities on these *tierras baldías* in the Pacific. I will analyse these processes in detail in Chapters 7 and 8. Suffice it to state here that the sense of place, as revealed through the oral tradition, tells us about the specific traditional land property relations and local history that current land titling processes and procedures draw and depend upon to legalise the collective territories for black communities. The oral tradition as a container of local history is mobilised in political processes that seek recognition of a differential space in the Pacific that has so far been made and held invisible by dominant representations of space and state legislation.

An important vehicle in the reproduction of oral tradition, and one of the outstanding characteristics of its continued practice in the Pacific, is the *décima*:¹¹¹

There is no doubt that the *décima* is the most important poetic structure in the Pacific. [...] The *decimero* works with history or with the everyday life, with the specific or with the symbolic. The themes are around the ‘divine’ (religious aspects) or around the ‘human’. [...] The *décimas* ‘around the human’ deal with disputes, with the rules of generational and interpersonal relations, with seduction, stories of historical events, tales, social critique and protest. [...] The *decimeros* are in a certain way a kind of collective conscience, critics and historians of local, national and sometimes international events, tale-tellers and praisers of love, loss of love, of fortune and setbacks of fortunes. (Pedrosa & Vanín 1994:12; my translation)¹¹²

With all of these characteristics, the *decimeros* are the vibrating sources of collective memories, of local history and aquatic epistemologies. In fact, they are the voices of the sense of place.

A prominent feature in a ‘migrant society’ such as the rural black populations on the Pacific coast in Colombia (Taussig 1979:131) is the farewell, be it temporary when

¹¹¹ The *décima* or *espinela* is a poetic form which originates in Spain at the end of the 15th century, created by Vicente Espinel (Pedrosa & Vanín 1994:12). It consists of ten octosyllabic verses which have an obligatory rhyme structure: the first with the fourth and fifth verse; the second with the third verse; the sixth with the seventh and tenth verse; and the eighth with the ninth verse (1,4,5 // 2,3 // 6,7,10 // 8,9). In the Colombian Pacific amongst black communities the *décima* is converted into forty-four verses with an initial stanza of four verses, which carries the essence of the *décima* in that each of the following four stanzas of ten lines has to end in the corresponding line of the initial stanza. This form is known as *décima glosada*, and it is the most rigidly structured form. Nevertheless many *décimas* have a less determined rhyme structure, and most *décimas* that I have recorded with don Agapito belong to this second group.

¹¹² “Indudablemente la *décima* es la estructura poética de mayor fuerza en el Pacífico. [...] El *decimero* trabaja con la historia o la cotidianidad, con lo concreto o con lo simbólico. Por su temática pueden ser ‘a lo divino’ (asuntos religiosos) o a lo ‘humano’. [...] Las *décimas* ‘a lo humano’ pueden usarse para porfía, normatividad de relaciones generacionales, interpersonales, enamoramiento, relatos de sucesos históricos, fabulación, crítica y protesta social. [...] Los *decimeros* son en cierta medida una especie de conciencia colectiva, críticos e historiadores de sucesos locales, nacionales y a veces internacionales, fabuladores y cantadores del amor y el desamor, de la fortuna y reveses de la suerte.”

embarking on a journey, or a final farewell to a lost love, one of don Agapito's favourite themes:

Adiós adiós amigo

*Hasta el alto fuimos juntos,
comunicando los dos.
Aquí fueron los desmayos,
donde nos dijimos adiós.*

*Donde nos dijimos adiós,
fueron grandes mis tormentos,
porque no pude sacar
lágrimas de sentimientos.*

*Sentimientos puse en tí,
prenda querida del alma.
Cómo querés que navegue,
si tu amor me tiene en calma.*

*Si tu amor me tiene en calma,
cómo no me lo dijiste,
para yo haberte sacado
d'esa cama en que dormiste.*

*Esa cama en que ti duermes
es una hiel para mi,
estos son los ayes-ayes,
cuando me acuerdo de ti.*

*Cuando me acuerdo de ti,
me dan ganas de llorar,
de ver las puertas abiertas
cerradas en tu voluntad.*

Farewell my friend

To the top we walked together,
talking one to another.
Here we nearly fainted,
as we said farewell.

As we said farewell,
immense was my anguish,
because I could not shed
tears of sorrow.

Love I invested in you,
my dear sweetheart.
How do you want me to carry on,
if your love has deserted me.

If your love has deserted me,
why did you not tell me,
so I could have thrown you
out of this bed in which you slept.

This bed in which you sleep
is like bile to me,
these are the sorrows
when I remember you.

When I remember you,
I just want to cry,
seeing the open doors
closed in your will.

*These décimas that was, when I was young, I liked to have a drink with the old folks, well, the really old folks, the old folks then, for example, the old folks of our parents. So I drank a lot with them, and I, since I was a boy, I respect this and all of that. The old folks said - is that taping? [referring to my tape recorder] - get lost you! [to his grandchildren who were surrounding him, listening to his story] - the old folks said, "Well, we have run out of drink, there's no more drink left." "Well, give me the money, I'm going to buy some." It could be ten or twelve o'clock at night, I went to get the drink. And since these people, these old folks, their pleasure was drinking [emphasis in speech], because they always told me, "Drinking is a pleasure. A guy has no reason to quarrel with his friends when they are drinking. Why would you quarrel?" They were five, six, seven, eight, ten of them, drinking and rhyming, and eating, and, because drinking is a pleasure. And they taught me to drink, and I learnt it.*¹¹³

¹¹³ "Esas décimas fue, yo, cuando yo era joven, me ha gustado tomar trago con los viejos, pues los viejos viejos, los viejos de antes, por ejemplo, los viejos que tuvieron nuestros padres, no, entonces, yo tomé bastante con ellos, y yo, como era un muchacho, lo respeto y todo eso. Decían los viejos - ¿está grabando

There is a clear link between heavy drinking, mostly the rurally distilled unrefined sugarcane spirit *viche*, and rhyming or the ‘throwing of rhymes’ (*echar décimas*).¹¹⁴ Many *décimas* and other rhyming verses (*versos*) also reflect on the topic of drinking:

*Vení, tomemos hermano,
le dijo el desdichado,
tomemos mucho trago,
tomemos sin cesar.*

Come here, my brother, take a drink,
the wretched one told him,
let’s get drunk,
let’s drink without stopping.

*Yo también como tú,
soy otro desgraciado
que a la taverna vengo
mis penas a aliviar.*

I as well as you,
am another poor devil,
and I come to the bar
to relieve my sorrows.

And, although some poems seem to evoke the ‘spirit’ of the Alcoholics Anonymous as the *decimero* reflects on the negative effects of alcohol consumption, at the end of the day a good drink is simply considered part of social life and the indispensable spirit for rhyming sessions in time to the rivers’ flow and the beat of the rains:

*Voy a dejar de beber
el aguardiente diez años,
porque estoy viendo
que me hace daño,
y esa enmienda voy a hacer.*

I will stop drinking
brandy for ten years,
because I can see,
that it does me harm,
so I will mend my ways.

*Yo no fuera sido de bebedor,
sería un hombre acaudalado,
porque sé que un hombre pasado
de grosero e insolente,
él tomó un susto de repente,
y todos prueban que así fue,
y por eso hoy en día
he dicho que voy a dejar de beber.*

If I wasn’t always drinking,
I’d be a rich man,
because I know that a man
over rude and insolent,
suddenly got a fright,
and everybody testifies to that,
and therefore on this day
I say that I will stop drinking.

eso? [referring to my tape recorder] - ¡quítese de aquí! [to his grandchildren who were surrounding him, listening to his story] - decían los viejos, “bueno, nos hemos quedado sin trago, se acabó el trago.” “Pues deme la plata, yo voy a comprarlo.” Podría ser diez, doce de la noche, yo me iba fuera, me iba a traer la bebida. Y como esos señores, esos viejos, el placer de ellos era *tomar*, porque ellos siempre me decían, “Tomar es un placer. El tipo no tiene por qué disgustarse con sus amigos ‘tando tomando trago. ¿Cómo se puede disgustar?’” Eran cinco, seis, siete, ocho, diez, tomando trago, y bebiendo, y echando *décimas*, y comiendo, y, porque tomar es un placer. Y ellos me enseñaron a tomar, y yo lo aprendí.”

¹¹⁴ The notion of ‘throwing rhymes’ (*echar décimas*) adequately expresses the often competitive character of these social meetings during which someone starts by ‘throwing’ a few rhymed verses into the round or at someone else in the group, who then has to improvise by rhyming to the given structure, so as to ‘throw’ the rhyme back or pass it on to someone else. Verses were quite literally ‘thrown’ from one to another in these meetings, accompanied by laughter, clapping of hands, cheering and, of course, *viche* intake. The most original improviser in the art of rhyming also gained the highest reputation.

*Pero ¡caramba ! pico, adelante digo,
he pensado beber mi bebido.
Mi mujer no pare un hijo,
¿para quién diablo trabajo?*

But, damn it, come on, I say,
I'd rather have another drink.
My wife won't give me a child,
who the hell do I work for then?

When I interviewed don Agapito, he was 77 years old, and remembered these *décimas* just as in his youth, although he complained that in his old age he was beginning to forget a lot of them:

I knew when I was young, when I was very young and already drinking, as I told you, I knew 79 décimas, but today not anymore. Since I had this accident [a heart attack as a result of which the doctor forbade him to consume alcohol], I am living very bored, so, these things, one has to be always, when one has a drink, well, one remembers these things. There are other decimeros here. There was a primo hermano [relative of second or third degree] here who always came to my house. And in the afternoon we were throwing rhymes between us.¹¹⁵

Don Agapito learned these poems by practising them in the company of other relatives and the old folks of the region:

When I was young, between 15 and 20, I went there, because the old folks then, they liked these things a lot, throwing lots of décimas. And I, when a boy, I always liked to be with the older people. So I started throwing décimas. The only thing I didn't like that much was the story. They also threw stories, some stories I remember as well.¹¹⁶

What may seem surprising is the enormous capacity to remember all of these stories, poems and *décimas*, which don Agapito still narrated repeatedly when I visited him. Furthermore, most *decimeros* can neither read nor write, a common phenomenon in a society with high levels of illiteracy of an average 38.8% (DNP 1998:18). Don Agapito himself laments not having gone to school because his mother was too poor to afford him a place, and because of the commonplace local notion that children should help in the household and work rather than go to school. It is still common for children only to attend school outside the harvest season, or when their parents do not need their help in some productive activity or other:

I didn't go to school, because my mother was very poor, my mother was abandoned, my father left her. I mean, I didn't have a father, my older brother was my father. And also the old folks then said, "go to work". If I had gone to school, I think I would have learnt

¹¹⁵ "Yo sabía cuando joven, que le digo que tomaba trago todo jovencito, sabía 79 décimas, pero hoy ya no. De lo cual que me cogía este accidente vivo muy aburrido, entonces, esas cosas, uno tiene que estar siempre, cuando uno toma trago pues se acuerda de las cosas. Hay otros decimeros aquí. Aquí yo tenía un primo hermano que siempre llegaba aquí a la casa. Entonces nos poníamos con él a echar por la tarde décimas."

¹¹⁶ "Yo, cuando jovencito, entre 15 y 20, yo iba, porque los viejos de antes, les gustaba mucho esta cosa, echar muchas décimas. Y yo, cuando muchacho, siempre me gustaba andar con los mayores de edad. Yo me ponía a echar décimas. Lo único que no me agradaba mucho era el cuento. Ellos echaban cuento y todo, algunos cuenticos también me acuerdo."

*something. Because some old man threw a décima, and I was paying attention. And the next day I already knew it by heart. That's the way I learnt.*¹¹⁷

Learning and knowledge have traditionally been passed on to the next generation in the oral tradition, just as has happened with land property. Formal education as well as land title deeds are relatively recent phenomena in the Pacific. The oral tradition has been the 'cohesive vehicle' in these processes by which past and present have been held in tension. If remembering is an act of resistance against processes of forgetting and oblivion, then the articulation of local history, of local forms of knowing and learning, can be an important tool in challenging present representations of space that homogenise and make invisible a historically sedimented differential space. The oral tradition can therefore be conceptualised as a 'site of resistance', in that it recuperates the collective memories of black communities which in turn get mobilised by social movement agency. This is also one of the aims of PAR, the critical recovery of history, as I have discussed in the previous chapter. In the following section I hence want to examine how the aquatic space runs through the imaginaries construed by and articulated in the oral tradition, and how it thus provides particular settings in which resistance is acted out and/or imagined. Aquatic space and oral tradition are fluidly entwined with one another, reproduced and reinforced through myths, legends and aquatic spirits that dwell in the imaginaries of the inhabitants of the Pacific, sailing along the rivers and the sea in time to the tidal rhythms and the beats of heavenly waters.

'Myth-poetics of the thriving shore':¹¹⁸ oral tradition as site of resistance

*No language dies whilst its last speaker is alive who monologues with the ancestors.
Zapata Olivella (2000:11; my translation)¹¹⁹*

The oral tradition of black populations in the Colombian Pacific is a hybrid form characterised by aspects of the heritage of both African cultures and certain literary structures from Castilian Spanish (Vanín 1996). The latter has been of interest to linguists and historians, who have shown the influence of the Don Quijote and of the Spanish poetic

¹¹⁷ "Yo no fui a la escuela, porque mi mamá fue muy pobre, mi mamá quedó abandonada, mi papá la dejó. Es decir que no tuve padre, el hermano mayor fue mi padre mío. Y que también los viejos de antes decían, 'vayan a trabajar'. Si fuera ido a la escuela, yo creo que había aprendido algo. Porque yo, un viejo echaba una décima ahora, y yo estaba poniendo cuidado. Y al otro día era ya que yo la tenía en el mente. Así en esa forma yo aprendí."

¹¹⁸ I borrow here the title of Vanín's (1998) article *Mitopoética de la Orilla Florida*.

¹¹⁹ "Nunca morirá una lengua mientras sobreviva el último hablante que monologue con sus Ancestros!"

forms of the *décima* and the *copla* of the Golden Age literature on the language and the linguistic structures used among black populations (Granda 1977).¹²⁰ Although the Spanish language was imposed on the slaves during colonial times, black people applied the literary structures to their own epistemologies, and changed and adapted them to their own needs and desires. They effectively re-worked linguistic structures and vocabulary to create a kind of ‘counter-language’:

In a world of oral tradition and shamanism, the spoken language acquires a magic dimension that reaches unsuspected limits. [...] Colonisation by way of language generated in the Pacific a kind of *counter-language*; the language was imposed but, as a cultural reaction, another one was created, because the desires for freedom or for belonging are linked to the language we share. (Vanín 1996:47; my emphasis and translation)¹²¹

This ‘counter-language’ hence can be thought of as a ‘site of resistance’ (Foucault 1980), in that it articulates (echoing Lefebvre) the lived, representational space of black communities on the Pacific coast against hegemonic representations of space. The social importance and status of the *decimero*, the public voice of this counter-language, is a heritage of West-African cultures in which the *griot* assumes the important function of conveyor of history(ies), ethics and morality (Pedrosa & Vanín 1994:14). Indeed, today’s Afro-Colombian *decimeros* can be considered the inheritors of the African *griot*.

Of faraway geographies and imaginary journeys

Now that we have examined manuscripts and tired pages, it is useful to return to the non-written metaphors, to those which stroll along the shores of the Pacific with their lavishness and shortages, their tenderness and violence, their cataclysms and origins.

Vanín (1998:265; my translation)¹²²

As conveyors of local history, the *decimeros* and their imaginaries, stories and *décimas* also reflect the individual and the collective geographical experiences of the aquatic space. Prominent features in many of these stories are real and imaginary journeys to distant places and the exploration of faraway geographies. A popular *décima* in this respect is *La*

¹²⁰ The Golden Age in Spain (*Siglo de Oro*) is approximately the period between 1492 and 1650.

¹²¹ “En un mundo de oralidad y shamanismo, la lengua hablada adquiere una dimensión mágica que alcanza límites insospechados. [...] La colonización por vía del lenguaje generó en el Pacífico una especie de contralenguaje; el lenguaje fue impuesto pero, como reacción cultural, se creó otro, porque los deseos de libertad o de pertenencia están ligados al lenguaje que compartimos.”

¹²² “Después de indagar códigos y fatigar páginas, es conveniente entonces volver sobre las metáforas no escritas, sobre aquellas que deambulan por las orillas del Pacífico con sus lujos y carencias, ternuras y violencias, cataclismos y nacimientos.”

concha de almeja (The cockleshell), wherein the poet expresses his imaginary experiences of travelling the world and the seven seas in a cockleshell, a journey of magic dimensions and encounters:

*Yo me embarqué a navegar
en una concha de almeja
a rodar el mundo entero
a ver si hallaba coteja.*

I embarked to sail
in a cockleshell
to travel around the whole world
to see if I found my match.

*Salí de aquí de Tumaco
con rumbo a Buenaventura
yo no embarqué un cargamento
porque la mar estaba dura.
Pero embarqué quince curas
un automóvil pa' andar
a Guapi entré a embarcar
cien tanques de gasolina
cargando en popa una mina¹²³
yo me embarqué a navegar.*

I left from Tumaco here
heading for Buenaventura
I didn't stow a cargo
because the sea was rough.
But I embarked fifteen priests
a car to move around
I entered Guapi to take on board
hundred tanks of petrol
weighed with a mine in stern
I embarked to sail.

*Desde Cristóbal Colón
salí con rumbo a la Europa
con una tripulación
como de cien mil en popa.
Con viento que a favor sopla
atravesé a Casa Viejas
y muchas ciudades lejas
las visité en pocos días
navegando noche y día
en una concha de almeja.*

From Cristóbal Colón
I set off heading for Europe
with a crew
of hundred thousand in stern.
Helped by a blowing wind
I passed through Casa Viejas
and many distant cities
I visited in few days
sailing day and night
in a cockleshell.

*Con un grande cargamento
como de cien mil vitrolas
me atravesé a Cabo de Horno
y no me dentró una ola.
Llevaba quinientas bolas
sobre cubierta un caldero
cuatrocientos marineros
una gran tripulación
hice la navegación
a rodar el mundo entero.*

With an impressive cargo
of hundred thousand gramophones
I passed through Cape Horn
and not a wave came in my shell.
I carried five hundred balls
on deck a boiler
four hundred sailors
an impressive crew
I made the voyage
to travel around the whole world.

¹²³ There might be a misrepresentation here in the transcription. On several occasions I heard this *décima* in Guapi from various people. They all agreed that this line should read/sound *cargando en popa una niña*, 'carrying a lassie in stern' and not 'a mine'. Although one of the *décima*'s characteristics is precisely the fact that they can be adapted and that they are told in slightly different ways depending on the presenter, in this case it could possibly be a transcription error. This interpretation is also supported by two transcriptions of the same *décima* which Hidalgo (1995:281-283) recorded in Esmeraldas on Ecuador's Pacific coast, and which both have transcribed this passage as *niña*.

*Cuando los náuticos me vieron
que iba navegando al norte
cien vapores se vinieron
que los llevara a remolque.
Cuarenta mil pailebotes
llenos de arroz y lenteja
todos los pegué a la reja
y puse rumbo a la Europa.
Y navegué a Constantinopla
a ver si hallaba coteja.*

When the naval officers saw
that I was sailing north
a hundred steamers came
for me to tow them.
Forty thousand pilot boats
full of rice and lentils
I tied them all to the railing
and I set a course for Europe.
And I sailed to Constantinople
to see if I found my match.

(transcribed in Pedrosa & Vanín 1994:15-17; my translation)

This version of *La concha de almeja* was recorded with a farmer in the river Saija on the Cauca coast in 1976. In other parts of the Pacific one may hear the same *décima* with slight changes in structure or vocabulary, since *décimas* in general do not adhere to a definitive authorship. While they undoubtedly have an original author, by being reproduced orally on countless occasions and in different places, each *decimero* may add to or change certain vocabulary in it. The *décima* thus effectively turns into collective authorship, a characteristic of all forms of oral literature among black populations in the Pacific (Pedrosa & Vanín 1994:13).¹²⁴

La concha de almeja is a ‘versed *décima*’ (*décima glosada*) in that it begins with a stanza of four verses, each one of which is repeated in the last line of the following four ten-verse stanzas with the rhyme structure ABABBCCDDC. A similar theme and mood are addressed in a *décima* that I taped with don Agapito in Guapi, *El capitán pirata* (The pirate captain):

*Cuando el capitán pirata
me convidó a navegar
para que fuera escuchar
lo que pasaba al mapa.
Dijo que me cuidaría
con mucha delicadeza,
pagándome al mes cien pesos
y tres comidas al día.*

When the pirate captain
invited me to sail
so I would see
what was happening in the world.
He promised to look after me
with great subtlety,
paying me hundred pesos a month
and three meals a day.

¹²⁴ The same *décimas* can be heard on the northern part of Ecuador’s Pacific coast, a region that shares much of the ecological, ethnic and cultural characteristics with the Colombian Pacific, so much that Whitten’s pioneering study of the *Black Frontiersmen* (1986) is subtitled *Afro-Hispanic Culture of Ecuador and Colombia*, allowing him “to cut back and forth across the national borders” (Whitten: 1986:xii). Hidalgo (1995) has recorded and transcribed two versions of *La concha de almeja* (pp.281-283) in Esmeraldas (Ecuador), and one of *El capitán pirata* (pp.305-306), a *décima* which I have recorded with don Agapito and transcribed and translated below. As these versions have been recorded with different *decimeros*, they all slightly differ one from another.

*Que el viejo diablo me veía
luciendo buena ropa
él me pondría en Europa
dueño de casa y hacienda.
Me enseñaba toda lengua
desde los números general
y cuando el capitán pirata
me convidó a navegar.*

So the old devil would see me
sporting fine clothes
he would make me in Europe
owner of house and estate.
He taught me all languages
from the basic numbers
when the pirate captain
invited me to sail.

*Salimos de Punto Areno,
de Barcelona un día.
Echamos sesenta días
para hondear en Cartagena.
A mi me valió la pena
caminar el mar d'Europa
con chico comiendo en popa
mandando mis oficiales
y luciendo de buena ropa
me convidó a navegar
el capitán pirata.*

We left from Punto Areno,
from Barcelona one day.
It took us sixty days
to unload in Cartagena.
To me it was worth while
travelling the seas of Europe
with boys eating in stern
ordering my officers
and sporting fine clothes
invited me to sail
the pirate captain.

As in *La concha de almeja*, don Agapito describes in these verses a sea voyage which he never undertook himself, to places he never saw. Yet, it is in these imaginary journeys that the notion of the aquatic space is revealed as a fundamental (re)source in the construction of a sense of place in the Pacific amongst black populations. The references in these verses to faraway geographies, *geografías lejanas* (Vanín 1996) and to places known only through the circulation of these stories become meaningful through the grounded experiences of black people bound up with *their* aquatic space. In fact, the references to rivers, ports (Punto Arena, Barcelona, Cartagena), the sea and the oceans, reveal an everyday aquatic vocabulary. The expression *caminar el mar*, to ‘walk the sea’, is characteristic of the ways in which black populations refer to their travels on sea. It also reflects another important feature of black communities on the Pacific coast: high levels of spatial mobility, both as long-term and short-term migrations. I will discuss these aspects in detail in Chapter 6.

Of farewells and encounters with aquatic spirits

There were kings without power and glory, princes transformed into unbearable animals [...] and powerful sorceresses who were able to alter space-time and dematerialise realities.

Vanín (1998:271-272; my translation)¹²⁵

¹²⁵ “Había reyes sin poder y sin gloria, príncipes transformados en animales insufribles [...] y hechiceras poderosas que eran capaces de alterar el espacio-tiempo y desmaterializar realidades.”

Each voyage implies a separation from people and places that one leaves behind, and many of don Agapito's verses are around the *adiós*, the farewell to friends, family and places. Always associated with the notion of leaving is a strong melancholy, particularly because a return is never guaranteed, although always sworn to and dreamed of:

*El que se va no se aleja
ni deja ningún sentido
porque la paja se va y vuelve
a su mismo nido.*

The one who leaves does not really do so
nor does it make any sense
because the hen leaves and returns
to its same nest.

*Él que se va se divierte
a lo lejos del camino
él que se queda se queda
con el pesar del continuo.*

The one who leaves enjoys himself
along the way
the one who stays, stays behind
regretting the continuum.

*Quiero ser la cuchara de plata
para echar el oro cocido
adiós alumbren mis ojos
nunca te echo yo en el olvido.*

I want to be the silver spoon
that throws the cooked gold
farewell shine my eyes
never will I cast you into oblivion.

It is clear that the idea of travelling, of leaving a place and people behind, is in itself not problematic. The one who leaves will always come back to the place and the people of origin. Place attachment and a strong sense of belonging are particular characteristics of the sense of place in the Pacific, and could not be better expressed than in these verses of don Agapito.

There is also a distinct spatiality associated with the oral tradition, in that there are special spaces and places where *décimas* and verses are constructed and 'thrown'. Don Agapito used to tell stories and throw *décimas* when hunting in the forest or when travelling with his friends in canoe:

Well, we chatted wonderfully when we were travelling - so, one said 'hey, friend, when are you going to travel?', because in those days there was no engine, everything was by paddle. 'Well, I will be leaving at such time at night, I will be leaving at midnight'. 'So tell me, we go together'. So one spoke to the other, and he to another, and so we all went as a crowd, well, that is, we left Guajuí for Guapi. And we went chatting, rhyming, talking, well, about life, yes.

(interview with don Agapito Montaña, Guapi, 23 April 1996)¹²⁶

¹²⁶ "No, pues, nosotros charlamos muy sabrosos cuando veníamos viajando - entonces, le decía uno 'ay, amigo, cuando usted va a viajar?', porque en esos tiempos no había motor, fue todo por canaleta. 'Ay, que yo voy a salir a tal hora de la noche, yo voy a salir a las 12 de la noche'. 'Pues me habla, nos vamos juntos'. Así es que, el uno iba hablando al otro, el otro al otro y así íbamos esa parvada pues, es decir, salíamos de Guajuí pa' Guapi. Y veníamos charluando, decimeando, conversando, y es decir de la vida, así."

Women travelling in the solitudes of the rivers and the mangroves often sing rhythmically to the sounds of their paddle in the water and the waves. These songs are referred to as *cantos de boga*, or rowing songs. Some of them may only be voice games, imitating the sounds of their embarkation, whereas others sing about the fortunes of love and loss of love (Pedrosa & Vanín 1994:64). In the settlements there are also particular places and times when stories are told, notably in the *cantinas*, the bars, in which mainly men come together to drink and to tell stories, or in the *mentidero*, comparable to a bar, as the space where men come together in the morning before leaving for work and in the evening when returning from their daily activities to tell stories and to throw *décimas*.

In an environment where people are surrounded by water - the sea in front, the rivers all around, and torrential rain from above - the aquatic plays a crucial part in local mythologies and explanations of the evolution of humankind, flora and fauna, in which the sea is considered the origin of all life and species. A legend has it that the town of Tumaco is built on an island that formed when three whales came to rest on shore. As time went by, sand accumulated on their backs until it covered them completely to form three islands. Yet, it is well known among locals that one day these whales will shake the sand off their backs and dive into the sea taking everything and every living soul with them (Vanín 1998:270-271). Another legend talks of the original inhabitants of the island of Gorgona, a peaceful people who never abandoned the island.¹²⁷ One day when an underwater volcano erupted, it threw the entire population into the sea, where they were converted into dolphins. That is why dolphins live as marine mammals whose females feed their young like any terrestrial female does and whose young cry like any human child does. That is also why dolphins often swim parallel to boats to protect their human crew and to save the

¹²⁷ Gorgona is a small island of 1,600 hectares, some 56 kilometres off the Pacific coast, and can be reached on a 90-minute trip by speedboat from Guapi. It is thought (by some) to be the summit of a fourth Andean chain which was gradually submerged during the present interglacial period that began some 10,000 years ago. As a result of this separation from the continent, the island is home to a diverse fauna including a number of highly poisonous snakes. The island's name is derived from ancient Greek mythology, where the Gorgons were three sisters who had snakes on their heads instead of hair, and who turned anyone who looked at them to stone. The conquistador Pizarro, on his way south to what is today Peru, set up camp on the island in 1527 to replenish his water supplies. Many of his men perished having been bitten by poisonous snakes, and Pizarro hurriedly broke camp, naming the island Gorgona. Between 1959 and 1984 the island was a high security prison. Escapes from the prison often ended fatally with the escapee being bitten by one of the numerous venomous snakes, just as were 450 years earlier the conquistadors. For humanitarian reasons the prison was closed down in the mid-1980s and became a national park in July 1984 under the auspices of what is today the Ministry of the Environment. The island today is a popular holiday spot for eco-tourists and serves as a marine life research station. It was also on Gorgona that I held a two-day workshop on social cartography with the resident population in April 1999.

shipwrecked (Vanín 1998:275). The aquatic space is hence not only the real surrounding environment but also the (re)source of stories and legends that explain the evolution of the earth and of the people on it.

Stories are often spiced up with references to mythical characters such as the *riviél*, a vision which solitary fishermen or travellers may have on sea at night and which means danger to them. The *riviél* is a poor solitary devil condemned to sail on the open sea at night at high speed in a wrecked canoe with a light in its stern. As a revenge for his fate he rams into and sinks solitary fishermen and travellers on sea. The vision urges the latter to return home at once and not to stray alone on sea late at night. In that sense the *riviél* also functions as an ecological control, in that the fishermen are meant to go out on sea, perform their fishing task and then immediately return home without overfishing the sea. Another vision on sea is the *maravelí*, a vessel with a crew of satanic spirits and skeletons that passes by every village at midnight to call upon those who have made a pact with the devil. The *maravelí* as image of one's soul infinitely navigating on the open sea without ever finding rest and peace is used as a social control function, in that it is meant to deter people from being malicious or from committing evil deeds. The *tunda*, on the other hand, is a forest vision which appears to young children as a woman they know well, and who lures them into the forest where she possesses them. This story is often told to children to deter them from venturing into the dangerous forest, and mothers are also warned not to leave their children alone at home. The *tunda* may also appear to men who walk alone in the forest at night. There she seduces them and inflicts psychological damages on their senses. The *tunda* is a warning not to venture alone into the forest, but also one that punishes male infidelity.

Navigating saints who have come to stay

Throughout the Pacific, the saints navigate alone, going to their festivities where they are celebrated (in the mind of men and women) and then their statues promenade in adorned rafts until finally they reach the place of the arrullo, death wake or worship, where people have prayed and sung for nine nights, to be celebrated in style, until the musicians are 'penetrated by the saint' through their heads or their instruments. The Virgin of Carmen, San Antonio, the Immaculate of Guapi, they are long-standing navigators.

Vanín (1998:270; my translation)¹²⁸

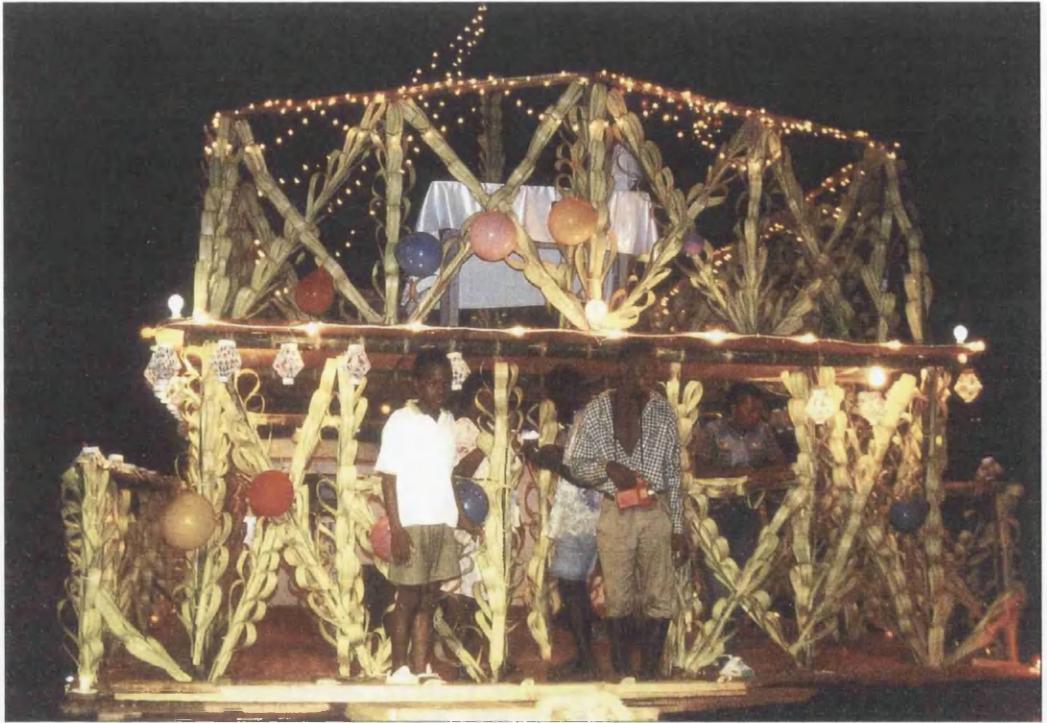
¹²⁸ “En todo el Pacífico, los santos navegan solos, yendo a sus fiestas donde las celebran (en la mente de los hombres y mujeres) y luego sus estatuas pasean en barcas festonadas para finalmente llegar al sitio del arrullo, velorio o adoración, donde se ha rezado y cantado nueve noches, para ser festejado por todo lo alto,

It is not only the aforementioned aquatic spirits who navigate endlessly at night on the open sea in search of lost souls. The saints on the Pacific coast are also linked to the aquatic space, in that most of them are said to have arrived in the different villages by sea or by river, which effectively makes them *santos navegantes* or navigating saints (Vanín 1998). Each village has its own patron saint who they celebrate on a particular day each year. Guapi's patron saint, the Virgin of Immaculate Conception, *La Inmaculada Concepción* or *Purísima*, is celebrated every 8th December by a spectacular water celebration. The festivities start the previous night when the river Guapi is illuminated by countless torches on numerous *balsadas*, or rafts, which are adorned with palm thatch and coloured light bulbs as they approach the town's landing steps. The crew on these rafts frenetically play the traditional instruments of the region, the *cununo*, *bombo* and *guasá*, and sing *arrullos* in homage to the virgin. With this ceremony the people of Guapi recreate the way in which the Immaculate Virgin is supposed to have arrived in town, a legend that has been passed on through generations: once a boat was caught up in bad weather and heavy storms on the open sea south of Guapi. As the sailors feared for their lives, they began to pray to the virgin statue that they carried on the boat and promised to take her on land and worship her in the first village which they could reach, if she extricated them from this danger unharmed. As dawn broke the storm had calmed down, and the sailors arrived in Guapi, where they took the statue to a small chapel to worship her. As they were leaving, it was impossible for them to lift the statue as the virgin suddenly weighed too much:

A lady called Orobio, member of one of the most distinguished families, offered to buy the virgin paying her weight in gold. When they weighed her, the virgin became very light and only weighed six kilograms. From that moment on she became our patron saint. [...] Since she arrived over water, we re-enact this event with the rafts each year. (Maestra Rita Tulia Perlaza, Guapi, quoted in Gaceta 1998:10; my translation)¹²⁹

hasta cuando a los músicos se les 'mete el santo' por la cabeza o por el instrumento. La Virgen del Carmen, San Antonio, la Inmaculada de Guapi, son navegantes viejos."

¹²⁹ "Una señora de apellido Orobio, miembro de una de las familias más prestantes, ofreció comprar la virgen por lo que valía su peso en oro. Cuando la fueron a pesar se puso 'balsudita' y sólo pesó media arroba. A partir de ese momento se convirtió en nuestra patrona. [...] Como ella llegó por agua, con las balsadas cada año se hace referencia a este acontecimiento."



'Balsada' in homage to *La Purísima*, Guapi's patron saint; Guapi, 7th December 1998



Procession through the streets of Guapi in honour of the *Virgen del Carmen*;
Guapi, 16th July 1999

Yet, the saint most related to the aquatic space on the Pacific coast is the *Virgen del Carmen*, protector of sailors, fishermen and anyone who travels by sea or river. The festivities to the Virgin of Carmen every 16th July are renowned in Guapi, with even more followers than the ones of the patron saint:

The Virgin of Carmen is the saviour of the shipwrecked on sea, of those who travel by boat, and who, let's say, are on a bad track. She is the protector, the patron. They are shipwrecked because sometimes these boats don't carry her with them, the virgin. They don't know her prayer. They shipwreck. Because if you know the invocation to Carmen, you don't drown. You can swim four, five days. Here we once lost some young women, two young girls and a young man. They went off course. They went to Gorgona, and coming back they went off course. From Gorgona. And they kept navigating for twenty days. And I don't know, they didn't drown, nor die of hunger. Because the boat's engineer knew the invocation to Carmen, and he said that when he called on Carmen, the waves somehow calmed down. Until they were found. Of course they looked almost dead. But they didn't die. Here they are today, one of them lives in Cali, and the other one in Popayán.

*(interview with Maestra Rita Tulia Perlaza, Guapi, 22 July 1999; my translation)*¹³⁰

The saints are always with the people

The eyes of the Lord of the Sea of Salahonda are the eyes of a shipwrecked.

*Vanín (1998:267; my translation)*¹³¹

Nobody doubts the powers of the saints. In Salahonda near Tumaco on the southern Pacific coast, the patron saint is said to have saved the village from destruction by the tsunami of 1906, when he stopped the giant sea waves that threatened to submerge the population. The same he is said to have done on 12th December 1979, during the last terrible seaquake. Amidst the general chaos and confusion of the inhabitants of Salahonda trying to rescue parts of their dwellings, the statue of the saint suddenly appeared outside the church without anyone having put it there. The saint faced the great wave and stopped it from washing the settlement away (Vanín 1998:267).

The Lord of Calle Larga on the river Napi arrived at the village in a similar way as the Immaculate Virgin of Guapi. Some pilgrims are supposed to have rested at Calle Larga

¹³⁰ “La Virgen del Carmen es la jefa de los que naufragan, de los que andan en los barcos, andamos, pongamos en un camino malo. Por eso, la protectora, la jefa de esas cosas. Naufragan porque hay veces esos barcos no la cargan a ella allí, a la Virgen. No saben la oración de ella. Naufragan. Porque si Usted sabe la oración del Carmen, Usted no se ahoga. Puede nadar cuatro, cinco días. Aquí hubo una pérdida de unas señoritas, dos jovencitas, y un jóven. Se desviaron. Fueron para Gorgona, y al venir par' acá, se desviaron. De Gorgona. Y duraron veinte días navegando. Y no sé, ni ahogaron, ni murieron de hambre. Porque el maquinista se sabía la oración del Carmen, y él decía, que cuando él invocaba la oración del Carmen las olas como bajaron. Hasta que los encontraron. Ya sí estaban un algo de fallecidos. Pero, no murieron. Aquí están, la una de ellas vive en Cali, y la otra en Popayán.”

¹³¹ “Los ojos del Señor del Mar de Salahonda son los ojos de un náufrago.”

on their way, and as they were leaving they could not lift the heavy statue and had to leave it behind. The saint must have liked the place and immediately became attached to it. Since he was used to moving around and could not stay still for a long time, at night he wandered along the river banks. His power asserted itself one day in an act of defiance to the Catholic Church, when the bishop in Guapi wanted to close the doors of the church in Calle Larga because no priest was available at the time to be appointed for the village. The bishop was also worried about the 'pagan' worshipping of the saints, which the Catholic Church considers far too excessive in the Pacific. The saint was on the people's side, however, and one night, at midnight, he broke the church doors down for locals to have continued access to him, their saint (Vanín 1998:268). Similarly some years ago in Guapi the bishop had ordered the removal of all saint statues from the church, because he felt that people's worshipping of the saints distracted them from the holy trinity of God the father, the son and the holy spirit. Resisting the bishop's intentions, some of the believers advised him that people would no longer go to mass if he took their saints out of the church; after some reflection, the bishop decided to leave the statues in their place.

Nobody speaks out openly against the Catholic Church in the Pacific. Rural black populations are a very spiritual and religious people and worship their saints with fervour. Catholic religion is the official religion in Colombia, but, although it has been imposed from the outside since Spanish colonial rule, Afro-Colombians on the Pacific coast have changed some of its structures and made it their own religion, in very similar processes to the ones discussed above in the appropriation of the Spanish language. The rhythmic clapping and the use of traditional instruments during mass, for example, distinguish a religious service in the Pacific from one in the interior of the country, and its look and feel is much more like a Catholic service in Africa.¹³² Yet, inquisitorial practices against black music and dances in Colombia have a long history and can be traced back to around 1730 (Wade 1997a:331). The Pacific lowlands have also been the scenario of a number of attempted repressions of black people's traditional instruments for a long time. Not too long ago in Guapi, a bishop from the interior of the country wanted to forbid the use of traditional instruments during mass, yet once again people advised him that they would no longer attend his services should he proceed with his intentions, and finally the bishop gave in.

¹³² This comparative remark is based on my personal observations made during a seven month stay in Cameroon, Africa, in 1991.

The most resistant of the traditional instruments defying inquisitorial practices has maybe been the *marimba*, a type of African xylophone that is central in traditional musical expressions on the Pacific coast such as the *currulao*. The Catholic Church began a campaign against the ‘diabolical’ dances of the *marimba* at the beginning of the 20th century (Friedemann & Arocha 1986:418), when a particularly fervent priest, Padre Mera, ordered that all instruments be burnt. Yet, a local *marimbero*, Francisco Saya of the river Chagüí, is said to have saved one *marimba* from the onslaught of Padre Mera and thus guaranteed the instrument’s survival. This legend was recently re-enacted during the carnival of Tumaco in February 1998, where the ‘return of the *marimba*’ was celebrated, which was meant to evoke local memory as a conscious strategy in the ways that identities had to be constructed amongst black populations (Agier 1999:25).

In this particular case, and thereby exemplifying how all other expressions of local aquatic epistemologies, myth-poetics, spatialised cultural memories and so on *could* be used, it is evident how local history and collective memories, along with the oral tradition as conveyor of those, have been drawn upon in the articulation of an Afro-Colombian identity politics that reclaims cultural and territorial rights. This identification and struggle, hence, is construed on an aquatic sense of place which, although fluid and changing in itself, is sedimented in specific spatio-historical experiences. As I will further show in Chapters 7 and 8, the aquatic sense of place has informed these and other processes of ethno-territorial identity construction, and can be regarded as a key resource for the organising processes of black communities in the Colombian Pacific; although care should be taken not to see sense of place as simply another resource as in RMT. As argued in Chapters 2 and 3, I am not trying to construct a synthesis of RMT and IOP, but to show how both theories contribute in differing degrees to an integral and place-sensitive understanding of social movements. Whereas the exploration of the (aquatic) sense of place in this chapter serves as an outline of the subjectivities of local perceptions of the ‘place’ that is the Colombian Pacific, and which do become channelled into social movement agency (as I will show in Chapter 7), the following examination of the location and locale sketch out the material, more objective geographies of the Pacific coast and how they are used and worked over by local communities. Chapter 6 therefore looks at the physical setting of social interaction in the Pacific, which I will then draw upon in Chapter 7 to show *how* they have been channelled into social movement agency on the Pacific coast.

CHAPTER 6***Location and locale: life in a tropical rain forest***

Guapi,
*tierra querida donde respira
 aire con ternura;
 porque en tí, la tranquilidad
 de tu vivir
 es la mayor fortuna de tu nombre.
 Y en la aurora de tus hermosos días
 cuando el sol refleja
 en aguas de tu río
 que sube y baja,
 con la tranquilidad
 que tus hijos pasan
 aquellos días de inolvidable frenesí.*

*Guapi que lindo eres
 tierra bendita donde yo nací
 Guapi que vas al mar
 Yo en mi potrillo junto de ti.
 En las tardes cuando el sol declina
 se va hacia el mar
 a la bocana de tu nombre
 con las tristezas y las alegrías
 que se ahogan con la furia de las olas.*

Guapi,
 beloved land that exudes
 air with tenderness;
 because in you, the peacefulness
 of your way of life
 is the greatest fortune of your name.
 And at dawn of your beautiful days
 when the sun is reflected
 in the waters of your river
 that rises and falls,
 with the tranquillity
 that your sons spend
 those days of unforgettable frenzy.

Guapi how beautiful you are
 blessed land where I was born
 Guapi that goes to the sea
 And I in my canoe at your side.
 In the afternoons when the sun sets
 we row towards the sea
 to the river mouth of your name
 with the sadness and the joys
 that drown in the fury of the waves.

*Eusebio Andrade Bazán (1999:8; my translation)*¹³³

Introduction: 'setting the scene' for social movement agency

In this chapter I examine the location and locale on the Colombian Pacific coast, which, as I argue throughout this thesis, provide the 'soils' or the 'pre-geographies' out of which the social movement of black communities emerges. These issues are of particular relevance to understand this movement, since it calls itself an 'ethnic-territorial' organisation whose cultural politics are articulated around the defence of their ancestral territories in the Pacific. Their struggle is a defence of their construction of place, and hence a close

¹³³ According to Eusebio Andrade Bazán, this is the first *bolero* paying homage to Guapi that he composed in 1976. The *bolero* is a kind of romantic ballad and one of the oldest musical styles in Latin America, still very popular today. Some of its composers, such as the Mexican Agustín Lara, have acquired legendary status in the Latin American music scene.

examination of the place (Colombian Pacific) - constituted of the three elements, sense of place, location and locale, as suggested by Agnew (1987) - helps us to understand better this movement in its particular organisational forms, aims, politics and discourses. Having grounded social movement theories in space and place on the theoretical level in Chapter 3, I will explore in the following chapters the specific 'groundedness' in the Pacific of the social movement of black communities at the empirical level. The discussion of location and locale in this chapter must therefore be understood as providing an analytical window on the pre-geographies of social movement agency in the Pacific. Location, as previously defined in Chapter 3, refers to the geographical area of the Pacific coast region and the historical, economic and political macro order of things in which the region is inscribed on the national and international level. Yet, I will not discuss in great detail the macro economic and political aspects of location in this chapter, as these are the 'usual' focus for existing studies of the Pacific coast (West 1957, Escobar & Pedroza 1996), and they alone would fill an entire PhD.¹³⁴ Instead I will focus on the physical aspects of location, the tropical rain forest, its myriad rivers and mangrove swamps, as well as on the historical aspects of colonisation, slavery and black rebellion that produced the Pacific coast as a region providing primary raw materials and that were responsible for its being inhabited by Afro-descendants. The locale in the Pacific refers to the physical settings and material contexts that the inhabitants draw upon in their everyday social interactions. In particular, I will show how a set of spatialised social relationships has evolved through time around the rivers of the Pacific that finds expression in specific forms of spatial mobility and adaptive responses to an aquatic environment. There is of course considerable interplay between location and locale, and both phenomena should be regarded as mutually impacting on one another rather than as wholly separate. The sense of place, as discussed in the previous chapter, will also repeatedly come up in the discussion of location and locale, as it is in effect the 'subjective result' of the latter two. The concept of the aquatic space as an analytical framework throughout this narrative reinforces the ways in which human agency interacts with this physical environment, and it should not be understood as a rigid

¹³⁴ I am, for example, currently planning a future research project together with a member of staff at Glasgow University that would critically examine two development programmes for the Colombian Pacific coast that have been running parallel in the region, although conceived through very different ecological rationales. This project would focus on the economic macro order of *location* in the Colombian Pacific, but it would also emphasise the need to recognise and to respect the *locale* and the *sense of place* among black populations in the Pacific for the successful implementation of sustainable development plans in the region. Such a 'place-centric' approach to development programmes is only one of many other ways in which the three-fold place-perspective of location, locale and sense of place can be usefully employed.

totalising concept disallowing a diversity of experiences within. This chapter hence ‘sets the scene’ and outlines the physical contexts for social movement agency in the Pacific, which, as I will show in Chapter 7, draws on the locale in its specific spatialised organisational forms as community councils along river basins.

Location: black resistance on a tropical ‘periphery of the periphery’¹³⁵

*Mire la calle.
¿Cómo puede usted ser
indiferente a ese gran río
de huesos, a ese gran río
de sueños, a ese gran río
de sangre, a ese gran río?*

Look at the street.
How can you be
indifferent to this big river
of bones, to this big river
of dreams, to this big river
of blood, to this big river?

Nicolás Guillén (quoted in Benedetti 1980:9; my translation)

In his pioneering work *The Pacific Lowlands of Colombia* (1957) the North American geographer Robert West, in a passage typical of cultural geographers in the Carl Sauer tradition at the time, portrayed the area in the following words:

Seen from the air the canopy formed by the giant trees resembles a sea of green, overlapping umbrellas, broken only by streams and occasional clearings. Hundreds of rivers, often in flood, run through the forest from hill and mountain slope to sea. They are the pathways for human travel and their banks are the main sites of human habitation. [...] If the area has any physical unity, it is to be found in the hot, humid climate and the vegetation cover of dense tropical rain forest. Colombia’s Pacific lowlands are the rainiest part of the Americas, with average annual totals from 120 to over 400 inches. The area’s position between 1° and 8° north of the equator gives it high year-round temperatures and contributes to an almost continuous relative humidity above 90 per cent. But the most striking physical feature of the area is the rain forest. West (1957:3)

More than forty years later, this passage still finds its justified space in this PhD thesis of a more ‘new’ cultural geography nature, since, in spite of increasing deforestation rates of currently 53,000 hectares per annum (DNP 1998:11), West’s description is still the impression that a bird’s eye view gives over the Pacific lowlands.

¹³⁵ Granda (1977) refers to the Pacific lowlands as ‘periphery of the periphery’, stressing the region’s marginal position in relation to the industrialising interior of Colombia. A similar position is adopted by Yacup (1934), who denominates the Pacific ‘hidden littoral’.



Aerial photograph of the Southern Pacific coastline around Guapi



Mangrove forest at low tide

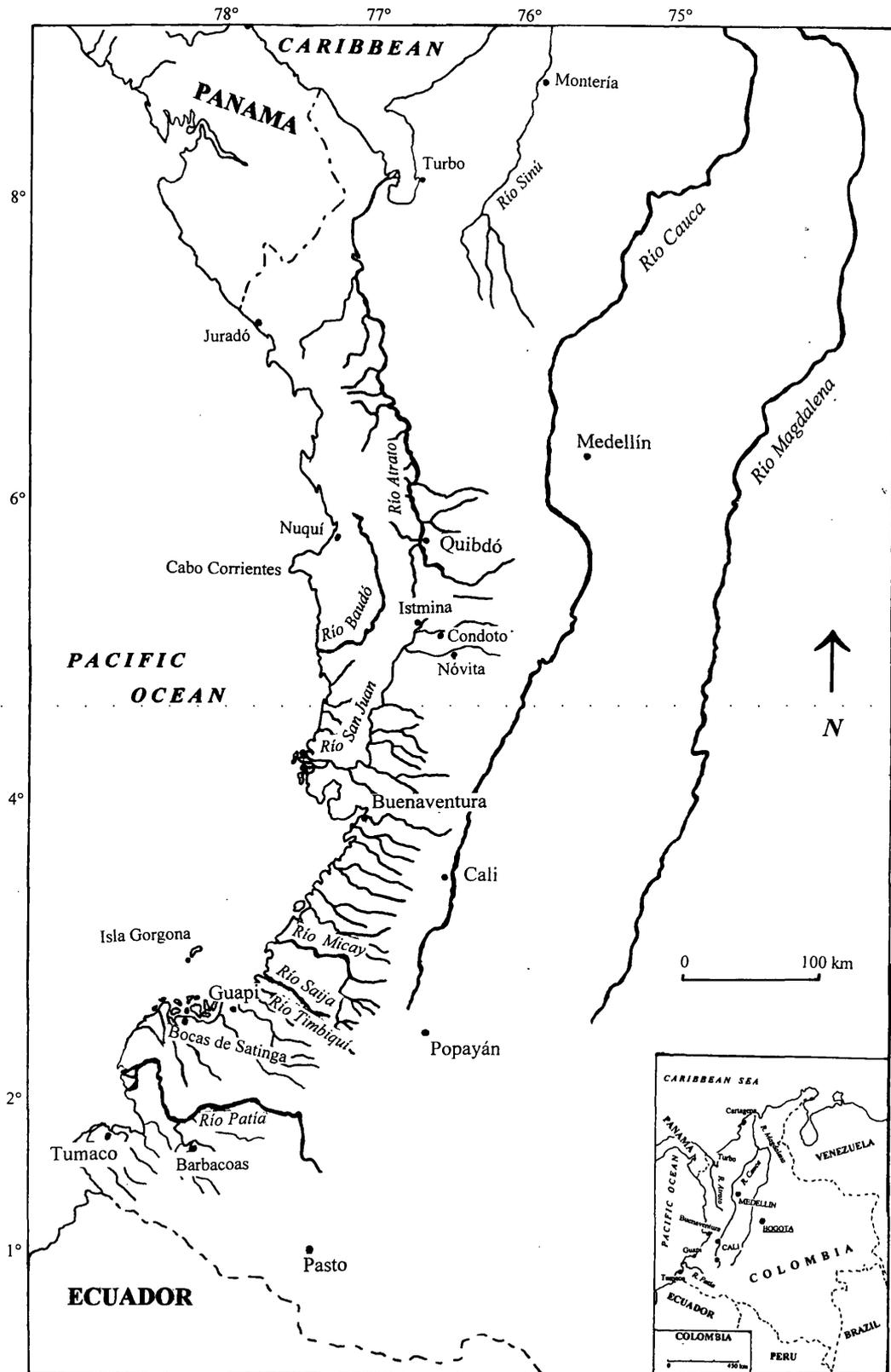


Figure 6.1 Map of the Pacific Lowlands
 Source: adapted from Leyva (1993)

The region is considered to contain one of the world's highest levels of biodiversity, yet only an estimated 50% of its plant species are known to date.¹³⁶ It extends from the Western Andean slopes and the border with Ecuador in the south, to the Darien gap on the Panamanian border in the north, including the vast delta of the river Atrato that flows into the Atlantic Ocean on the Caribbean Coast (Figure 6.1). It covers an area of over ten million hectares, some 6.2% of Colombia's total land surface (IIAP 1997), including some 1,300 kilometres of Pacific coastline, and extends between 80 and 160 kilometres towards the Andean foothills. The region is situated within the Intertropical Convergence Zone, a low pressure belt of weak converging air masses loaded with humidity which are responsible for high levels of precipitation, a characteristic of these equatorial climates. Precipitation reaches annual averages of over 10,000 millimetres in some areas such as Tutunendo in the northern Chocó department, which makes it one of the zones of highest precipitation world-wide. Corresponding to tropical regions located almost at sea level, mean temperatures are high and relative humidity is around 90% (West 1957:3, INCORA 1998c).

The Pacific lowlands are characterised by an extensive network of rivers, which originate on the Western slopes of the Western Andean range and criss-cross in east-westerly direction towards the Pacific Ocean. These rivers are subject to frequent flooding, especially during and immediately after periods of high precipitation. Furthermore, they are joined on their way by countless tributaries, thus creating a number of vast river basins such as the Patía delta in the south-western department of Nariño, which extends over 3,000 square kilometres (Del Valle 1996). Nearly eight million hectares, or 77.5% of the entire area, are covered in forest, 55.3% of which by continuous vegetation (DNP 1998:11), so that the region gives an impression of a 'spatial trinity' of forest, lands and sea (Mosquera 1999:59).¹³⁷ It is also this forest cover which guarantees the availability of nutrients in the otherwise poor soils of this fragile ecosystem.

¹³⁶ 5,474 plant species belonging to 271 different families have so far been identified in the Pacific lowlands (IIAP 1997). In an ethnobotanic study examining plant species and their uses amongst indian and black communities in the delta of the river Patía, Caballero (1996) identified 110 medicinal plants, 81 food plants, 30 different plant species used in construction and housing, and 22 others used in rituals and magic. The study also shows the forms of cultural exchange between black and indian communities who share a common environment and the common usages of 'biodiversity'.

¹³⁷ I like the notion of 'spatial trinity' suggested by Mosquera (1999:59), as it expresses a certain 'togetherness' of the various ecological elements forming a holistic environment. Unlike Mosquera, however, I would replace 'lands' with 'rivers', thereby further stressing the *aquatic* nature of the 'spatial trinity' of the Pacific lowlands.

We can distinguish between two coastal types of the Pacific littoral: a high mountainous coast that extends northward from Cabo Corrientes just south of the Gulf of Tribugá to Panama; and a low alluvial coast fringed by dense tidal forests and sandy beaches that stretches south of Cabo Corrientes for more than 650 kilometres right into the province of Esmeraldas in Ecuador (West 1957:52). In both parts of the coast we find tidal ranges of up to 4.5 metres that still have an impact some twenty kilometres upstream when the width of the river channels increases diurnally in response to the tide.¹³⁸ The southern half of the Pacific coastline is characterised by extensive and labyrinthine mangrove swamps. Four geographic belts can be identified in this zone arranged in sequence from the sea inland: a belt of shoal water and mud flats immediately off coast; a series of discontinuous sand beaches, interrupted by tidal inlets, estuaries and wide mud flats; a zone of mangrove forest, usually one half to five kilometres wide; and a belt of fresh-water tidal swamp. Behind the tidal swamp on slightly elevated ground, the equatorial rain forests begin which cover the greatest part of the Pacific lowlands (West 1957:53).

*Searching for access to the 'hidden littoral'*¹³⁹

Access to the region has always been difficult, which was one of the reasons why the Spanish never effectively colonised this part of South America (Aprile 1993, Romero 1995). Today there are still only three main roads leading into the region from the interior of the country, and instead the rivers are the main arteries of transport and communication.¹⁴⁰ As expressed in INCORA's report on their visit to the community council of the river Napi on the Cauca coast in 1998 (Figure 5.1, p.134):

¹³⁸ According to West (1957:213-214), tidal ranges tend to increase northward along the Pacific coast from Peru (around 2.1 feet) to Panama (around 16.4 feet). For Tumaco and Buenaventura on the Colombian Pacific coast he gives the following data: Tumaco - mean range 8.7 feet, spring range 10.9 feet; Buenaventura - mean range 10.4 feet, spring range 12.9 feet. On the Baudó river, West found tidal effects some 50 kilometres upstream on the confluence of the Dubasa river, and further south on the San Juan river he noted tidal effects some 35 kilometres upstream from the mouth. The average of 20 kilometres that I have given here refers to the Cauca coast, the region where my fieldwork was situated. The measure is a rough estimate observed in the rivers Guapi, Guajuí and Timbiquí.

¹³⁹ *Litoral Recóndito* ('The Hidden Littoral') is the title of a book by the Guapi-born politician Sofonías Yacup (1934). He deplored the economic and cultural backwardness of the Pacific coast and argued that the physical isolation of the region was one of the factors that had to be overcome in order to develop the region and tie it into the economy and political life of the interior of the country.

¹⁴⁰ One road in the southern department of Nariño leads from the Andean towns of Pasto and Ipiales to Tumaco on the Pacific coast near the border with Ecuador; a second road in the central department of Valle del Cauca connects Cali with Buenaventura; and a third road links Medellín in the department of Antioquia to Quibdó in the northern department of Chocó. Since the 1930s there have also been plans to build a road from Popayán to Guapi on the Cauca coast, and indeed several different roads have been proposed. However, engineering difficulties, the lack of political will, anticipated costs, and an un-calculable environmental

Due to the geographical location of the communities that form the Community Council River Napi, they can only be reached by river, leaving from the town of Guapi, and changing onto the river Napi at its mouth. The means used up to the community of San Antonio [on the lower parts of the river Napi] are speedboats (manufactured in fibre) powered by large engines (60 and 70 hp or more). There one changes to smaller dugout canoes (made out of wood), powered by small engines (9, 15, 25 and 40 hp), to reach the community of San Agustín. Access to the interior of the communities is along paths and small streams, which are the only form of penetration. (INCORA 1998d, point 1.2; my translation)¹⁴¹

A similar journey must be undertaken to reach the communities on the river San Francisco (Figure 5.1; p.134):

Leaving the town of Guapi, the only communication route is by river. One has to travel along the river Guapi up to the mouth of the river Napi [Boca de Napi], and then keep on travelling upstream on that river until one reaches the mouth of the river San Francisco [Boca San Francisco]. The most commonly used means of transport are the wooden dugout canoes with outboard motor, or the smaller canoes with paddles and *recatón* (a paddle with an iron cover at its point). (INCORA 1998c, point 1.2; my translation)¹⁴²

Today the region's population of some 1.3 million (DANE 1993) consists of around 93% Afro-Colombians, an estimated 2% indigenous indian populations of various tribal groups,¹⁴³ and some 5% are mestizos who mostly have come from the interior of the country.¹⁴⁴ Aprile (1993) identifies two cycles of settling processes in the Colombian

impact have so far worked against such road construction. Furthermore, unforeseen social and cultural costs have to be taken into account. As Raquel Portocarrera, teacher and specialist in folklore and local history points out: "Thinking about this road, some people that come here say, 'well, without a road you really suffer.' Some locals also say we need the road. But a lot of us say, 'no, we don't need a road. Because [with a road] come the bad habits from the interior, come the thieves, come this, come that" (Interview held in Guapi, 27 April 1996; my translation of: "Pensemos en la carretera. Para algunos que vienen, es que, 'pero no, Ustedes están malos sin carretera'. Para otros de aquí dicen nos falta la carretera. Pero muchos decimos, 'no necesitamos carretera. Porque nos vienen los vicios del interior, nos vienen los ladrones, nos viene eso, nos viene lo otro").

¹⁴¹ "Debido a la ubicación geográfica de las comunidades que conforman el Consejo Comunitario del río Napi solo se puede acceder a ellas por vía fluvial, partiendo desde la cabecera municipal iniciando recorrido por el río Guapi, cambiando al río Napi en la boca de éste. El medio utilizado hasta la comunidad de San Antonio son las lanchas (elaboradas en fibra) impulsadas por motores grandes (60 y 75 Hp en adelante), realizando allí el trasbordo a canoas (elaboradas en madera), más pequeñas, impulsadas por motores pequeños (9, 15, 25 y 40 Hp), para llegar a la comunidad de San Agustín. El acceso al interior de las comunidades se hace a través de caminos y quebradas, que son el único medio de penetración."

¹⁴² "Partiendo desde la cabecera municipal la única vía de comunicación es la aluvial. Para ello debe recorrer el río Guapi hasta la boca del río Napi para luego ir subiendo el río, hasta llegar a la desembocadura del río San Francisco. El medio de transporte más utilizado son las canoas de madera con motor fuera de borda, o el potrillo con canaleta y recatón (una palanca con cubierta de hierro en la punta)."

¹⁴³ Indigenous ethnic groups in the Pacific coast include: embera, embera catío, embera chamí, wounaan, awa, eperara-siapidara and tule (DNP 1998:4).

¹⁴⁴ These population ratio figures are generally accepted estimates, as there exists no reliable racial information in Colombia's census data. In the last census in 1993 the National Statistical Institute DANE tried to consider and to quantify Afro-Colombians for the first time. However, due to the ambiguous census question - "Do you belong to an ethnic group, indigenous group or black community?" - only 502.343 people

Pacific: an Indoamerican or Amerindian cycle, on the origin of which we have no data, but which was in decline from the end of the 16th century onwards with the Spanish conquest and colonisation; and a second Afro-American cycle starting in the 17th and 18th centuries. Within the latter, Aprile identifies a further two phases: a partial settlement phase around the gold mines at the end of the 17th century, driven by processes of colonisation and slavery; and an extensive and Pacific endogenous drive of agrarian colonisation and independent mining on the part of the runaway slaves (*cimarrones*) and self-liberated blacks (*libres*), which involved intense circulation and the expansion of territorial appropriation. Both settlement phases were profoundly inscribed in the aquatic space: colonial gold mines were located in the upper and middle sections of the rivers, where auriferous sands and gravels were deposited; and agrarian colonisation and territorial appropriation by free blacks extended along the river banks, with the river invariably being the central axe of orientation. I will discuss these settlement patterns in this chapter in relation to the locale of the Pacific coast, as the rivers provide the settings and contexts that are used and re-worked in social interactions.

'All the black people, where do they all come from?': the slave trade as bridge between Africa and the Americas

Don't matter where you're from, if you're a black man you're an African.

Peter Tosh

During the transatlantic slave trade from the 16th century onwards, some twelve million Africans of different ethnic groups were forcefully displaced from their lands and kept in atrocious conditions in the prisoner camps along the West African coast, before being transported to the Americas and enslaved (Friedemann & Arocha 1986:33-35). Those who arrived at the slave port of Cartagena, on what is today Colombia's Caribbean coast, were sold and transported to the gold mines of Antioquia (1580-1640), later to the Pacific coast (1690-1810), and to a lesser degree condemned to work on plantations and in domestic services. Some 3,000 Africans, mainly Yolof and Biáfara people from the region of the

affirmed belonging to a 'black community' (Ruiz Salgero & Bodnar Contreras 1995; Bodnar 2000). This would only be 1.5% of Colombia's national population. A recent report by the Minority Rights Group (1995:xiii) shows oscillations in estimates of Colombia's black population ranging from 4.9 million as a minimum to 15 million as a maximum, which would be the equivalent of 14% or 43% respectively of the national population. These considerable differences can partly be explained by the problematic definition of the term 'black community' (Grueso *et al.* 1998, Restrepo 1998) and by issues of black self-identification in a dominant context of whitening (Wade 1993, Streicker 1995).

river Guinea between today's Senegal and Sierra Leone, entered through Cartagena between 1533 and 1580 (Del Castillo 1982:38). Between 1580 and 1640, 169,371 Africans mostly from the Congo Kingdom were officially imported through the port of Cartagena (Del Castillo 1982:18,160-162). Yet, the real number is likely to be much higher considering the importance of the contraband in the slave trade at the time (Maya 1998:27). Both phases were controlled by the Portuguese, and the latter one corresponds to the first gold cycle from 1580 to 1640 in the Zaragoza Medio area of Antioquia (Colmenares 1976). The second gold cycle, which was initiated around the end of the 17th century in the Chocó on the Colombian Pacific coast (Sharp 1976), corresponded to a Dutch hegemony of the slave trade (1640-1703). The Spanish Crown had lost control over it around 1640 due to the political and economic decline of its empire and the war against Portugal, which until then had provided the sources of supply for African slaves. This rupture resulted in a sharp decline in the introduction of *bozales*, the slaves directly imported from Africa, between 1640 and 1662 (Maya 1998:31) and contributed to a "profound crisis [of the mining economy] during which the *reales de minas* of the 16th century practically disappeared" (Colmenares 1994:35).¹⁴⁵ Most of the Africans that arrived at Cartagena during this time were kidnapped from the Gold Coast, today's Benin. Yet, a particularity of this phase was the fact that most Africans first passed through the Caribbean island of Curaçao, which was in Dutch hands, before arriving at Cartagena. Curaçao acted as a kind of stopover before the further distribution in the Americas, and it thus also became a point of contact between different ethnic groups from Africa. Here the Akán mixed with the Yoruba, the Fanti, the Ibo and the Ewe-Fon peoples amongst others. Following the Dutch hegemony, the French held a relatively short monopoly over the slave trade from 1704 to 1713, and then the English until 1740. During these latter two periods the number of *bozales* who arrived at Cartagena dropped significantly to 30,000, which can be explained by an increasing contraband traffic of slaves from Jamaica (Del Castillo 1982:126). From the mid-18th century until 1810, which is commonly regarded as the end of Cartagena as a slave port (Sharp 1976, Maya 1998:43), relatively few *bozales* were imported, and the owners of gold mines largely searched for a supply of slaves on the local markets.

The use of such an economic and dehumanising vocabulary when discussing the slave trade is not coincidental. It reflects the historical realities at the time and the ways in

¹⁴⁵ *Reales de minas* are the mining camps and administrative centres founded in the 16th century.

which the African prisoners were regarded and treated as mere merchandise, a process of depersonalisation that was also reflected in the jurisdiction of the colonial laws (*Leyes de la India*). However, it also reflects the analytical language that many researchers have applied when discussing this period. As Maya (1988) points out, the works of Colmenares (1976), Sharp (1976) and West (1952, 1957), through their focus on the gold mining industries at the time, reduce the slaves in their analyses to their economic functions and regard them as parts of the colonial machinery. Thus they also fail to treat them as the protagonists of their own history, positioning them merely as an appendix to the history of the slave system writ large. This trend is also evident in historical accounts which represent the republican state as the agent of freedom for the slaves rather than this possibility arising from the slaves themselves.¹⁴⁶ The date associated with the end of slavery in most accounts is 1851, the year in which its abolition was decreed in Colombia by the Liberal president José Hilario López.¹⁴⁷ Prior to this legislation, the Law of Womb Liberty (*Ley de Libertad de Vientres*) was passed on 28 May 1821, which declared every new-born by a slave mother after this date a free person. It also introduced in article 18 a fairly progressive notion at the time to do with land redistribution, in that *libres* were granted the right to work empty-lying and uncultivated lands as their property, and that the owners who had abandoned those lands thereby lost their rights over them (Pastoral de Etnias 1999).

Even before, the *libres* appealed to laws of colonial justice to defend their rights, as happened, for example, in the river San Francisco near Guapi, when in 1798 a black *libre* named Ybarguen complained about the attempt of a slave owner to expel him from the territory and mines he had been working for two years (Romero 1993). Not surprisingly maybe, the judiciary system in this case favoured the slave owner, the latter frequently being the judge as well. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that black *libres* were already making use of colonial legislation some fifty years before the abolition of slavery in 1851. There were also multiple forms of resistance in which the slaves themselves acted as agents in the pursuit of their freedom. Many escaped the slavery system by running away from the mines or plantations, a process known as *cimarronaje*. Others bought their

¹⁴⁶ West (1957), for example, refers throughout his work to the liberated blacks as ‘freedmen’, emphasising with this expression, although probably involuntarily, the passive nature of the slaves themselves in these processes of gaining their freedom. Throughout this PhD I use the non-gendered Spanish term *libres*, which both implies ‘freemen’ and ‘free women’, thus stressing too black agency in their self-liberating experiences.

¹⁴⁷ The fact that it was the Liberal Party which decreed the abolition of slavery partly explains that Afro-Colombians today in their vast majority are still politically closer to the Liberal Party than to the Conservative Party (Sabás 1997, Agudelo 2000).

freedom making use of the judiciary system, a process referred to as *automanumisión*. The aquatic space on the Pacific coast provided the physical space in which runaway slaves could hide along the banks of one of the countless rivers, as well as offering to the self-liberated *libres* the material space of agrarian colonisation that spread along the river basins of the Pacific.

'Aunque mi amo me mate, a la mina no voy':¹⁴⁸ the eternal black rebellion

You must know that we, born in this town, are born rebels.

Zapata Olivella (1986:23; my translation)¹⁴⁹

Resistance formed part of the slavery system from the beginning, and indeed, “wherever slavery existed, self-liberation began” (Whitten & Torres 1992:17). In fact, the Pacific lowlands can be regarded as a ‘territory of resistance’ with a historical continuity dating back to the early stages of the Spanish conquest, which was confronted with bitter and long-lasting indigenous indian resistance. Valencia (1991) comments on the Spanish military frustrations in the Pacific, and describes the attempts at conquest by the Spaniards as a ‘complete failure’, considering that for nearly two hundred years no definite success could be registered over the indians. With the first conflicts taking place in Urabá on the North-western Caribbean coast in 1510, Valencia still registers major resistance in 1687 without the Spanish Crown being able to establish a central, colonial control over the territories of the Pacific. The latter consequently came to be known as a ‘war frontier’ (*frontera de guerra*), and indian resistance proved a major obstacle for the exploitation of the region’s gold resources:

Although Spanish mining activity in the Chocó began on the upper Tamaná in the 1570s, Indian hostility prevented intensive placering and the importation of many Negroes for more than a century. (West 1957:98)

In 1684, for example, the Chocó rebellion forced the Spanish miners and their slaves to retire to the highlands and prevented them from exploiting the gold placers for more than four years (West 1957:229). The indians in the southern part of the Pacific lowlands became known as ‘warring indians’ (*indios de guerra*) for the ferocity with which they attacked the *conquistadores*, so that Spanish settlements were mainly restricted to the Andean axis of Quito (in today’s Ecuador), Popayán and Cali. A number of indian

¹⁴⁸ These are the lyrics of a popular song in the Pacific which are a reminder of black resistance during slavery: ‘Even if my master kills me, I shall not go to the mine’.

¹⁴⁹ “Ustedes deben saber que los nacidos en este pueblo somos rebeldes por nacimiento.”

resistances have been documented, such as the massacre of all miners and Spanish missionaries on 15th January 1684 in the town of Neguá (in today's department of Chocó) as committed by the Citaraes *indios*, an incident which spread like a fire and gripped the whole region as towns and churches were destroyed (Funcop 1996). According to Valencia (1991), it is only from 1690 onwards that we can talk of an authentic conquest, and even then, of course, resistance remained a daily practice by both indian and black people.

These resistances took on a variety of forms, such as escapes, rebellions, suicides, infanticides and so on (Friedemann 1998:83). Abortion and infanticide, for example, were forms of female resistance, by which the mother denied the slave owner control over the body of her child, since a child born to a slave mother was bound to be appropriated by the slave owner as labour force and economic value (Spicker 1996). There were also the rebellions in the gold mines, such as the one in Zaragoza, Antioquia, in 1598, where some 300 whites controlled 4,000 black slaves (Mina 1975:32); and there are many more acts of resistance which are either not documented at all or are mis-represented in official history. As Sabás Casamán, a black elderly political leader of the North Cauca region, explains:

Colombia's history has not been written, and it has not been written for a very simple reason, because history is always written by the winners; the losers we have no part in it, as long as we have this condition of losers. (Casamán 1997:64; my translation)¹⁵⁰

Or, as he remembers a verse passed on in the oral tradition, referring to the slave owner Julio Arboleda who was renowned for cruelty towards his slaves:

*Aquí, aunque más se habla,
no habla sino quien pueda,
el dueño de la propiedad,
señor Don Julio Arboleda.*

Here, no matter what you say,
only speaks who can,
the owner of this property,
Mr Julio Arboleda.

Casamán (1997:72; my translation)

Historical documents and archives on black resistance, if they exist at all, are often plagued with a racist vocabulary that represents black slave rebellions not as liberating processes by historical subjects, but frequently as criminal acts that supposedly show the lack of gratitude of the slaves towards their white masters who after all brought the black 'pagans' Christian redemption. These are "documents in which the Spanish never cease to be heroes

¹⁵⁰ "La historia de Colombia no se ha escrito, y no se ha escrito por una razón muy sencilla, porque la historia siempre la escriben los vencedores; los vencidos no tenemos lugar a entrar a ella, mientras tengamos esa condición de vencidos."

while the blacks rarely are anything but cowards and traitors” (Arocha 1999:48). Or, as the Afro-Colombian novelist Manuel Zapata Olivella expresses the relation between dominant history and intentional oblivion in his extraordinary Afro-centric novel *Changó, el Gran Putas* (‘Changó, that Great Motherfucker’),¹⁵¹ referring to the black rebellion on Haiti at the end of the 18th century:

For the Wolf’s forgetful scribes, the history of the Republic of Haiti will always be the fanaticised and hate-crazed blacks’ massacre of their white brothers, never the slave owners’ genocide against a defenseless people. (Zapata Olivella 1998:256)

The recently deceased anthropologist Nina Friedemann has made it her lifelong work (and passion) to lead historical and contemporary black resistances out of their structural ‘invisibility’ in academic literature and socio-political life in Colombia (Friedemann 1974, 1979, 1984, 1985, 1989, 1992, 1998). Her contributions counter dominant representations of space in the Colombian Pacific by uncovering a historically and spatially segmented differential space that has survived into the present. She does so by documenting the myriad rebellions, escapes and the consequent attempts at social organisation of runaway slaves in *palenques*, places which embodied to the maroons (runaway slaves) those ‘homeplaces’ that hooks (1991) talks about: places liberated from the control and the surveillance of the white man.

Palenques were fortified villages built by runaway slaves, often located in areas of difficult accessibility. They functioned as autonomous spaces within the colonial territory from which the inhabitants resisted colonial rule and slavery. There were frequent military confrontations between colonial armies and the *palenques*, some of which were destroyed, while others persisted, and in a number of cases the Spanish Crown was forced to negotiate with and to acknowledge a *palenque*’s existence (Sharp 1976, Zuluaga & Bermúdez 1997). Whereas two *palenques* were officially registered during the 16th century, by the end of the seventeenth twenty *palenques* had been established, mainly in the Caribbean area near Cartagena, in what has been considered a “numerous occurrence of *palenques* on the territory which today is Colombia” (Friedemann 1998:85). One of the most important *palenques* of that time was the *palenque* of La Matuna, founded in 1600, with its famous

¹⁵¹ In this unpublished manuscript the title of the novel has been translated into English as *Changó, the Baddest Dude*. However, as Zapata Olivella himself told me on various occasions, he prefers the notion of Motherfucker which better captures the ambiguous characteristics of the African god Changó in all its complexities.

leader Benkos Bioho.¹⁵² In 1603 the then Spanish governor Gerónimo Suazo had to sign a peace agreement with the inhabitants of La Matuna, after a series of military excursions to defeat black resistance had failed. Similarly, in a royal decree of 1691, the Spanish King granted freedom to the ‘*palenqueros* of the Sierra de María’, as a result of the ‘maroon wars’, the *guerra de los cimarrones* (Friedemann 1998:83-84).

The *palenque* of San Basilio, located some 70 kilometres south of Cartagena, was founded in 1713 by an *entente cordiale*, a pact of mutual concessions which the inhabitants of San Basilio signed with the bishop of Cartagena, Fray Antonio María Casiani, after attempts by the Spanish colonial troops to destroy this *palenque* and its rebellious population had consistently failed (Escalante 1954). In this pact the *palenqueros* committed themselves to refuse to receive and protect further runaway slaves who had escaped the *haciendas* and the domestic services. In return, the colonial administration acknowledged the *palenque*’s territoriality and self-government (Arocha 1999:49). We do not know in how far the *palenqueros* stuck to this agreement, and if they did indeed turn away any newly arrived maroons, but they certainly applied this pact to demand their rights. This happened in 1774, for example, when they refused entry to their *palenque* to Coronel Antonio de la Torre Miranda who wanted to conduct a census. The *palenque* of San Basilio has remained one of the most visible symbols of black resistance in the Americas, and the inhabitants have been referred to as the ‘first free peoples of the Americas’ (Arrázola 1970). One of the most studied socio-cultural phenomena in San Basilio is the Creole language which developed on American soil, owing its influences to the Spanish as well as to various African languages, and which many of the 3,000 inhabitants of San Basilio still practice today (Friedemann & Patiño Rosselli 1983):

The strategies of escape and confrontation [...] have been vital principles of the resistance and cultural creativity of the African Diaspora which in San Basilio is still expressed in the diverse characteristics of the contemporary community: in social organisation, in funeral rites, in language. [...] Total deculturation did not occur. (Friedemann 1998:85,95; my translation)¹⁵³

¹⁵² In the 1980s a black ethnic guerrilla organisation emerged in the area of the Baudó and the San Juan rivers in the Chocó with the name of Benko Bioho. Not much is known about this guerrilla group, and virtually nothing has been documented on them. They seem to have dissolved in the mid-1990s (various personal communications).

¹⁵³ “Las estrategias de huida y enfrentamiento [...] han sido principios vitales de la resistencia y de la creatividad cultural de la diáspora africana que en San Basilio aún se expresa en los diversos perfiles de la comunidad contemporánea: en la organización social, en la funebria, en la lengua. [...] La deculturación total no ocurrió.”

Not only has the cultural memory of *palenques* survived in San Basilio, but it has also inspired contemporary articulations of the organising processes on the Pacific coast, where, prior to the establishment of community councils, black communities had named their river organisations *palenques*. The *palenque* as *material space* for social organisation has a deep symbolic significance for the specific historical experiences of resistance. It gets mobilised as what we can term a ‘spatialised cultural memory’, and has indeed turned into a ‘site of resistance’ which enables the social movement of black communities to articulate its contemporary political project in a historically and spatially grounded imaginary. I will discuss the figure of *palenque* in contemporary organisation processes in more detail in Chapter 7.

‘Automanumisión’ on the Pacific coast: from resistance to self-liberation

The phenomenon of *palenques* was less common on the Pacific coast than on the Caribbean coast or indeed elsewhere in the colonial Spanish and Portuguese Americas (Zuluaga & Bermúdez 1997). In fact, the *palenque* El Castigo (1732) on the river Patía is the only officially registered *palenque* in the Pacific region (Zuluaga & Bermúdez 1997:38-58; Friedemann 1998),¹⁵⁴ although there is mention of other *palenques* in the oral tradition such as the *palenque* of Tadó in the Chocó and the *palenque* of Zanahoria.¹⁵⁵ Geographical location in dense tropical forests and the different structure of the slavery

¹⁵⁴ Again historical documentation on this *palenque* is rare and biased: “During almost the entire 17th century and the beginnings of the 18th century, the Patía was a territory ignored. For that reason, when one tries to research the emergence of the Palenque El Castigo, it is necessary to move between the hypothetical and legend” (Zuluaga & Bermúdez 1997:38; my translation of: “Durante casi todo el siglo XVII y comienzos del Siglo XVIII, el Patía fue un territorio ignorado. Por esta razón, cuando se trata de averiguar por el surgimiento del palenque de el Castigo, es necesario moverse entre lo hipotético y la leyenda”). These authors further claim that El Castigo emerged at some point between 1635 and 1726, based on the writings of the monk Fray Juan de Santa Gertrudis who speculated on its probable existence and referred to its inhabitants as thieves and criminals (Zuluaga & Bermúdez 1997:39). The year of 1732, often given as the date of origin of El Castigo (Friedemann 1998:89), most likely refers to the first confirmation of its existence by the Jesuit priest Miguel de España who visited the *palenque* after three of its inhabitants had asked the Jesuit priest José María Manferi in Pasto for the presence of a priest amongst them: “In the name of all who were hidden in that place, slaves and freemen, a priest to administer them the holy sacraments so they could live like Christians, since they were so only in name, lacking as they did a priest who would educate them” (Archivo Eclesiástico de Popayán, quoted in Zuluaga & Bermúdez 1997:41; my translation of: “En nombre de todos los que estaban retirados en aquel sitio, así esclavos como libres, cura que les administre los santos sacramentos para vivir como cristianos, pues sólo lo eran en nombre por falta de quien los eduque como párroco”). The *palenque* of El Castigo is important in understanding the social formation of the region of the Patía, in that “resistance practices were generated in it which had continuity and consolidation in the society of the Patía as maroon society” (Zuluaga & Bermúdez 1997:58; my translation: “en él se engendraron prácticas de resistencia que tuvieron continuidad y consolidación en la sociedad Patiana, como sociedad cimarrona”).

¹⁵⁵ Various personal communications from movement leaders of black communities and from historians.

system on the Pacific coast - based on exploitation of the gold mines in relatively small and mobile slave gangs (*cuadrillas*) - account for different liberating experiences. In the Pacific it was more common for slaves to buy their freedom in gold which they had accumulated working on Sundays, their 'day off'. This process was known as *automanumisión*, and "this seems to have been the most recurrent form for the slaves in the Pacific to obtain their freedom. There, escapes were relatively seldom" (Romero 1993:28). This process of accumulating sufficient funds to buy freedom could take several years, however, and not everyone was able to sustain the strains of prolonged hard labour (Romero 1995). Although the process of *automanumisión* set in around 1690, it was from 1775 onwards that slaves started to make extensive use of this option to attain their freedom (Maya 1988).

Yet, the legislation on *automanumisión* must not be understood as a purely philanthropic gesture by the Spanish Crown towards the slaves. An economic rationale underlies its practice considering the specific nature of the slavery system on the Pacific coast, notably the absence of the slave owners from the sites of exploitation, living mainly in the cities in the Andes, and thereby not being able to exercise total control and supervision over the *cuadrillas*.¹⁵⁶ The typical structure of a slave gang, *cuadrilla*, was characterised by an absent master, who left a person in charge to administer the mines, and a *capitán de cuadrilla* who was in charge of the slave gang and who was frequently black himself. Also significant were the relatively high maintenance costs of the slaves and the declining profits from gold mining. Thus by 'selling' a slave his liberty, the responsibility for maintaining that slave was taken off the slave owner. At the same time the latter received a compensation from the liberated slave which in many cases would be higher than the economic wealth that this slave would generate for him in the gold mines. It has also been argued that it was mainly the older and less productive slaves who obtained their freedom this way (Casamán 1997). Furthermore, food security was not always guaranteed in the *cuadrillas*: whereas black slaves worked in the gold mines, indians were integrated into the colonial system as providers of foods to the mines and were hence important in keeping up the efficiency of the black *cuadrillas*. It was mainly in times of food scarcity from the interior of the country that black slaves also started cultivating and fishing to guarantee food security (Romero 1993).

¹⁵⁶ Aprile (1993), for example, observes that at the end of the 18th century there were five owners of gold mines in the river Timbiquí and four in the river Micay, all living in Popayán on the western Andean range. He also registers four owners of mines in Iscuandé, all of whom were living in Pasto. Only in Barbacoas were two to three owners actually living there.

In spite of declining economic returns from the gold mines, many slave owners were bitterly opposed to the abolition of slavery, and some, anticipating its end, sold their slaves before 1851 to make maximum profits with them. Such was the case, for example, of Julio Arboleda from Popayán who owned gold mines in Timbiquí. Shortly before the abolition of slavery, he sold 99 adult slaves and 113 child slaves for 31,410 pesos to Peru (Mina 1975:40-41), thereby not only defying the ideas of abolition but also acting illegally since it was then already against the law to sell slaves abroad. The Law of Womb Liberty from 1821 states in article 6 that “it is rigorously forbidden to sell slaves outwith Colombian territory” (Pastoral de Etnias 1999:10), and article 7 prohibited all kinds of negotiations with slaves. Irony has it that today Julio Arboleda is widely known as a recognised poet, even in the area of Guapi and Timbiquí by the descendants of the very slaves he mistreated and sold. It seems incomprehensible that the airport in Guapi is named after this man, in a town whose population consists of over 90% Afro-Colombians. However, even leaders of black communities in Guapi remembered Julio Arboleda as a poet and not as a cruel slave owner.¹⁵⁷ Just as official history has deleted or changed stories of resistance, Julio Arboleda has entered official history as a respected poet and his blood-stained hands and heart have been ‘whitewashed’ by collective amnesia and dominant historical representations. Only a few testimonies remind us of his cruelty towards the slaves. Casamán remembers one of these testimonies that has been passed on in typical verse-style in the oral tradition to make sure that local history is not completely obliterated from the collective memories. This verse also includes a witty reference to the black leader Lujuria, who set out to free slaves on a hacienda where they had not heard about the law of abolition. At this hacienda, Lujuria, whose name means ‘lechery’, came across some white women from Popayán whose sexual thirst he quenched:

*El sanguinario Arboleda
mataba negros con furia,
pero las popayanejas
gozáronla con ‘Lujuria’.*

The bloodthirsty Arboleda
killed blacks with fury,
but the ladies from Popayán
enjoyed themselves with ‘Lujuria’.

(Casamán 1997:70; my translation)

¹⁵⁷ When I suggested that we change the name of the airport in a direct action event, some proposed to name it after a local female educator. We painted a banner with the new name which was to cover the ‘letters that said slavery’ at the airport, agreed on a time for the event to take place and arranged for the local radio station to cover the direct action live. However, at the last minute some leaders retracted from the idea and argued that it might be better to discuss the issue with the mayor instead of using direct action. The airport is still called ‘Julio Arboleda’ today.



Airport 'Julio Arboleda' in Guapi

The importance of the oral tradition as historical document cannot be emphasised enough here. Faced with a lack of written historical documents or very biased reports, the oral tradition of black people in the Colombian Pacific provides us with a different take on historical facts and events which recover the black slaves and the *libres* as historical subjects emphasising their agency as articulated in acts of rebellion and resistance:

The cultural memory of the communities [of the river San Francisco] talks of the slave uprising in Cascajero, when the slaves used the absence of their master Julián to stage a rebellious attack throwing the kitchen and work instruments into the river and onto its beach. When the master saw this mess he called the place Cascajero [a mess]. That's how the community got its name. (INCORA 1998c, point 2.1; my translation)¹⁵⁸

The process of naming is important in this respect, and although the name Cascajero seems to have been given to the settlement by the slave owner Julián, in the cultural memory it stands for the slaves' uprising. A similar process in which the naming of a place has kept alive collective memories of resistance has been documented in the upper reaches of the river Guapi, inscribed in the name of the settlement of Balsitas, doña Celia's birthplace. Balsitas means 'small rafts' and refers in this context to the means of transport and escape that the maroons of the mines in this area chose to navigate on through the aquatic space to freedom (INCORA 1998b, point 2.1.1).

Anansi and other legends of resistance

As they are passed on in the oral tradition, these (hi)stories of resistance often turn into legends, powerful imaginaries and 'incessant metaphors' for the human desire for freedom. Galeano, for example, tells us of the strategies of the women slaves in Dutch Guinea, today's Surinam, in 1711, when they escaped from the plantations:

The female slaves steal rice, maize and wheat grains, beans and gourd seeds. Their enormous hairdos serve as grainstore. When they reach the open hideouts in the forest, the women shake their heads and fertilise thus the free land. (quoted in Córdoba 1994:3; my translation)¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ "En la memoria cultural de las comunidades se narra la sublevación de los esclavos de Cascajero, los cuales aprovechando la ausencia del amo Julian irrumpieron en ataque de rebeldía tomando los utensilios de cocina y trabajo arrojándolos al río y a su playa. Cuando el amo vio tal desorden lo denominó 'Cascajero'. De aquí proviene el nombre de Cascajero para dicha comunidad."

¹⁵⁹ "Las esclavas roban granos de arroz y de maíz, pepitas de trigo, frijoles y semillas de calabaza. Sus enormes cabelleras hacen de granero. Cuando llegan a los refugios abiertos en la jungla, las mujeres sacuden sus cabezas y fecundan así la tierra libre."

From the same region it is said that one of the first actions of self-liberated slaves was to shed their clothes, a symbolic act articulating their freedom from Spanish subjugation which imposed itself on the bodies of blacks and indians by clothing them (Whitten & Torres 1992:19). The history of black resistance is also full of historical figures turned into legend who symbolise black slave revolts. Possibly the most famous of all maroons, Mackandal in Haiti, the “first self-liberated democratic island republic in the Americas” (Whitten & Torres 1992:19), defied French colonial rule and was ascribed supernatural powers inspiring the black rebellion on this island.¹⁶⁰ In Brazil it is the mystic figure of Zumbi associated with the great *quilombo* of Palmares, who after his death was resurrected in the *quilombo* of Cumbe to fight Portuguese colonial rule.¹⁶¹ His memory lives on today in that “Zumbi will be the name of the chiefs of the incessant black rebellions” (Córdoba 1994:4).

In the Caribbean, it is Nanny, the beautiful priestess of Jamaica who reigns over thunder, lightning, sun and winds, “great woman of burning clay, lover of the gods, [who] wears no more than a necklace made of the teeth of English soldiers” (Córdoba 1994:4; my translation).¹⁶² This woman-goddess is said to have led the maroons in their wars for freedom, and even the mosquitoes allegedly obeyed her at the hour of combat, a natural and efficient weapon against any ‘civilised’ army on tropical soils. Nanny is the same figure that Arocha (1999) associates with the spider-sisterhood of Ananse (*hermandad de Araña*), the goddess of the Fanti-Ashanti people in the golf of Benin, who he also finds under the names of Bush Nansi, Compé Nansi and Aunt Nancy in Costa Rica, Belize, Nicaragua, Panama, Surinam, and Trinidad and Tobago, as well as on the Colombian archipelago of San Andrés and Providencia as Miss Nancy. Anansi as epitome of shrewdness and survival in the Colombian Pacific is symbolic to Arocha (1999) for the knitting of nets of resistances, and provides a common link between the descendants of African slaves throughout the Americas.¹⁶³ The Afro-Colombian anthropologist Rogerio

¹⁶⁰ The Cuban author Alejo Carpentier (1995) [1946] resurrects the figure of Mackandal in his novel *El Reino de Este Mundo* (‘The Kingdom of This World’) and makes use of this legendary and inspiring figure to illustrate Latin America’s reality as what he terms ‘realismo maravilloso’ (marvellous realism). This novel is considered as initiating the literary genre of ‘magic realism’ which swept through the Latin American literary landscape and gave rise to the so-called ‘boom’ in Latin American literature in the 1970s and 1980s.

¹⁶¹ The *quilombo* is the Brazilian equivalent of the *palenque* in the Spanish-speaking Americas, a fortified settlement of runaway slaves.

¹⁶² “gran hembra de barro encendido, amante de los dioses, viste no más con un collar de dientes de soldades ingleses.”

¹⁶³ However, see footnote 84 in Chapter 5 for my critique of Arocha’s over-simplified application of Ananse as an overarching concept of socio-cultural resistance amongst Afro-Colombians.

Velásquez (2000) has also documented in his *Cuentos de la Raza Negra* (1959) a number of stories of Anance that show its shrewdness and capacity of survival in extreme conditions of poverty.

Anansi in the Colombian Pacific possesses the gift to walk on water, furthermore, and powers are ascribed to her which she exercises over the aquatic space. As an informant told Friedemann and Vanín (1991:190), his greatest desire as a child was to walk on water like Anansi. So he learnt Anansi's prayer which he would recite three times, submerging himself in the waters of the river San Juan, preferably during holy week for major effect:

*Oh, divina Anansi,
préstame tu poder!
para andar como tú
sobre las aguas del río,
sobre las aguas del mar,
oh, divina Anansi.*

Oh, divine Anansi,
lend me your power!
to walk like you
on the waters of the river,
on the waters of the sea,
oh, divine Anansi.

(Friedemann & Vanín 1991:190; my translation)

In these local narratives, the aquatic space as *location* (the tropical rain forest of the Pacific lowlands) comprising the *locale* (the rivers as physical setting and context for social interaction) becomes mobilised in the legends of Anansi which form part of the *sense of place* of black communities on the Pacific coast. Moreover, the locale accounts for a set of spatialised social relationships that have evolved around the rivers of the Pacific coast and that embrace settlement forms, family structures and socio-cultural adaptations to the aquatic space. These are the subject of my following inquiries.

Locale: settlement patterns in fluvial territories

Contemporary settlement patterns in the Pacific are the result of settlement processes that began with the Spanish conquest, when colonisation and gold mining activities initiated what Aprile (1993) refers to as the Afro-American settling cycle. As West (1957:97) points out, "the Pacific lowlands of Colombia were significant to Spaniards only for the rich gold placers along the upper and middle courses of rivers." During colonial times three main centres of gold mining were established: the area around the upper San Juan and Atrato drainages in the heart of the Chocó; the area around Barbacoas on the Telembí river in the south-west; and the upper and middle sections of the numerous rivers between Buenaventura and Guapi (West 1957:98). Between 1605 and 1610, tentative military excursions from Popayán and Pasto into the Pacific lowlands had established first mining

camps around the rivers Saija, Guapi and Micay in what is today the Cauca coast (Aprile 1993). Yet, the first Spanish settlement in the Pacific coast is generally accepted to have been Santa María del Puerto (today's Barbacoas) on the river Telembí in 1610. Between 1640 and 1683, a stabilisation of mining camps can be observed around the rivers Timbiquí, Iscuandé and Patía. Towards the end of the 18th century the settlements around Iscuandé and Timbiquí in particular began to show urban characteristics, half of their populations being slaves (Aprile 1993:50). These settlements were known as *reales de minas*, and some became so wealthy that they were qualified as 'tropical gold minimetropolis' (Granda 1977). The aquatic space was hence mobilised as a resource for the exploitation of the gold bearing placers during this first phase of Afro-American settling in the Pacific.

The second phase of extensive agrarian colonisation and independent mining, related to the processes of *cimarronaje* and *automanumisión* as discussed above, led to the construction of a free Afro-Colombian territoriality on the Pacific coast, thus establishing a direct and necessary link between territoriality and freedom.¹⁶⁴ Territoriality, or the control over territory, could only be exercised in conditions of freedom. This link has important implications today, as land ownership and the control over land are regarded as an expression of freedom. As Sabás Casamán explains, commenting on the importance of black communities retaining control over their lands:

He who had suffered the rigour of slavery and the persecution of the landowners knew that freedom was the possession of land, but we had a generation that did not understand this. [...] They sold their little piece of land because they had never seen a \$1,000 peso note before, and all of this to go and live in the city in inhuman conditions. (Casamán 1997:50; my translation)¹⁶⁵

Contrary to what many writers claim, the *libres* did not necessarily search for the remote areas of the Pacific rivers, but continued to work the mines on their own account, following the mobile slave gangs until at some point they would settle down:

¹⁶⁴ Relatively little is known about the settlement forms of runaway slaves in the Pacific. We can assume that those slaves who managed to escape from slavery searched for the isolated and remote river parts where they were relatively secure from being tracked down and caught by their masters. However, while these forms certainly formed part of the construction of a free territoriality of black people in the Pacific, it is wrong to assume that this was the main form of territorialisation there. Self-liberation in the form of *automanumisión*, as described above, was the principal means of gaining freedom among black slaves in the Pacific (Friedemann & Espinosa 1993, Romero 1998).

¹⁶⁵ "El que había sufrido el rigor de la esclavitud y la persecución de los terratenientes sabía que la libertad era la posesión de la tierra, pero tuvimos una generación que no entendió eso. [...] Vendieron el pedacito de tierra dado que nunca habían visto billete de \$1.000 juntos, todo para irse a vivir a la ciudad en condiciones no humanas."

Some must have stopped following the slave gangs to organise themselves in family settlements of gold panners along the rivers. (Friedemann & Espinosa 1993:564; my translation)¹⁶⁶

They continued to mine, as well as work in agriculture and fishing, which led to a potentially conflictual cohabitation, in which the *libres* effectively existed side by side with the slavery system exploiting the same resources:

Maybe the most difficult thing for the group of *libres* was confronting the aggression of the white miner, who saw them as competition, not only for space, but also because they attracted his slave gangs to emulate them. Slavery had entered into another phase; it had as its neighbour the referent of the construction of a free black territoriality. (Romero 1993:28; my translation)¹⁶⁷

Yet, it was not until the abolition of slavery in 1851 and the decline of the gold mining economy in the Colombian Pacific that black settlement patterns spread significantly along the river banks, characteristically in longitudinal and discontinuous extension (Aprile 1993, Romero 1995). As West argues, there are very practical reasons for these “outstanding features of riverine distribution of the Pacific lowland population”:

Along the lower courses of streams natural levees afford the highest land, the best soils for cultivation. Similar advantages are found on alluvial terraces along the middle and upper courses of rivers. Even for non-farmers the river banks are attractive by reason of the usual abundant supply of fish, fresh-water crustaceans and molluscs, and a variety of aquatic and amphibious mammals. Moreover, rivers are the highways in this forested land where interfluves, because of their swampy or rugged nature, are hard to traverse. (West 1957:87)

The rivers constitute the locale in these settlement processes, as they quite literally provide the material resource for settlements and the physical context for social interaction. Furthermore, poor soils favoured dispersed forms of settlements which, with increasing population density, turned into sporadic village-like settlements or *poblamientos aldeanos* (Aprile 1993:95).

Aprile (1993) identifies seven steps in a typical evolution of settling patterns among black groups on the Colombian Pacific coast:

¹⁶⁶ “Algunos debieron dejar de moverse tras las cuadrillas para organizarse en núcleos familiares de ‘mazamorreros’ a lo largo de los ríos.”

¹⁶⁷ “Quizás lo más difícil para el grupo de *libres*, fue enfrentar la agresión del minero blanco, que le veía como una competencia, no sólo del espacio, sino también porque le atraía a sus grupos de esclavos para que le emularan. La esclavitud había entrado en otra fase; tenía como vecino el referente de construcción de la territorialidad libre del negro.”

- (1) A settler arrives in an uninhabited area, fells some trees, plants some plantain and banana trees, maize, and so on, and constructs a rudimentary shelter, a *rancho*, for himself and for storage use. The river functions as a communication network, which precedes the habitat, in that “it is intimately integrated into the everyday life of the farmers and continually participates in their multiple domestic activities” (Aprile 1993:98).
 - (2) The family settles down with definitive, proper housing including a patio, thus producing a ‘complete habitat’ (Aprile 1993:99).
 - (3) Another settler arrives on invitation of the first, who is frequently of the same family, establishing thus an ‘associated bifamiliar habitat’. A path parallel to the river links both houses, and both families share the labour between them.
 - (4) A multifamily neighbourhood is established (*vecindario*), and a first street is built that connects the different houses.
 - (5) A spatial separation occurs between habitat and productive activities with the ‘building of town’ (*formar pueblo*): first state institutions are established, and a school and a chapel are built. A proper street of up to 300 metres is constructed, with houses arranged in linear fashion facing the river.
 - (6) As time goes by a village centre emerges with shops and bars, attracting merchants from outside of the region. This frequently leads to a rupture of the previously homogenous architecture, as these merchants tend to build their houses and shops on the other side of the street closer to the river, thereby obstructing the view onto the river for the first houses.
 - (7) As a final step, the village reaches a linear extension of almost one kilometre, and the need arises for a second street, built parallel to the first one away from the river.
- Furthermore, the state is ever more present with its institutions.



House construction along the river banks; river Guapi

Although Aprile (1993) gives a fairly structural perspective on the evolution of settlements among rural black populations in the Colombian Pacific, the general pattern that he describes can be observed in most rural settlement processes. Furthermore, these are still ongoing processes today, notwithstanding high rates of emigration to the urban centres of the interior of the country, and analytical preference in population studies for migration processes affecting the cities (Wade 1993, Agier 1995, Arboleda 1998). The organising axis in these rural settlement processes is hence still very much the river, giving orientation, shape and dynamics to the settlement patterns in the rural Pacific, which can thereby be considered as specific adaptive responses and strategies to the aquatic space in the Colombian Pacific.

Settlement patterns hence developed from an insular type around colonial mines to dispersed patterns of free agrarian colonisation to concentration in rural centres and later migration to the cities. However, these processes have not been unilinear, and many people, after having spent some time living and working in the cities, have also returned to the rural settlement in their river of origin, a process that Taussig (1979) refers to as ‘circular forms of migration’.¹⁶⁸

In the historical evolution of settlements in the Pacific one can observe an alternate and ‘pendular’ movement with ebb and flow in the forms of habitat. (Mosquera 1999:50; my translation)¹⁶⁹

The family functions in all these processes, be it in rural or urban areas, as an “ordering axis of the articulation of residential spaces” (Mosquera 1999:54). In the cities this takes on a peculiar form in that rural family links are reproduced in the urban context and settlement structures give rise to an ‘urban village system’, *sistema ‘urbano-aldeano’* (Mosquera 1999:51). Black people emigrating from the rivers of the Pacific to the cities stay with their relatives there, understanding ‘relative’ in the sense of the extended family. It is an unwritten rule for those relatives to receive the newcomer in their house, and to provide them with the necessary support to survive in the ‘big city’. This includes a space to sleep, food, money for transport and all kinds of contacts which can be of help to the newly

¹⁶⁸ This trend was confirmed during my fieldwork when a number of interviewees told me about their experiences of living in the cities in the interior of the country, especially Cali and Bogotá, before they decided to return to their rivers. Some of them now are active members of the organising processes in the local community councils.

¹⁶⁹ “En la trayectoria histórica del poblamiento del Pacífico se observa un movimiento alternado y ‘pendular’, con flujo y reflujo en las modalidades del hábitat.”

arrived to get settled.¹⁷⁰ The urban migrants on the other hand remain in constant contact with their relatives in the rivers of the Pacific, sending money when they can to support their families there (Wade 1993, Arboleda 1998). When they periodically return to the rivers to visit their families and friends, they act as a kind of ‘ambassador of modernity’ (Hoffmann 1999:89), bringing with them the latest fashions in clothes and music.¹⁷¹ The urban and the rural are in these ways intrinsically intertwined.

Family structures among black populations

The rural black family in the Colombian Pacific has often been qualified as ‘illegitimate’ by dominant state and church discourses since it is said not to follow occidental, Christian family concepts. These discourses emphasise the supposedly polygamous and unstable character of family relations among black populations, and often portray the father as an irresponsible subject showing no care for the numerous children he may have in various rivers. Affirmations of male virility, such as don Agapito’s, certainly help to reinforce these stereotypical representations:

A man stays where he arrives. And sometimes, let’s say you have been to Tumaco. And in Tumaco where there are plenty of girls [emphasis in speech]. There you can have a child and you don’t even realise. [laughter] Well, such is life. So that boy grows up there, and you don’t even realise. [laughter]

(interview with don Agapito Montaña, Guapi, 23 April 1996; my translation)¹⁷²

Yet, black family structures in the Pacific differ from the western, Catholic norm, in that they represent a set of adaptive answers to the specific physical and social environment in which they evolve. They form in fact “*family alternatives* that adopt different forms in accordance with diverse historical and socio-cultural circumstances and influences” (Friedemann & Espinosa 1993:563; my emphasis). These family alternatives have also

¹⁷⁰ During my stay in Bogotá it happened on various occasions that black people arrived at our flat, presenting themselves as members of my girlfriend’s family who had come to stay to make a living or ‘search for one’s life’ in Bogotá (*buscarse la vida en Bogotá*). Although my girlfriend frequently did not know them, it turned out that they were some second or third degree relatives (*primo-hermanos*), who had been sent to our flat by my girlfriend’s mother from Cali. These family relations function as networks of support and solidarity, and spread throughout the country and indeed to other countries.

¹⁷¹ The notion of ‘ambassador of modernity’ can also be applied in relation to the organising processes of black communities at the local level in the rivers of the Pacific. One of the founding members of the organisation Matamba y Guasá in Guapi resided in Bogotá and now lives in Cali, where she works with a national NGO. This woman functions as an important contact person for the local organisation in the national and international circuit of NGOs and governmental institutions. In that way she is in fact the organisation’s ambassador, negotiating its various demands with the agents of modernity.

¹⁷² “El hombre donde llega, queda. Y a veces, supongamos Usted estuvo en Tumaco. En Tumaco que hay tanta hembra. Allá puede dejar un hijo y Usted no se da cuenta. [se rie] Entonces, así es la vida. Entonces el muchacho queda y Usted no se da cuenta [se rie].”

formed as an adaptive response to the aquatic space in that people settled and formed kinship ties along the same river basins where they effectively established a ‘family territoriality’ (Romero 1998:123):

The family spread out along the river in such a way that there was a piece of land, the forest backland, that belonged to a member of a family that dispersed along the rivers. And the land in general belonged to the family, and could be divided between the children as well. But it was in the name of the head of the family. That means, that there was an individuality about the land, although it was not titled.

(interview with Alfredo Vanín, Tumaco, 19 April 1996; my translation)¹⁷³

The complex relation between kinship ties and territoriality has been conceptualised by Friedemann (1974, 1985) in the notion of *tronco*, based on her observations in the case of the black miners of the river Güelmambí in Nariño:

Troncos in the Güelmambí may be described as consanguineal kinship groups whose members trace their descent to a common ancestor through a line of males or females in a series of parent-child links. (Friedemann 1985:207)

Although such a highly structured representation of family relationships in the Pacific has been questioned as “comfortable and ‘stereotypical’ affirmations of the kinship systems of ‘black groups’ in the Pacific” that have not been observed elsewhere in the region (Restrepo 1995:65), it is important to discuss Friedemann’s conceptualisation here, since it has been employed widely by anthropologists.

Friedemann observes highly systematised links between family structures and territorial rights. Each family traces its descent back to a common ancestor (*antepasado fundador*) considered to be the original owner of the lands on which the current members of his/her descent group live and work. Each descent group known as *tronco*, or trunk, identifies itself with the name of the common ancestor. However, as Friedemann explains:

An individual can choose to affiliate with one tronco in preference to another through options provided by either a maternal or a paternal link. Each nuclear family unit also has the option of activating rights in any of the troncos to which either the man or the woman can trace ancestral lines. This optional affiliation creates a flexible system that can adjust to circumstances such as personal preference for residence, better mining opportunities, and cultivation on sites belonging to the woman’s or man’s tronco. (Friedemann 1985:211)

¹⁷³ “La parentela se iba extendiendo por un río, de tal manera que había un pedazo de tierra, respaldo de monte, perteneciendo a un miembro de una familia que se iban dispersando a lo largo de los ríos. Y la tierra en general pertenecía a la familia y podía dividirse entre los hijos también. Pero estaba en nombre de la cabeza de la familia. O sea, que sí había una individualidad en la tierra así no estuviera titulada.”

The rights of affiliation of any one individual are hence spread across a significant section of space and between different territories. This choice widens with marriage, when normally the man brings his wife to his dwelling and mine where she acquires full active rights, while the couple retains latent rights to the mine and territory of the woman's *tronco*, which on occasion they may choose to activate. The activation of these latent rights is nonetheless subject to approval by other members of the mine in question.

Each *tronco* then owns a territory within which its members have active rights to their own space to live: the right to construct a dwelling, a process known as *parar vivienda*, and to a small plot of land near the house, the *chagra*, which they can cultivate with subsistence crops such as plantain. Furthermore, they own rights to a site which they work as a family mine, *mina-comedero*, and to communal mining land, *mina-compañía*, which they work together with other 'elemental families' (the family base consisting of father, mother, sons and daughters) belonging to the same *tronco*. The totality of this complex is known as *mina*, or mine (Friedemann 1974:15), and individual members identify themselves as being from a particular mine which normally carries the name of the founding ancestor. The denomination 'mine' refers to "the whole complex of social organisation and mining work to which (s)he, his/her family and other individuals and families belong" (Friedemann 1974:23).

Such a highly systematised social organisation based around extended family links and the construction of a family territoriality can be considered as a "strategy of socio-technological adaptation" (Friedemann 1974:49) to the aquatic space and a humid environment:

[The region is] abundant in that clayey mud so characteristic of the acid and little fertile soils of the humid tropics [in which] wheels tend to get buried, go rusty and rot away. This habitat [...] is furthermore inhospitable for oxen, horses and mules. With few machines and still less draught animals, its traditional inhabitants have given life to their economies by investing the energy of their own bodies. (Arocha 1999:66; my translation)¹⁷⁴

To co-ordinate and to maximise the efficiency of these energies, mining activities, agricultural tasks and construction works are all conducted as communal labour drawing on the active participation of all family members:

¹⁷⁴ "[La región es] abundante en ese barro arcilloso tan característico de los suelos ácidos y poco fértiles del trópico húmedo [donde] las ruedas tienden a enterrarse, oxidarse y pudrirse. Ese hábitat [...] es además inhóspito para bueyes, caballos y mulas. Con pocas máquinas y aún menos animales de tiro, sus pobladores tradicionales le han dado vida a sus economías invirtiendo la energía de sus propios cuerpos."

Since working the ecological medium basically consists in gathering people's physical energy, it is important for a family unit to have the possibility to invoke this help through kinship ties [...] and thus to have the reciprocal participation that completes the circle which in the river Güelma [Güelmambí] is called *help*. They are conscious of this reciprocity, as well as of the fact that help is given because 'that guy is my uncle and it is my duty'. (Friedemann 1974:42, emphasis in original; my translation)¹⁷⁵

The overall system of mines and 'elemental families' belonging to *troncos* that can be traced back to the same common ancestor is known as *mina mayor*. There thus exist direct links between family, territory, and a territorial sense of belonging always connected to a particular river:

This system of organisation which connects people and rights beyond the physical boundaries of the *minas mayores* maintains a kinship network which precisely makes people state that 'In this river we are all relatives'. (Friedemann 1974:28; my translation)¹⁷⁶

This observation is supported by the fact that today certain family names dominate in certain rivers. For example, the most common family names in the river Guajuí are Bazán, Cuero, Martínez, Montaña, Hurtado and Angulo (Community Council River Guajuí 1998). In the river Micay they are Riascos and Torres. The people who I met in Guapi all considered themselves *guapireños*, but it was important to them to point out which river they came from and that they had family there. They felt particular responsibility and rights towards *their* river, and, although they lived in the town centre of Guapi, they felt that it was their right to participate in the local organising processes in their river of origin, as their families own land there and therefore they do too.

Friedemann's (1974, 1985) conceptualisation of the rural black kinship networks on the Pacific coast in terms of *troncos* have been derived from her observations in the river Güelmambí. Restrepo (1995:64-65) finds no references to common ancestors who give their name to a *tronco* in the kinship relations on the rivers Satinga and Sanquianga in the southern part of Nariño. Hoffmann (1999:78) also refuses to use the concept of *tronco*, "although the idea exists in the discourse", for the case of the river Mejicano in Nariño,

¹⁷⁵ "Como el trabajo sobre el medio ecológico consiste básicamente en la reunión de energía física de las gentes es importante para una unidad familiar tener la posibilidad de invocar esa ayuda a través de lazos de parentesco [...] y asimismo tener la participación recíproca que completa el círculo que en el Güelma se llama *ayuda*. De esta reciprocidad son concientes, así como del hecho de que la ayuda se concede porque 'fulano de tal es mi tío y es mi deber'."

¹⁷⁶ "Este sistema de organización que enlaza gentes y derechos por encima de los bordes físicos de las minas mayores mantiene una red de parentesco que justamente hace exclamar a sus gentes 'En este río todos somos parientes'."

because she wishes to stress the flexibility of the concept itself. Even so, she acknowledges that the figure of a founder is central to kinship relations there as well. The concept of *tronco* may be too systematically rigid, as applied by Friedemann, yet the relations it describes between kinship, land ownership and family territorialities can be observed throughout the Pacific, as they represent social strategies of adaptation to a changing physical and human environment. It may be best to conceive of kinship relations in the Pacific amongst black populations in terms of an extended family with a set of unwritten rules, responsibilities and feelings, in which there does indeed dominate a strong sense of belonging and solidarity.

This connection brings us back to my earlier discussion in Chapter 5 on the ‘aquatic sense of place’. The river is mobilised as the physical context and setting (locale) for the establishment of kinship networks and family territorialities on the Pacific coast, which in turn inspire subjective feelings of belonging to a particular river with the individual and the collectivities (sense of place). Clearly, in such an analysis locale and sense of place form a mutually constitutive relation on the empirical level, and can only briefly (and somehow forcibly) be separated on the analytical level.

‘Le dije que me esperara, Carmela no me esperó’: mobility and migration¹⁷⁷

The family ties described above extend further as a result of high levels of mobility, both male and female, especially in the form of migration from rural to urban areas:

In this new space, in this appropriated territory, solidarity networks are formed, the names of distant settlements and people are recreated, family albums get worn out and returns are sworn which rarely happen. (Vanín 1999:1; my translation)¹⁷⁸

The tragedy behind many of these migrations, which have almost invariably started with the intention to return one day, is elusively captured in the title of Arboleda’s (1998) book, *Le dije que me esperara, Carmela no me esperó* - ‘I told her to wait for me, Carmela did not wait for me’. This phrase expresses the intentions that lie behind many of the Pacific emigrations: to send for the partner to join the migrant in the city once (s)he has established a household there, or to wait for the opportunity to return to the Pacific, hopefully as a rich

¹⁷⁷ I should make clear that I am not interested in a quantitative analysis of the phenomenon of migration in the Pacific here, but in a brief *qualitative* assessment of how mobility and migration patterns form an integral part of an understanding of the ‘place’ that is the Colombian Pacific coast.

¹⁷⁸ “En ese nuevo espacio, en ese territorio apropiado, se forman redes de solidaridad, se recrean los nombres de los pueblos y personas lejanas, se desgastan los álbumes familiares y se juran retornos que poco se cumplen.”

(wo)man with financial means to improve living conditions in the rivers of the Pacific. Migrations rarely occur as an individual act concerning only the migrant him/herself, but, as Arboleda's (1998) statement indicates, the other person is not always willing or able to wait that long.

Whereas today's migrants leave the Pacific mainly in search of work opportunities or education in the cities (Wade 1993, Arboleda 1998), Vanín (1999) sees a historic continuity in the phenomenon of migration comprised by what he refers to as the 'art of walking', *el arte de caminar*. It all began with the forced voyage from Africa to the Americas during the slave trade. On arriving at Cartagena on the Caribbean coast, the slaves continued their involuntary aquatic voyage, being transported on the rivers Magdalena and Cauca to the interior of the country and then on to the gold mines in the Pacific. Those who managed to escape from the mines, or had already done so during the transport, made their own way into hiding. In that sense runaway slaves embarked on perhaps the first free voyage of black people in the Americas, their escape routes transforming them into the "first proper migrants" (Vanín 1999:3-4).

Around the beginning of the 20th century the national and international markets, in their demand for labour, encouraged increasing migration to new emerging regions. The construction of the Panama canal (1880-1910) initiated major migrations of black people from the Pacific to that region (Aprile 1993:62). Such migrations were generally linked to economic cycles, such as during the *tagua* boom at the end of the 19th century, answering a demand for this 'ivory nut' used in European fashion as buttons. The 1920s and 1930s saw a booming timber industry connected to the construction of railways in the country. Emigration rates from the Pacific accelerated during the 1950s with black people moving to find work on sugar plantations in the Cauca valley; in the 1980s to Cali during a boom of the construction industry related to the coca cartels' activities; and in the same period to the Putumayo and Eastern regions of the country during the coca boom. Today it is very common to find, when asking rural black families in the Pacific on the whereabouts of absent family members, that they answer *llanos orientales*, the Eastern plains of Colombia bordering with Venezuela. At first surprised as to the possible attraction of this area in terms of work opportunities, I soon understood that these migrations were almost invariably connected to coca plantations and the illegal drugs trade in Colombia.

Yet mobility among rural black populations is not merely linked to economic cycles. As shown in the discussion of the *décimas* *The cockle shell* and *The pirate captain*

in the previous chapter, travelling and going places form part of an adult's life, and "for the previous generation to travel was to fulfil an objective that made 'free' and 'complete' the one who travelled (Vanín 1999:11). Don Carlos, for example, doña Celia's son-in-law, regularly came to our house in Guapi to eat, relax and chat. Suffering from chronic asthma, he literally 'came to life' and flowered in his accounts of his travels which led him through the entire Chocó region of the Pacific coast to work in Panama, and later also in Medellín in the interior of the country. Extensive descriptions of his travels and his experiences along the way remained his pride, as he eked out a living as a shoeshiner in Guapi depending on the benevolence of friends and distant family members.¹⁷⁹ Doña Celia herself tells us of how she left Balsitas on the headwaters of the river Guapi as a girl and stayed working with an uncle in Penitente further downstream on the same river before moving to the town of Guapi where she stayed with her sister. The extensive family network is essential in these migrations as providing a first shelter, food and contacts in the new environment:

From Penitente I moved over here to Guapi. Here, in this street here, in what were some houses like these here, on this side, there was a big house of a man called Plinio who lived there with his daughter Velermina. It was a big house, and there, my sister rented, and there I arrived. My older sister, she was there, and I arrived there.

(interview with doña Celia Lucumí Caicedo, Guapi, 12 July 1999; my translation)¹⁸⁰

Later doña Celia went to Buenaventura for a few years to work, then to Cali, before she finally returned to Guapi.

It is important to point to the spatial and temporal differences that exist in the notion of mobility in the Pacific. Not only are there 'long routes' of emigration to the cities in the interior, which are often routes of no return or of only periodic returns and visits from the cities, there are also 'circular forms of migration' (Taussig 1979) whereby people go to work elsewhere in the interior of the country for a number of years and later return to work and to live in their respective rivers. There are furthermore the 'short routes' of migration (Vanín 1999:6), short both in space and time, including, for example, the travels to the various cultivated plots of land that a family owns away from the usual place of residence. This 'permanent nomadism' (Aprile 1993:93) means that frequently a family

¹⁷⁹ Don Carlos died in November 2000 from an asthma attack.

¹⁸⁰ "De Penitente me pasé aquí a Guapi. Aquí, en esta carrera de aquí, lo que eran unas casitas así, a este lado, allí había una casa grande de un señor que se llama Plinio que vive allí con la hija Velermina. Era una casa grande que había allí, y allí, mi hermanita arrendaba, y allí llegué yo. Mi hermana mayor, allí estaba ella, y allí llegué yo."

father is absent from the household for a week or two while looking after his *finca* and plantations in a different river. In these short migratory routes the river network provides the locale that enables the movement and mobility of the migrant through the aquatic space.

The 'logic of the river' - geographical and symbolic meanings

Within the organising and identifying system of black communities on the Pacific coast, the river is hence central to all economic, domestic and social activities, and is the principal factor of identification in rural areas. Houses are constructed on stilts along river banks, all transport is river-based, while fishing and collecting of shellfish are important contributors to the local diet and provide extra income. The river is also the space of social interaction for black communities on the Pacific coast. It is here where people wash themselves, women wash clothes and fetch water, and children play. These activities are of an almost ritual nature, accompanied by laughter, storytelling and gossiping. This becomes most evident on market days, which attract locals from surrounding settlements not only to sell their products and stock up necessary food items and general merchandise, but also to exchange information and stories. The market, usually held on the river banks, is the most important and often the only source of information and means of communication for many inhabitants of more isolated communities. The river hence is a *social space* of everyday human interactions and becomes a *collective space* of social relations that are based on co-operation and solidarity:

I remember, as a girl I never went alone to wash the clothes in the river; we were always at least four. Or to wash the dishes. We always did things together.

(interview with Silveria Rodriguez, Guapi, 29 April 1996)¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ “Me acuerdo, como niña nunca fui sola a lavar la ropa en el río; siempre fuimos por lo menos cuatro. O a lavar ollas. Siempre hicimos las cosas juntas.”



‘... where people wash themselves, women wash clothes, and children play’: the river as ‘space of social interaction’; landing steps at Guapi



Basketball pitch on the banks of the river Timbiquí in Santa Bárbara

This ‘doing things together’ as an expression of solidarity and of the collective spirit of many activities is still a crucial articulation of the social relations of black communities on the Pacific coast. It extends into the fields of agriculture and construction in rural communities, whereby joint labour forces are applied to save energy and to fulfil tasks that would prove too big for an individual or for one family. These collective forms of labour are known as *minga*, a co-operative labour group that works for the benefit of the community, or *cambio de mano* (‘exchanging hands’) when someone ‘lends’ his hands to a neighbour or relative who later repays the favour.¹⁸²

In the fields we used to work in groups a lot. So, when I went, for example, to plant some one hundred plantain trees, I can't do this alone in one day; so I went with my neighbours, and we did it and got the work done. And with the others the same.

*(interview with Silveria Rodriguez, Guapi, 29 April 1996)*¹⁸³

This practice was also common in the construction process:

When you built your house, all the men came together - the owner of the house prepared the food that day - but all the men came together, and this house, well, they built it in one day. That's how everything went.

*(interview with Teófila Betancourt, Guapi, 23 April 1996; my translation)*¹⁸⁴

For these activities neighbours and relatives from other rivers come together, and, although many of these relations have been monetarised today by paying labourers to do the work, the traditional practices of *cambio de mano* and *minga* can still be observed, especially in the more isolated river parts (INCORA 1998a, 1998b, 1998c).

The river as central point of local reference is also clearly depicted in an exercise carried out by a government project of Ecological Zonification of the Colombian Pacific Region (IGAC 1999). Part of this project examined local territorial perceptions in workshops where locals drew up mental maps of what they conceived to be their territories.

¹⁸² In the practice of *cambio de mano*, an individual or a group of people provide their workforce to someone else who at a later point repays them by providing work for them, thereby quite literally ‘exchanging hands’. *Minga*, on the other hand, is a co-operative labour group, where a number of people come together to work as a group, normally for common benefits. *Minga* is practised, for example, in many rural communities before and during the traditional religious celebrations when months in advance maize is sown to be reaped and cooked in time for the preparations of the patron saint festivities.

¹⁸³ “En los campos se utilizaba mucho antes el trabajo en grupos. Entonces, si yo iba, por ejemplo, a sembrar unas 100 matas de plátanos, yo en el día no puedo hacerlo sola; entonces, me iba con mis vecinos, y lo hacíamos y salíamos de ese trabajo. Y así mismo los otros.”

¹⁸⁴ “Si tú vas a hacer tu casa, todos los hombres se reunían - el dueño de la casa hacía la comida para ese día - pero todos los hombres se reunían, y esa casa hacían, pues, en un día. Así era todo.”

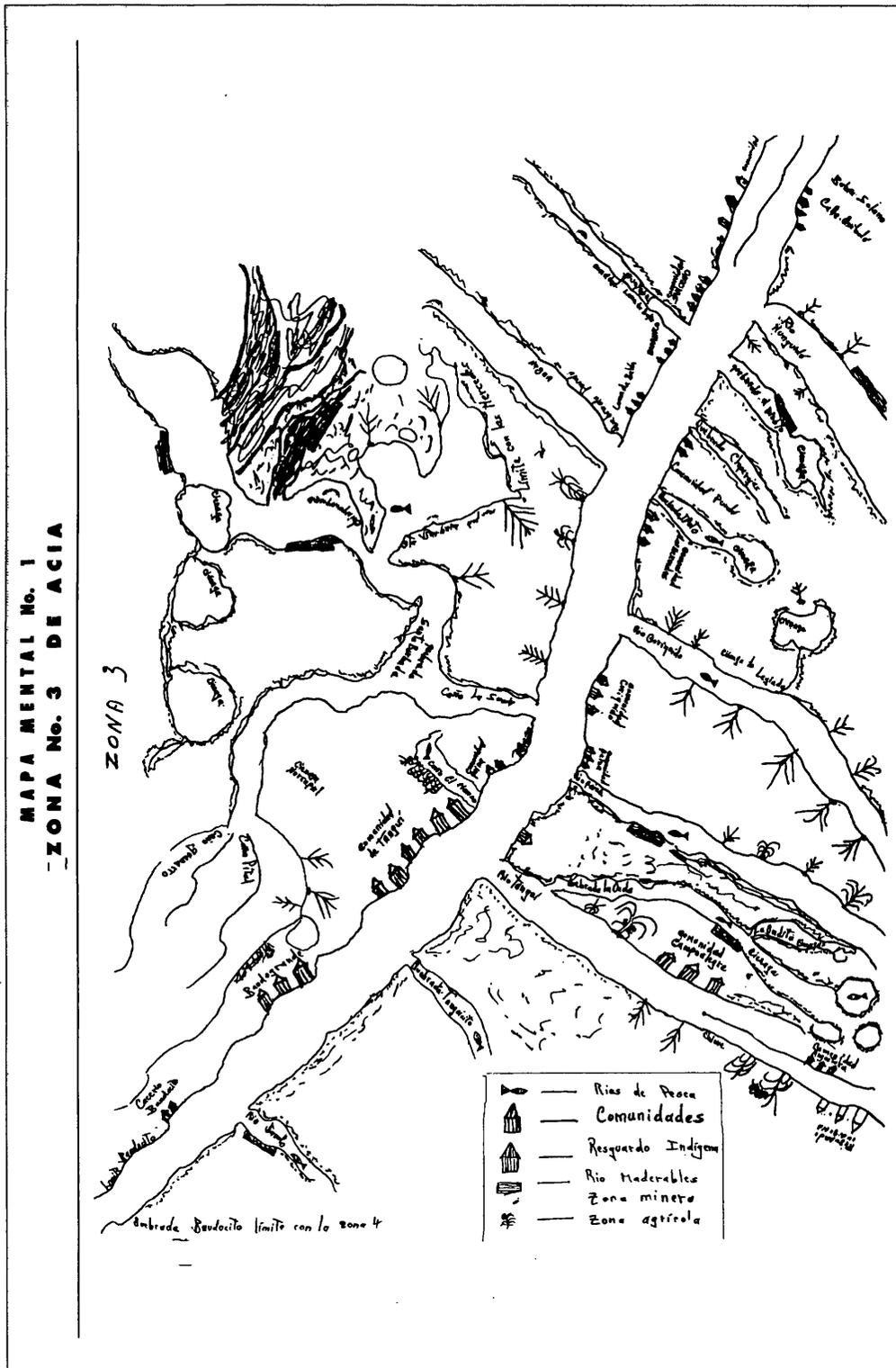


Figure 6.2 Mental map of the river Atrato produced by local communities
 Source: IGAC (1999:31)

The results of this exercise were then later translated into scientific maps by Colombia's Geographical Institute (IGAC), and served as an important tool in the current process of collective land titling for black communities on the Colombian Pacific coast. The map drawn here by participants in the workshop clearly shows the river as the central feature. It also shows in accurate detail the different tributaries and the width of river channels as perceived by locals. The locations of settlements, plantations and other productive activities are identified again in reference to what can be termed 'local mental river coordinates'.

In the local geographical imaginaries, the different parts of the river are mutually interconnected and must be regarded as integral parts belonging to the same socio-cultural system. Interactions between the different populations along a particular river are such that communities in the middle parts or the headwaters of the river depend on the productive activities of communities in the river mouth, especially on the provision of fish. Furthermore, many of the people living river upstream own lands further downstream as well. So the interconnectedness along a river basin is not only evident in terms of exchange of foodstuffs, but also in terms of land distribution and property relations. These spatialised social relationships along the river basins are an expression of what activists of black communities refer to as 'the logic of the river':

In the logic of the river the characteristics of land use are determined by location: in the upper section of the river, emphasis is given to traditional gold mining, and hunting and gathering activities are exercised in the forest hills; towards the middle section, emphasis is put on agricultural production and selective logging, as well as hunting and gathering activities in the forest backlands; towards the lower section, emphasis is given to fishing and gathering of shells, molluscs and crabs together with agricultural activities. Between all sections there exists a continuous relation between the upper and the lower parts and *vice versa* and of the middle section with both, characterised by a mobility that follows the natural course of the river and of nature. Its dynamics strengthen and permit kinship relations and the exchange of products with the productive unit in these dynamics being the dispersed family along the river. (PCN 1999:1; my translation)¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ "En la lógica del río las propiedades del uso del territorio están determinadas por la ubicación: en la parte alta del río se da énfasis a la producción minera artesanal, se desarrollan actividades de cacería y recolección en el monte de montaña, hacia la parte media el énfasis se da en la producción agrícola y el tumbado selectivo de árboles maderables, también se desarrollan las actividades de cacería y recolección en el monte de respaldo; hacia la parte baja el énfasis se da en la pesca y recolección de conchas, moluscos y cangrejos compartidos con la actividad agrícola. Entre todas las partes existe una relación continua del arriba con el abajo y viceversa y del medio con ambas, caracterizado por una movilidad que sigue el curso natural del río y la naturaleza, cuyas dinámicas fortalecen y posibilitan las relaciones de parentesco e intercambio de productos siendo en esta dinámica la unidad productiva la familia dispersa a lo largo del río."

Socio-cultural adaptation to the aquatic space

In Guapi on the Colombian Pacific coast a man walks the streets with his stomach inflating at high tide. With the retreating waters at low tide, his stomach deflates accordingly until it reaches its 'normal' proportions.

(story told in Guapi)

Facing floods and tsunamis

Whitten (1986) has discussed in detail the adaptive responses of rural black populations to an uncertain physical and economic environment, where local economies have responded and adapted to the various boom-and-bust cycles satisfying the raw material demands of external regions, both national and international. Yet, black people in the Pacific have also had to adapt to the physical uncertainties of the aquatic space, characterised by heavy rainfall, frequent large-scale inundations caused by bursting river banks, and other devastating effects of natural disasters such as large tidal waves and tsunamis. To Whitten (1986), the cultural adaptation of the 'black frontiersmen' to the uncertainties of the physical and economic environment in the Pacific must be seen as a dynamic process consisting of three main factors: an intense spatial mobility, as I have outlined above, both as short term and longer term migrations; a traditional system of social organisation, including extended family networks and systems of communal labour and solidarity, also discussed above; and adaptive processes to new technologies and state institutions.

Others have also argued that the intense spatial mobility of rural black groups can partly be explained by the physical limitations and conditions of an environment in which frequent inundations of the countless rivers are a common occurrence (Romero 1993, Vanín 1999). The area of Guapi, for example, receives an annual rainfall of 3,966 millimetres (Del Valle 1996:26), which normally occurs in short but heavy spells, a characteristic of tropical rain forest environments. Precipitation increases further inland, so that in San Antonio de Guajú, for example, it reaches some 5,500 millimetres. These factors can lead to a rapid swelling of rivers and a sudden increase in water volume and flow velocity shortly after rainfall has set in. This causes frequent, large-scale inundations, so that many inhabited areas along river banks are effectively 'fluvial territories'. Although Afro-Colombians have adapted their house construction to these hazards by building their homes on stilts (*pilotes*), many floods still wash whole communities away. During my stay in Guapi, massive flooding occurred at the end of April 1999 as a result of prolonged heavy rainfall in the foothill areas of the Pacific lowlands (El País 1999). Particularly affected were the upper

parts of the river Napi, where cultivated plots of maize, rice and fruit trees were completely destroyed, and entire settlements along the river banks were swept away, affecting over 250 families. As I was standing on the river bank further downstream in the town of Guapi, plantain trees, roof thatch and wooden pillars used in the construction of houses were carried down to the sea by the current of a swollen river Guapi. One person disappeared during these heavy floods, and the corpse turned up only two days later badly torn-up at the river mouth. Emergency help was set up by the local municipality and the regional governor in Popayán, providing foodstuffs, medication and emergency shelter. However, more important were the extended family networks in the various rivers which guaranteed survival and granted support, food and a roof to those affected by the flood. A previous heavy flood in the area had occurred on 12th May 1996. It affected 5,835 people in the municipality of Guapi, especially in the settlements of Bellavista and Limones, and resulted in the destruction of housing and crops (DNPAD 1995).

These disasters have a profound collective psychological effect, and the inhabitants of the Pacific coast, both urban and rural, are aware of the physical uncertainties that living with the aquatic space means to them. Nevertheless, once the waters have retreated, people tend to return to their lands and, mobilising the aquatic space as the physical setting for their social interactions, start again with the construction of houses along the river banks rather than moving into different and what may be considered ‘safer’ areas:

In spite of the danger, people don't want to move away from there. [...] Actually, the whole of Tumaco is in danger. This area here where I am, a big tidal wave with high waters would sweep this office away. Of course, what happens is that already at spring tide there are houses in danger, and the sanitary conditions are very bad. But the problem is all around social identity constructed around the neighbourhood. This is very strong so that people do not easily accept a resettlement. The problem is basically one of identity and rootedness in a place.

(interview with Alfredo Vanín, Tumaco, 19 April 1996; my translation)¹⁸⁶

This ‘rootedness in place’, or in the locale of the Pacific lowlands, and the feeling of belonging to the land and to a particular river impels people to remain in (or return to) a

¹⁸⁶ “La gente, pese al peligro no quiere moverse de allí. [...] Incluso todo Tumaco está en peligro. Esta zona aquí donde estoy, un gran maremoto con el agua alta barrería esta oficina. Claro, lo que pasa es que ya incluso con las pujas altas hay casas en peligro, y las condiciones de salubridad son pésimas. Pero el problema es todo a la identidad social construida en torno del barrio. Eso es muy fuerte para que la gente acepte una reubicación. El problema es de identidad y de arraigo a un sitio básicamente.”

place that may *objectively* be considered 'in danger', but that *subjectively* has generated a sense of place that resists these kind of 'objectivations' and representations of space.¹⁸⁷

Seismic activity and its devastating effects present another threat from the natural environment in the southern Pacific coast. Only too well do people remember the tsunami that hit the Pacific coast on 12th December 1979 at 2.59 am local time, affecting an area from Las Esmeraldas in Ecuador to Guapi.¹⁸⁸ An estimated 500 to 600 people died and around 4,000 people were injured, while over 10,000 homes were destroyed (Pararas-Carayannis 1982). The settlements of San Juan and El Charco in Nariño were completely wiped out by waves that reached five metres above sea level. In some areas such as Amarales these waves washed away large parts of the cultivated areas, while the deposited salt sterilised many lands for years thereafter. This effect can still be felt today, although some lands have already recovered with the first palm trees establishing themselves once again.

Adaptive strategies to disasters like this call on the creativity of local people and a plural combination of economic activities, processes that have been referred to as *polifonía cultural* (Arocha 1991) and which are seen as characteristic of rural black population groups who combine fishing activities with agriculture, and in the upper sections of the rivers also with mining. Following the tsunami of 1979, for example, the inhabitants of La Caleta Libre near Tumaco had to abandon their agricultural productive activities since their lands had been flooded and salinised (Arocha 1999:52). Instead, they fabricated self-made hooks and fishing lines, recycling pieces of metal and string from the rubbish heaps of Tumaco, to intensify the catching of crabs, a previously only occasional activity. Once the lands had recovered their fertility, they again planted, harvested and sold coconuts, using this income to buy nylon nets to increase the catches of crabs. People's creative capacity in applying disposed articles and items for their needs, a process that Arocha (1993) refers to as *bricolage*, has thereby not only guaranteed survival for rural black populations in this area but usefully diversified their economic strategies.

¹⁸⁷ This argument can also partly explain the current trends of displaced people in Colombia who want to return to their places of origin which they had to flee as the result of Colombia's internal conflict, even though they expose themselves to very concrete dangers to their lives by doing so.

¹⁸⁸ Tsunamis are giant sea waves caused by earthquake shocks, the epicentres of which are located along faults in the sea bottom a few miles off-shore. At least three more tsunamis have been registered as affecting the Colombian Pacific coastline over the last 150 years: one in 1836, with its epicentre off Guapi; another in 1868; and another one on 31 January 1906. The latter destroyed several coastal villages and coconut plantations and eroded large sections of beaches and mangrove swamps for a stretch of sixty miles along the coast near Tumaco (West 1957:57-60).

'Convivencia acuática': seizing the tides

Rural black identities have become intimately linked to the experience of the aquatic, and the tidal rhythms in particular strongly influence everyday life patterns. The town of Guapi, for example, lies some 17 kilometres from the mouth of the river Guapi at a height of two metres above sea level. The newcomer to the region who arrives in the morning can be forgiven if (s)he is surprised in the afternoon by the fact that the river seems to have changed direction, now flowing upstream. A tidal range of 4.5 metres and low river flow velocity (Del Valle 1996) mean that twice a day at high tide brackish water reaches far beyond Guapi, and that during relatively dry periods levels of saltwater intrusion can be very high:

When it stops raining for at least a week, the river gets salty, because we are quite close to the sea here. Then we go upstream to Temuey, which is a fairly big stream, and the water doesn't get salty there; so we go and collect water in dug-out canoes; and we use that water.

(interview with Teófila Betancourt, Guapi, 23 April 1996; my translation)¹⁸⁹

On the other hand at low tide the waters retreat and expose the mangrove swamps, an important zone of both ecological productivity (West 1957:70-72) and economic activity by black populations:

One could imagine only very few economic activities in the Pacific littoral without the mangrove. During high tides, estuaries and *caños* [crevasse channels cut through river banks by flooding waters] absorb the swell of the waves, thus enabling the navigator to row in dugout canoe to faraway places. The great number of organisms which it sustains form the first link of the complex food chains of the Pacific. Tannin and firewood are derived from the trunks and branches of its trees, and charcoal from its roots. Finally, the lives of many women depend on the shells and crabs which live in the mud. (Arocha 1999:73; my translation)¹⁹⁰

These women, known as *concheras*, travel into mangrove areas to collect shells (*conchas*), which live buried in the mud, and do so at low tide when they can more easily extract them. Part of the catch is sold later on the local markets, the other part provides a welcome addition to the local diet and is usually cooked at home in coconut milk. The *concheras*

¹⁸⁹ "Cuando deja llover, por lo menos, una semana, se sala, porque tenemos el mar aquí bastante cerca. Entonces nos subimos hacia arriba a Temuey, que es una quebrada bien grande que hay, y el agua no se sala; entonces vamos y recogimos agua en potrillo, en canoa; y ese agua utilizamos."

¹⁹⁰ "Muy pocas actividades económicas del litoral Pacífico podrían imaginarse sin el manglar. Durante las pleamares, esteros y caños amortiguan el oleaje, permitiéndole al navegante bogar en potro hasta sitios distantes. La infinidad de organismos que sustenta forman el primer eslabón de las complejas cadenas alimenticias del Pacífico. De los troncos y ramas de sus árboles salen tanino y leña, y de las raíces, carbón vegetal. En fin, de las conchas y cangrejos que se albergan en el lodo depende la vida de muchas mujeres."

actively mobilise the aquatic space in their activities, making use of tidal rhythms that enable them to travel rapidly in dugout canoes. Doña Celia's daughter Anunciación and her daughter-in-law Luz Ofelia, for example, frequently set out in their dugout canoe downstream on the river Guapi to go to pick shells and to catch crabs. Typically, this is only one of their diverse economic strategies. Anunciación usually buys large bunches of *chontaduros*, the fruit of the peach palm, to sell them in the local neighbourhood. She also works during the day as *revendedora* on the local market, 're-selling' the fish she bought in large quantities from the fishermen at dawn. Luz Ofelia, apart from being at the age of thirty-three a mother of eight children, occasionally works in the nearby palm hearts processing plant ALENPAC, a case I will discuss in the following chapter. When the two women in their function as *concheras* set out into the mangrove swamps to catch crabs and shells, they usually stay away over night and return the following day. They calculate their departure precisely at low tide so that the retreating waters of the river Guapi guarantee a speedy journey towards the mangrove swamps, and that on arrival there the mud flats are exposed for them to pick the crabs and shells. They take already prepared food with them in metal pots, usually *tapao*, the traditional steamed fish and plantain dish. Once their task is fulfilled, they wait for the next high tide to help them navigate upstream in their canoe. This system of transport makes it possible for the *concheras* to travel large distances to and from the mangrove swamps without much effort in their dugout canoes. They make further use of the aquatic space by travelling through the tranquil waters of the estuaries and crevasse channels (*por dentro*), without the necessity to enter the open sea (*por fuera*), which could be a dangerous venture:

As the higher portions of the [sand] banks constantly shift position due to wave and current action, navigation is extremely hazardous immediately offshore even for shallow draft boats and canoes. During high tide the large swells that reach the shore make canoe navigation almost impossible. [...] Canoes and small launches use the quiet waters of the *esteros* for coastwise travel, rather than risk the turbulent swells and waves at sea, or *por afuera*. Travel *por adentro* along the inland channels, however, must be closely timed to correspond with periods of high tide. More than once the writer has been stranded for several hours in a canoe stuck on the muddy bottom of an *estero* at low tide, being pestered to distraction by black flies and mosquitoes until the water slowly rose with the incoming tide. (West 1957:55, 70; emphases in original)

At low tide the channels of the extensive mangrove areas virtually dry up, and not even small canoes can pass through them, let alone motor driven speed boats. Travelling schedules therefore have to be adapted to the tidal rhythm, which can mean very early

departures at three or four o'clock in the morning depending on water availability in the river channels. For the tree-cutters in the *guandal* forests of the southern Pacific,¹⁹¹ the effect of the tides “not only determines the appropriate time to set off for work, but also for returning from work, so that the working days get either shorter or longer. This fact, amongst others, means that the working day in the Pacific has a differential effective time” (Restrepo 1996b:366; my translation).¹⁹²

In the upper sections of the rivers it is more the precipitation patterns that influence navigation, and during relatively dry periods the river bed is frequently not deep enough for even a small dugout canoe to pass:

The river is the principal street of this forest. Travelling on it in canoe is difficult in the upstream parts towards the foothills, when it is necessary to pull the embarkation or leave it behind, and keep walking along the beaches¹⁹³ and paths that communicate one settlement with another. (Friedemann 1974:19; my translation)¹⁹⁴

Friedemann's observations coincide with doña Celia's account of travelling as a young girl in her dugout canoe in the upper stretches of the river Guapi at Balsitas, as transcribed at the beginning of Chapter 5. Little Celia had to walk along the river beaches and pull her little canoe along the river bank and around the river bend before she was able to paddle again.

'Palo bastante, coge bueno con vaciante':¹⁹⁵ tidal impact on traditional logging

The tidal rhythm is also taken into account when timber has to be transported over larger distances from the felling site to the sawmills. The felled tree is normally pulled over the forest floor to a nearby water channel or river. There, depending on the channel's width, various logs are tied together with natural fibres to form a raft which then floats downstream until it reaches the sawmill. In the *guandal* forests of the department of Nariño the tree-cutters (*tuqueros*) use two different and complementary forms of transporting the

¹⁹¹ The *guandal* is a backswamp of palm thickets of largely inundated lands found mainly in the southern part of the department of Nariño. A similar ecosystem in the Chocó department is referred to as *palmar*.

¹⁹² “determinará no sólo la hora adecuada para ir a trabajar, sino también la de la salida, con lo cual se acortan o alargan, según el caso, las jornadas de trabajo. Este factor, entre otros, hace que la jornada de trabajo en el Pacífico posea tiempos efectivos diferenciales.”

¹⁹³ Beaches, or *playas*, in the Pacific riverine context are point bars of gravel and boulders which are exposed along the river banks at low tide or during drier periods.

¹⁹⁴ “El río es la calle principal de esta selva. Su recorrido en canoa es difícil a medida que se remonta hacia el pie de la montaña, cuando es necesario arrastrar la embarcación o dejarla, para seguir caminando por las playas y senderos que comunican un caserío con el otro.”

¹⁹⁵ This Spanish verse recorded with doña Celia can roughly be translated as ‘lots of logs side by side, travel fast at low tide’. It refers to the fact that in traditional logging the felled trees are bound together to form a raft on the river, which then travels downstream and does so best at low tide with the retreating waters.

logs. One form is over land which implies the temporary construction of ‘roads’ (*carreteras*) by placing thin logs some three metres apart and parallel to one another from the felling site to a watercourse. The felled tree (*tuco*) is then rolled over these logs until it reaches the waterway on which it can be transported downstream. A longer lasting road for the transport of logs is often constructed in the forms of ditches (*cunetas*) of one metre width and two metres depth which fill up with water after prolonged periods of precipitation or at high tide, and along which the logs are transported to a larger and wider waterway (Restrepo 1996:252-253). Both the ditches and the roads therefore constitute the fundamental infrastructure in the timber extraction processes on the southern Pacific coast.

The tree-cutters usually travel on the rafts to direct, steer and protect them. This journey can take hours and even days depending on the distance to be covered and the tidal impact. So again, at low tide the raft travels faster downstream than at high tide, when it would be going against the flow. Locals are usually well prepared for these trips, carrying cooking utensils and foodstuffs such as plantains with them. Fish can be caught in the river, or occasionally it has already been prepared before departure. Although it is usually men who cut trees and deliver them to the saw mills, frequently their wives help them in this task:

It was I who was working with him [her husband]. A woman also helps her man. Look, if one wants to work, my son, a woman who wants to work, she does work. If I had someone with whom to work in the forest, I'd be doing anything in the forest. Because working in the forest is wonderful. I enjoyed it a lot working in the forest.

(interview with doña Celia Lucumí Caicedo, Guapi, 5 July 1999; my translation)¹⁹⁶

When doña Celia went logging with her husband, they travelled downstream on the river Temuey, a smaller tributary to the river Guapi, at low tide on the rafts that they had built with the felled logs until they reached the river Guapi. There they waited for the high tide to help them travel upstream on the river Guapi until they reached the sawmill. So it was the double effect of the tides upon which they depended for transporting the felled logs to the sawmill. All of this was achieved without any powered engines, but using the natural rhythm of the tides, careful calculations of the precise time when to travel, a degree of patience and tranquillity (see my opening remark in Chapter 5), and the steering capacity while navigating the fluvial routes of the rivers in the Pacific:

¹⁹⁶ “Yo, yo era quien trabajaba con él. Una mujer también le ayuda al hombre. Veá, uno queriendo trabajar, mijo, una mujer que quiera trabajar, trabaja. Si yo tuviera con quien andar en el monte, yo cualquier cosa estaba haciendo en el monte. Porque el trabajo en el monte es divino. A mí me gustaba mucho trabajar en el monte.”

The trees we cut went to Nicolás. Often that was here, when he had the sawmill here in Guapi. And when he then moved the sawmill to where it is now [further upstream], we had to take the logs up there. All the timber we cut was from Temuey. At low tide we transported the logs to the mouth of the [river] Temuey. And when the water rose we moved it upstream from the mouth of the Temuey. From the mouth of the Temuey in a raft, some two to three hours. When these were a lot of logs, we just sat on top of them. One travels like in a canoe. And with one's paddle one helps the water, one helps it. There could be three, four rafts leaving from the mouth of the Temuey. And when they [at the sawmill] saw that three arrived, we had already got there long before. Because I didn't like just staying put quietly on the raft, but I preferred to help it move more quickly. And the other one [her husband] as well. In any case we arrived before the others, because they didn't want to tire themselves. But we did. The moment we climbed onto the raft we helped the water to move us. To the sawmill of Nicolás Martán. Once we moved 75 logs from Temuey to the sawmill here. First we came down with them during low tide to the mouth of the Temuey, which was a small tide. It gave us just about enough water to travel downstream to the mouth of the Temuey. And from there, plam, plam, from here to there [helping out paddling on the raft]. And I'm telling you that when we got here, we went straight to Puerto Cali [where the sawmill was]. And you know of course that 'lots of logs side by side, travel fast at low tide' [saying which rhymes in the original Spanish as well].

(interview with doña Celia Lucumí Caicedo, Guapi, 5 July 1999; my translation)¹⁹⁷

Manipulating the aquatic space: nature's blessing and river's vengeance

As doña Celia's account shows, rural black populations have not only adapted themselves to an aquatic environment, they have also actively adapted this environment to their needs. The people of San Antonio de Guajuí, a village of 910 inhabitants (Community Council River Guajuí 1998) located in the foothills of the Pacific lowlands some 20 kilometres upstream on the river Guajuí, have made use of the surrounding topography and high levels of precipitation of over 5,500 millimetres per year, when they built a system to provide them with running water. Pipelines were built to two streams located some two kilometres from the village at higher elevations. Through these pipes the water reaches an overflow tank in the village from which it is distributed to the various households by gravity. Thus,

¹⁹⁷ "La madera que cortamos era pa' donde Nicolás. Muchas veces aquí, cuando tenía el aserrío aquí en Guapi. Y cuando ya pasó el aserrío adonde está, allá teníamos que subir la madera. De Temuey sacamos toda la madera. Con la vaciante la sacamos a la boca de Temuey. Y cuando subía el agua la sacamos desde la boca de Temuey p'arriba. De la boca de Temuey en una balsa, unas dos horas o tres horas. Cuando la madera era grande, nosotros nos sentamos allá encima. Uno va como dentro de una canoa. Y uno con su canaleta le va ayudando al agua, le va ayudando. Podían salir tres, cuatro balsadas de la boca de Temuey. Y cuando veían que las tres llegaban, hacía rato que nosotros ya habíamos llegado. Porque a mí no me gustaba estar sentada quietecita en la balsa, sino que dale, dale, dale. Y el otro también. Totalmente que nosotros llegamos primero que los demás, pues ellos no querían cansancio. Y nosotros sí. Desde que nos montamos encima de la balsa era ayúdale al agua. Al aserrío de Nicolás Martán. Una vez bajamos 75 trozas del Temuey hasta el aserrío aquí. Primeramente la bajamos en una vaciante hasta la boca de Temuey que era así chiquita. Apenas nos dio el agua para bajar a la boca de Temuey. De allí, plam, plam, de allí por aquí. Y le digo que cuando llegamos aquí, que veníamos derecho allí a Puerto Cali. Y ya Usted sabe que 'palo bastante, coge bueno con vaciante'."

even in the drier months a sufficient fresh water supply is guaranteed, which flows straight into people's homes, a rare luxury on the Pacific coast.

Yet, adaptations of the aquatic space have not always been so successful. The construction of the so-called Canal Naranjo,¹⁹⁸ serves as a negative example which has had a devastating impact on both the physical and human environments (Almario & Castillo 1996:64), as a result of which the town of Bocas de Satinga in the department of Nariño with a population of 4,968 (DANE 1993)¹⁹⁹ is now under serious threat of disappearing altogether. The construction of a 1,800 metres-long canal in 1973 which linked the rivers Patía and Sanquianga, in order to facilitate the transport of timber from remote extraction sites in the former to the river mouth of the latter, has attracted strong criticism:

[The canal is a] work of the greed and irresponsibility of the sawmill owners and timber merchants who are settled at the mouths of the [river] Sanquianga, who after having devastated the forests of the river Sanquianga, aimed at making accessible those of the [river] Patía with this canal. (Echeverri 1979:22-23; my translation)²⁰⁰

As a result of the canal's construction, the river Patía has changed its course due to its higher elevation and drastically increased water volume and flow velocity of the river Sanquianga. The latter's river bed breadth increased from 30 to 200 metres and now regularly floods the town of Bocas de Satinga that lies at its mouth. An inundation at the beginning of June 1996 destroyed the houses of 400 families, flooded plantations and wiped away 80% of the urban centre. Planning officers at the National Department of the Prevention and Attention of Disasters DNPAD (Departamento Nacional de Prevención y Atención de Desastres) have recommended a total resettlement of the town (El Tiempo 1996). A flood in March 1999 affected more than 10,000 people in both the town centre and the surrounding rural areas when houses and crops were destroyed (El Espectador 1999). On the other hand, the settlement of Salahonda, which lies near the mouth of the river Patía, now experiences serious droughts due to the latter's lower water discharge. This example shows the fragility of the ecosystems in the Colombian Pacific, and the devastating effects that human impacts on the aquatic space can produce.

¹⁹⁸ Named after the timber merchant from Cali, Enrique Naranjo, who was responsible for the construction of this canal.

¹⁹⁹ These figures have to be taken with caution and can only indicate a rough approximation to the actual population, given both that seven years have passed since the last official census undertaken in Colombia and the high levels of long-term and short-term migrations by black people on the Pacific coast.

²⁰⁰ "obra de la avaricia e irresponsabilidad de los aserradores y comerciantes de maderas asentados en las bocas del Sanquianga, quienes después de haber arrasado con los bosques del río Sanquianga, buscaron con este canal hacer accesibles los del Patía."

'Polifonía cultural': alternating productive activities

Fishing is the productive activity *per se* which depends on the aquatic space, as the rivers and the sea are the homes out of which the fishermen extract their victims. The coastal fishermen know well the underwater topography of the fishing grounds of the open sea, and they possess mental catalogues of where best to fish and when. The tidal changes play an almost determining factor in the development of these activities, as fishermen know, for example, where to find at low tide the *bajos*, the sandy elevations only some 50 centimetres submerged, on which they can stand to throw their nets (*chinchorros*) catching shrimps.²⁰¹ On the other hand, fishermen who use engine-powered canoes and *changa*-nets, which they pull over the sea ground, avoid these sandy *bajos* in order not to damage their equipment.²⁰² These *bajos* actually constitute a changing and moving marine relief since the wave impact on them changes their position, as they are washed away and formed again in new shapes. Fishermen adapt to these changing underwater topographies by extremely careful navigation when approaching the shore. There are other fishing methods and the respective devices which are employed in taking advantage of the tidal changes. The *atajada*, a system of poles with a net stretched between them, is used for trapping fish, mainly in mangrove swamps. The poles are rammed into the mud at low tide. With the incoming tide fish arrive to feed off the mangroves, and once the waters retreat these fish are caught in the net. Two people are usually enough to check the net, and often they shout and hit the water with sticks, thus chasing the fish into the net.

The aquatic experience is also reflected in the local vocabulary when people refer to positions and directions along the coastline. Due to a longshore northward-flowing current, coastal inhabitants judge directions and the location of places along the coast by these currents rather than by strict cartographic location. Any point which is geographically seen to the north they refer to as *costa abajo*, or downcoast, i.e. with the current, whereas areas to the south are *costa arriba*, or up coast, i.e. against the current (West 1957:52). These denominations, confusing to a geographer who thinks in terms of his/her 'learnt' cartographic vision, reflect the local aquatic epistemologies.

It is not only the fishing *methods* which depend on the dynamics of the aquatic space, but the activity itself. Most fishermen also practice agriculture, and at times hunting

²⁰¹ A *chinchorro* is a seine or a net used in saltwater fishing. It is thrown either from a canoe or from a sandy elevation in the sea, the fisherman standing up to his knees or thighs in the water.

²⁰² A *changa* in the Pacific littoral is a net of small mesh size which the fishermen pull over the sea ground with a canoe powered usually by a 40hp engine.

and mining as well, and the tides are crucial when making a decision about which productive activity to pursue at any one moment. For example, during *puja* (spring tide), at the time of the new and the full moon when the high tide pushes further up into the rivers than usual, thereby facilitating transport in dugout canoes upstream, people travel to and work their plantations which may be far away from their main household in the middle or upper sections of the river. On the other hand, during *quiebra* (neap tide), at the times of the first and the third quarters of the moon when the high tide does not reach far into the rivers, people dedicate themselves more to fishing. This pattern shows what can be termed a ‘temporally differential use of space’ in the Pacific, in which rural black populations have developed diversified economic activities in accordance with the rhythm of the subtly shifting and mutating aquatic space.

The alternation of spaces can also be observed in traditional practices such as *barbecho*, which consists in leaving lands to recover naturally after the harvest. Friedemann observes in the case of the miners of the river Güelmambí:

When the lands ‘heat up’, they [the miners] leave them to recover so that they ‘cool down’ by rotating their crops. The miner knows by experience that the soil only supports two or three planting periods of maize or beans, for example, before he has to leave it recover during six months. (Friedemann 1974:19; my translation)²⁰³

The alternation of spaces is also practised in *cañeo*, a kind of recycling operation in which farmers move their pigs from one side of the river to another to feed them on the leftovers of a recently harvested plot of land. The river acts as a borderline here to prevent the pigs damaging the crops on the opposite river bank. The pigs roam freely about the already harvested plot, feeding on fallen maize cobs or sugarcane stems on one side of the river, whereas on the other side the farmer can still cultivate rice, maize and sugarcane without having to fear a destruction of the crops by the pigs (Arocha 1999:152-153).

The communities in the upper sections of the river Guapi practice traditional gold mining, the activity that generates the largest income for the region, but more important for the daily reproduction of social life and people’s self-sufficiency in food are complementary activities such as agriculture, river fishing, hunting and traditional logging for house and canoe construction. Within these diversified economic strategies, agricultural activities are linked to the rain cycles. This means, for example, that rice is planted in the

²⁰³ “Cuando los terrenos ‘se calientan’, los dejan descansar para que ‘se enfríen’ haciendo rotación en sus cultivos simples. El minero tiene la experiencia de que el suelo solo resiste dos o tres regadas de maíz y frijoles por ejemplo antes de dejarlo descansar durante seis meses.”

river Guapi between October and January, which are periods of relatively moderate precipitation. At the same time there exists a close link between agriculture and placer mining, the rivers and small streams together with heavy rainfall being the principal natural resources for this activity:

The Community Council Alto Guapi is geographically located in a privileged zone in which gold mines are found as natural resource, which constitute the routine activity in which the rivers and smaller streams play a fundamental role in indicating the techniques to be used. (INCORA 1998b, point 1.5.1; my translation)²⁰⁴

Already practised in colonial times, stream placering (*mazamorreo*) is still the most common technique today, whereby gold bearing sands of the river bed are panned in a wooden shallow bowl (*batea*). One particular technique to recover auriferous sands from deep river beds is known as *zambullir*, or diving. The *zambullidora*, usually a woman, dives weighted with a heavy stone tied to her waist and sinks down to the river bottom to scoop up auriferous gravel and sands in her *batea*. Once the *batea* is filled, the diver unties the stone and shoots to the surface with her load, which is then washed to separate the auriferous parts. The most common technique now used to extract gold from high gravel deposits is ground sluicing, a technique which can also be traced back to colonial times, and which depends on a regular water supply for washing the gravels:

In [...] the Pacific littoral [...] earthen reservoirs (*pilas*) were constructed on hilltops to impound rain water, which was led to the mines through canals. This is still the principal way of supplying water to small sluice mines throughout the Pacific lowlands. The period of operation of such mines is per force determined by the seasonal distribution of precipitation. The *pila* system is especially adapted to ground sluicing in the Pacific lowlands, where heavy showers fall nightly except during the drier months of January and February. The reservoirs are filled during the night, and the water is used in daytime for sluicing. (West 1952:57)

On the other hand, the miners concentrate their agricultural activities in times of scarce rainfall, when there is not enough rainwater available to service the process of gold washing (Friedemann 1974:17).²⁰⁵ This alternating experience goes back to the times of slavery when black slaves practised agriculture and mining in accordance with the rains:

²⁰⁴ “El consejo comunitario del Alto Guapi está ubicado geográficamente en una zona privilegiada, donde se encuentran minas de oro como recurso natural, constituyéndose en la actividad rutinaria donde los ríos y quebradas juegan un papel fundamental marcando la técnica a utilizar.”

²⁰⁵ I am referring here again to the traditional mining practices. The increasing use of dredges and hydraulicking equipment have in fact led to a certain ‘independence’ of precipitation patterns, in that water is now available during dry periods as well. However, not everybody has access to this kind of equipment, so that more traditional and modern practices often exist side by side.

more agriculture and less mining during times of scarce rains, and less agriculture and more mining during periods of heavy rains (Romero 1993):

During rainy periods and in winter mining activities begin at around six or seven o'clock in the morning, and if the mining canal has enough water, work carries on until six o'clock in the evening. [...] When the rains are less intense and in summer, work in the mining canals stops at around one, two or three o'clock in the afternoon.²⁰⁶ Then, the men look after their *fincas*, the young ones pick fruits in the forest, and if the waters of the river permit it, the women are going to *tundiá* which is a form of catching small fish by pushing them with their hands into large round nets. (Friedemann 1974:22; my translation)²⁰⁷

This detailed discussion of the diversified productive practices of rural black people as adaptive strategies to the aquatic space shows that categories such as miners, farmers and fisherfolk are only partially correct, since locals are never only that but also engage in other productive activities. Furthermore, the specific aquatic characteristics of the environment in the Pacific are traditionally employed as a resource by black 'agro-fishermen' and 'agro-miners', as we could call them.

I have emphasised here the fact that these are 'traditional' activities, thereby pointing to a contrast with how the ever deeper penetration of modernity into the Pacific coast has had and keeps having its impact. Evidence exists of the use of dynamite in river fishing (Friedemann 1974:20), for instance, which not only leads to the depletion of fish stocks through indiscriminate killing but also to the mutilation of locals' arms and other extremities when not handling the dynamite correctly (Arocha 1999:104). This of course raises questions over the so-called sustainable forms of exploitation of natural resources by black population groups in the Pacific, an ambiguity that Arocha (1999:156) expresses as 'contradictory ecosophy'. Villa (1998) also warns against the construction of an 'illusory sociologism' assuming that rural black populations necessarily live in harmony with the environment, when many of them are actually involved in environmentally damaging activities such as large-scale tree felling and gold mining using mercury. Furthermore, the introduction of dredges and hydraulicking equipment in the exploitation of gold mines in

²⁰⁶ *Invierno* (winter) and *verano* (summer) are denominations used throughout Colombia to refer to the rainy periods and less rainy periods respectively. These categories have nothing whatsoever to do with the seasonal variations of the northern and southern hemispheres.

²⁰⁷ "En tiempo lluvioso e invierno el trabajo minero comienza alrededor de las seis o siete de la mañana y cuando el corte tiene suficiente agua entonces se trabaja hasta las seis de la tarde. [...] Cuando las lluvias son menos intensas y en el verano, el trabajo en los cortes mineros se suspende alrededor de la una, dos o tres de la tarde. Entonces, los hombres atienden la chagra, los jóvenes recogen frutos en el monte y si las aguas del río son propicias, las mujeres se van a tundiá que es una manera de acorrallar pececillos empujándolos con las manos entre redes redondas grandes."

the rivers has contributed to an alteration, and in some areas even a sterilisation, of the ecological landscape. Yet, it is important to point out that these practices are for the most part externally induced in the Pacific, and that many traditional farmers and fishermen often face these outside interventions with a degree of impotence. In April 1999, fishermen on the river Timbiquí complained to me about drastically reduced catches and deformations of some fish, arguably connected to the use of mercury in the gold extraction processes applied further upstream. In spite of an order by the courts to stop these activities, gold mining still takes place in Cotete in the upper reaches of the river Timbiquí, and the mayor of Santa Bárbara de Timbiquí is simply too afraid to act against the miners there, as powerful interests lie behind all of these investments. Similarly in San Antonio de Guajú, the local communities have tried in vain to expel the retro power shovels (*retroexcavadoras*) from their territory, although the established community council keeps working in this direction.²⁰⁸

I am hence not trying to construct a nostalgic picture of rural black populations living harmoniously with the local natural environment at all times. Similarly, the above given analysis of the logic of the river is certainly an idealised account of social organisation on the Pacific coast, one that in many instances has been interrupted and which is more and more under threat given the current escalation of Colombia's internal armed conflict into the Pacific coast. The increasing contact with modernity has also meant that these patterns are changing and that rural black populations often become involved in unsustainable production practices (Villa 1998). By deploying the concept of the logic of the river, we should indeed not aim at a nostalgic representation of rural black dwellers in the Pacific as 'noble savages'; but instead we should emphasise that these traditional practices are still valid and applied in many parts of the Pacific, that they present concrete adaptive strategies to an aquatic environment, and most importantly, that these imaginaries of a historically and spatially sedimented representational and lived space - in the Lefebvrian understanding - among black communities are mobilised in political articulations that aim at defending local constructions of place and at creating a differential space that enables an appropriation of the ancestral territories in the Pacific for black communities. As I will argue in the following chapter, this clearly happens as people

²⁰⁸ I will discuss further struggles of local communities with external capital in Chapters 7 and 8.

consciously draw upon the locale in the Pacific as a spatial and territorial ordering logic in the formation of the emerging community councils along river basins.

CHAPTER 7***The aquatic space in a new political context: enter the community councils***

Fifty years will not pass in vain. The sea will see them abandon marimbas and drums bequeathed to them by their African ancestors to replace them with the gramophone, loudspeakers, radiogram and tape recorder. The black culture that once lived under the thick forest cover of the cuangare will give up its network of relations to the culture of the record player, which will create and recreate the mechanisms of resistance at the hands of the white man, the mestizo and even the black man, allied to the former. A new geographic and social context will determine the struggle, and the forms of resistance will be reproduced in unforeseen ways while maintaining their libertarian essence.

Olarte Reyes (1994:26; my translation)²⁰⁹

Introduction

This chapter functions as a bridge between the earlier examinations of the aquatic space, taken as a frame for both the locale (the settings of everyday social interactions) and the sense of place (routine psychic belonging) in the Pacific, and its mobilisation in contemporary political processes as expressed by the community councils that are emerging as an organising unit among black populations on the Pacific coast. I will show how the riverine identification and the particular spatialised social relations of black communities along river basins, as examined in the previous chapter, are now reflected in the context of political organisation and mobilisation. The river hence remains a key cultural resource or ‘soil’ for the making of politics and is argued to be of special significance in the cultural politics of black communities in the Pacific. Yet, I will also show how political mobilisation in the Pacific has been mediated by both capital and the state, who pursue their own interests in these processes. It is precisely these entanglements between state discourse, capital’s profit-seeking drive in the region and the local organising processes that I aim at highlighting in this chapter, arguing that these entanglements are

²⁰⁹ “50 años no pasarán en vano. El mar los verá abandonar las marimbas y los tambores legados por sus antepasados africanos para reemplazarlos por la vitrola, el picot, la radiola y la grabadora. La cultura negra que una vez vivió bajo los espesos copos de los cuangares, cederá su red de relaciones a la cultura del tocadiscos que creará y recreará los mecanismos de resistencia al manejo del blanco y el mestizo y aun del mismo negro aliado de los anteriores. Un nuevo contexto geográfico y social determinará el forcejeo, y las modalidades de resistencia se reproducirán en formas imprevistas pero conservando su esencia libertaria.”

responsible for at times very differential experiences in the formation of community councils. I would insist too that such intersections need to be understood more fully by social movement leaders, as they are one of the principal reasons for the appearance of serious fragmentations within the overall movement.

On the Colombian Pacific coast black communities have organised themselves since the second half of the 1980s, first in some areas as peasant struggles for land,²¹⁰ and later, following favourable legislation within Colombia's new Constitution of 1991 and the resulting Law 70 of 1993, as 'ethnic-territorial' organisations that defend their rights to cultural difference as intrinsically linked to gaining and sustaining control over their territories. The new Constitution of 1991 declared the nation to be multicultural and pluriethnic, recognising for the first time its black populations as an ethnic group.²¹¹ Transitory Article 55 opened the path for a legislation that would grant collective land rights to the rural black riverside dwellers of the Pacific basin, a law which was passed in August 1993 and became known as Law 70. It states that "in order to receive the awardable lands as collective property, every community will form a community council as a form of internal administration" (Law 70, Chapter III, Article 5). Regulating Law 70, Decree 1745 of 1995 prescribes the steps that a rural community has to follow in the creation of a community council "as the highest authority of internal administration within the lands of black communities" (Chapter II, Article 3) and in the subsequent application to the Colombian Institute of Agrarian Reform INCORA for a collective land title (Chapter IV, Article 20).

²¹⁰ These organisations were particularly strong in the northern Chocó department where they were supported by the Catholic Church, and include, for example, the Peasant Association of the River Atrato ACIA (Asociación Campesina Integral del río Atrato), formed in 1987, and the Peasant Association of the River San Juan ACADESAN (Asociación Campesina del río San Juan), formed in 1990, as well as the peasant associations of the river Baudó ACABA (Asociación Campesina del río Baudó) and of the lower Atrato OCABA (Organización Campesina del Bajo Atrato).

²¹¹ One should not exaggerate the *real* possibility of social change in Colombia via the new constitution. It may well be that it turns out to be just another 'rhetorical make-up', following a historical continuity of many "absurd regimes typical of many parts of South America during the 19th century, characterised by a rhetorical, formal constitutional innovation, by a few social and economic changes and a chronic political instability" (Hobsbawm 1990:42). Unfortunately, such an interpretation seems fitting for the Colombian case, as a rhetorically progressive constitution, providing for the opening up of political spaces of participation, gets eroded in practice by an escalation of the internal armed conflict.

Organising in the rivers

In the rivers, the people with their singing, dancing and their games now have other reasons to meet, it is not any more only the ritual encounter with the saints or with their dead, now the decimero arrives at the meeting to remind them of how the river organisation was born, to evoke the journey that some of the community made to Bogotá in order to talk about the territory for which they fought and to tell of how life was for the people of the Pacific. Singing and dancing are integrated in the dimension of the political meeting, the elderly tell the history of the river settling processes, they mark on the maps the places where the first elders settled, they tell the histories of slaves and masters, of food and celebrations of the past, of indians and blacks, of the history which in the meeting becomes the bearer of identity. But the journey on the river is not only the oral exercise, it is also the real journey, the one the settlers of the river San Juan embark upon in 1992 from the delta to Istmina during a number of days. Hundreds of the Peasant Association of the River San Juan embark in their boats and stop in each village, getting off with their chirimía, and from the beach they put colour into the meeting with jotas and contradanzas.²¹² The journey is a geographical recognition of a territory which they now understand as theirs.

Villa (1998:444-445; my translation)²¹³

The discourses that formed during the mid-1980s in the middle Atrato area in the Chocó around the aspirations of a black peasantry for control of their lands set off an ‘hour of meeting’ (Villa 1998:443) in the early-1990s throughout the rivers of the Pacific coast. River organisations were formed and mobilised, and their representatives began to meet to debate the new legislation, the possibilities that it opened up, and to discuss the kind of future that *they* wanted for the Pacific region. It was in effect the first time that the Pacific became discovered as a ‘region’ by its inhabitants, whereas during previous centuries not a single political project had united them (Vanín 1993:553). The shared histories of rural black populations are now being evoked in numerous meetings along the river banks, and cultural collective memories are being mobilised to reflect upon the past, but also to look ahead by projecting an ‘alternative life project’. For the first time, black communities are

²¹² *Chirimía, jota* and *contradanza* are traditional music styles of black populations in the Chocó.

²¹³ “En los ríos, las gentes con sus cantos, danzas y juegos tienen otros motivos para reunirse, ya no es sólo el encuentro ritual con los Santos o con sus muertos, ahora llega a la reunión el decimero para recordar cómo nació la organización del río, para evocar el viaje que algunos de la comunidad emprendieron hasta Bogotá con el objetivo de enseñar sobre el territorio que luchaban y para contar cómo era la vida de las gentes del Pacífico. Canto y danza se integran en la dimensión del encuentro político, los viejos cuentan la historia del poblamiento del río, en el mapa van marcando los sitios donde se asentaron los primeros mayores, enseñan sobre historias de esclavos y amos, sobre comidas y fiestas del pasado, sobre indios y negros, sobre la historia que en el encuentro es portadora de identidad. Pero el viaje por el río no es sólo el ejercicio oral, es también el viaje real, el que emprenden los pobladores del río San Juan en 1992 desde el delta hasta Istmina durante varios días. Son cientos de la Asociación Campesina del San Juan los que se embarcan en sus botes, en cada pueblo hacen la parada obligada, bajan con su chirimía, desde la playa alegran el encuentro con Jotas y Contradanzas. El viaje es reconocimiento geográfico de un territorio que ahora aprenden como suyo.”

collectively assuming control over their *historicity* and engaging in processes of *conscientisation* - processes that I have discussed theoretically and methodologically in Chapters 2 and 4 respectively. They construct the Pacific coast as a region of shared histories, geographies and territorialities; so much so that it now consciously ‘emerges’ to them and is politically articulated by the social movement of black communities as a ‘territory-region’, a cultural, geopolitical and biogeographical construction:

In this conception and in the setting that the Pacific presents today, the ethnic-territorial organisations of black communities do not only plan the appropriation but also *the defence of the territory from a perspective past-present-future*, which understands, assumes and develops the tradition and the history of resistance of Afro-Colombians and their aspiration to maintain, develop and realise a *different and alternative life project* together with the indigenous peoples as ancestral inhabitants of these territories and the region. (PCN 1999:2; my emphases and translation)²¹⁴

Lefebvre would have been excited to chart these processes as they so clearly articulate the movement’s ‘quest for a counter-space’ or differential space (‘different and alternative life project’) that draws on a historically and spatially sedimented concrete space (‘defence of the territory from a perspective past-present-future’). And this quest is materially embedded in the locale, drawing on the river networks as resources for mobilisation and conscientisation. The fluvial communication of the new legislation meanders from one riverine settlement to the next, and the ‘fluvial messengers’ of the river organisations pass the word around, just as doña Celia did in her childhood, only this time the message is of new political processes being constructed along the rivers of the Pacific coast. The leaders of the river organisation ACADESAN filmed this journey on video and later edited it to be the visual testimony of the *Primera expedición fluvial de autodescubrimiento territorial y defensa de identidad étnico-cultural por el río San Juan* (Stemper 1998:170-171) - ‘the first fluvial expedition of territorial self-discovering and defence of ethnic-cultural identity along the river San Juan’. The video tells the story of the more than 600 members of ACADESAN who travelled by boats and canoes on the river San Juan during October 1992 from the river mouth to the town of Istmina to spread the word of the new legislation, and to publicise the resulting territorial and cultural rights for rural black communities on

²¹⁴ “En esta concepción y en el escenario que presenta el Pacífico hoy, las organizaciones étnico-territoriales de comunidad negra plantean no sólo la apropiación sino también la defensa del territorio desde una perspectiva pasado-presente-futuro que comprenda, asuma y desarrolle la tradición y la historia de resistencia de los afrocolombianos y su aspiración a mantener, desarrollar y validar un proyecto de vida distinto y alternativo conjuntamente con los pueblos indígenas como pobladores ancestrales de estos territorios y de la región.”

the Pacific coast.²¹⁵ The main river and its countless tributaries function in this context as the ‘aquatic street network’ essential for the communication process, and the entire river basin becomes the principal spatial figure of organisation on the Pacific coast.

Three years later, with the Decree 1745 of 1995, when black communities began to form into community councils that could apply for collective land titles, most communities decided to take the river basin along which they have settled as the spatial organising unit for their community council.²¹⁶ The figure of the river basin’s spatial structure with its numerous tributaries has been described by some activists as resembling a fishbone, “in which the fundamental life aspects of the Afro-Colombian communities of the Centre and South Pacific are arranged. It is starting from this logic that a sense of belonging and of territoriality is defined” (PCN 1999:1; my translation).²¹⁷ The particular set of spatialised social relationships within and around the aquatic space is now articulated in a new context, namely that of political organisation. Understanding the aquatic space and the logic of the river as the spatial preconditions for political organisation, the establishment of community councils along river basins reflects these specific cultural and identity-based referents of black communities. This conceptualisation is evident, for example, in the constitution and the naming of the Community Council River Napi and the River San Francisco in the department of Cauca. In both cases the area delimiting the community council’s territory comprises the lands around the river basin and includes the headwaters and the mouth of the particular river.

Yet, more than merely in terms of physical location, the river basin must be understood in terms of both its socio-cultural meaning for local communities and the perceptions and sense of belonging that it generates. In the case of the community of La Soledad, it becomes evident how a particular subjective aquatic sense of place, rather than

²¹⁵ Such an impressive venture mounted by ACADESAN in the river San Juan stands out for the size of its mobilisation and the efforts it required. On the Cauca coast no similar aquatic voyage of self-recognition has taken place. One of the reasons lies in the fact that, at the time when the new constitution and Transitory Article 55 were signed, there did not exist a strong organisation in the Cauca rivers that could have undertaken such a mobilisation. There exists a clear spatial difference in the organising processes of black communities on the Colombian Pacific coast, in that in general the organisations in the northern Chocó department are better organised and have a longer standing history of mobilisation than does the rest of the Pacific coast, where most organisations began to be formed only once AT-55 was in place. This characteristic is also reflected in the fact that the first community councils to be issued collective land titles are in the Chocó department. ACIA, the peasant organisation of the river Atrato, is still the strongest of all river organisations in the Pacific today.

²¹⁶ There are some exceptions to this pattern, the reasons for which I will discuss later in this chapter.

²¹⁷ “en la que se ordenan los aspectos fundamentales de la vida de las comunidades afrocolombianas del Pacífico Centro y Sur. Es desde esta lógica como se define el sentido de pertenencia y de territorialidad.”

just the objective cartographic location of the community, has informed the spatial organising structure of the community council. La Soledad is a village of 575 inhabitants (DANE 1993) that lies at the headwaters of the river Guajuí in the department of Cauca, some 25 kilometres from the river mouth in the Pacific Ocean (Figure 5.1; p.134). Yet, shallow depths and numerous rapids in the upper reaches of the river prevent navigation for the last five kilometres even for small dugout canoes. The principal route of communication and transport for locals is a trail that connects La Soledad with Belén, a settlement at the headwaters of the neighbouring river Napi, which can be reached on foot along this trail in around two to three hours. Everything and everybody moves along this trail, so that the inhabitants of La Soledad are connected physically, commercially and spiritually to the river Napi. All merchandise destined for La Soledad is transported via the river Napi to Belén, and then on the aforementioned trail to La Soledad. People who need to travel from La Soledad to Guapi also do so on the river Napi. The physical location of La Soledad on the river Guajuí seems ‘topographically accidental’ in this context, and instead the inhabitants of La Soledad have developed a strong sense of belonging to the river Napi.

In the formation processes of the community councils, the inhabitants of La Soledad thus made it clear that they should be part of the community council of the river Napi, and not of a council for the river Guajuí. This intention was at first rejected by the leaders of the river organisation ASODERGUA in the river Guajuí,²¹⁸ who argued on grounds of physical location that La Soledad should belong to their community council. Yet, ASODERGUA finally had to give in to the locals’ demand, and today the population of La Soledad forms part of the community council of the river Napi. In fact, the current legal representative of this community council lives in La Soledad. It is clear, then, that local perceptions and socio-cultural references have been more important in the spatial organising structures of these two community councils than has cartographic location alone. In their spatialised imagination the inhabitants of La Soledad have in fact created their own ‘imaginative geographies’, or more specifically their own ‘imaginative river basin’, to which they feel they belong. The aquatic sense of place among rural black populations in the Pacific, as discussed in Chapter 5, has effectively been mobilised as a political tool in the constitution of these two community councils.

²¹⁸ ASODERGUA (Asociación para el Desarrollo del Río Guajuí) is a grass-roots organisation that emerged in 1992 in the river Guajuí and which aims at improving living conditions in this river.

Entering into conflict: 'new political identities' and traditional party politics

The organising processes of black communities do not take place in a political and economic void, of course, but within a field of shifting power relations. The very constitution of community councils has affected, or is perceived as affecting, a whole range of interests in the region. This is not the place to discuss in detail the impact of Colombia's escalating civil war on rural black mobilisation, although this is one of the most urgent questions to address.²¹⁹ Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that guerrilla and paramilitary activities have significantly extended throughout the Pacific coast over the last few months, and that increasingly black peasants are faced with threats to their lives, subjected to rural collective massacres and experience forced displacements to the cities.²²⁰ This leads to a constant redrawing of territorialities and boundaries in the Pacific, as the effective territorial control of armed actors prevents local communities from affirming their territorial claims as guaranteed by Law 70. On the contrary, it produces the opposite effect of de-territorialisation for black communities that occurs as a result of a changing 'geography of power', one "characterised by inequality, fragmentation, tension and conflict [in which] de-territorialisation refers to processes of territorial loss, the product of territorial dynamics and the power conflicts between the different territorial agents" (Montañez & Delgado 1999:125). Instead of a strengthening of local territorialities or a 'defence of constructions of place' (Escobar 2001), as aimed for by the black movements, completely opposed processes of local de-territorialisation and territorial fragmentation are induced as a result of the terror that is spread by paramilitaries, guerrillas and Colombia's army. These processes have still not been documented for the Pacific coast, but it becomes of increasing urgency to deal with them for local communities and social movements, and should open up a necessary research direction.

²¹⁹ The drastic impact of Colombia's internal conflict on black communities on the Pacific coast was also the main focus of a recent tour of six PCN representatives through Europe in March and April 2001. The activists were invited by the global social movement network People's Global Action (PGA) to raise awareness over their plight and the precarious human rights situation in the region with NGOs and the general public in Great Britain, Germany, France, Spain and Italy.

²²⁰ The literature on Colombia's internal conflict is vast, to the extent that it has generated the category of the *violéntólogo*, the 'expert analyser' of violence. For a general overview see, for example, Leal Buitrago (1995), Leal Buitrago and Zamosc (1991), Pearce (1990), Pizarro (1991, 1993), and Pécaut (1993, 1999). Much less has been published with regard to the impact of this conflict in the Pacific coast. See Wouters (2001) for an assessment of the impact of violent actors on the river organisation ACIA in the Chocó department. See also the intervention by the Afro-Colombian liberal senator Piedad Córdoba in a recent World Bank forum on 'Race and poverty' (Córdoba 2000).

In the local political arena, some community representatives have pointed to the lack of support and even open hostility towards the community councils from the mayors, the most powerful political figures in the region.²²¹ As the legal representative of the Community Council Guapi Abajo explains:

The politicians didn't want Law 70 to spread as we see it happening today, the local politicians. They feel that Law 70 gets in their way. It won't let them keep on pushing the people around the way they like to. And this is the problem with the politicians. We even experience this with the mayor now. He doesn't want to know that the community council is the people's highest authority in their territory. He doesn't want to understand this. Look, as the legal representative of the council I was one of the mayor's best friends before he took up office. And I thought that with this mayor in place our community council would benefit more. When now the opposite is true. And he is like this with all the councils. [...] Law 70 is a law for black people. And the mayors, being black, why are they not proud of Law 70? This hurts me a lot. I would like to have a space, a media where I can make this public to the world, well, for the world to be aware of this. Because they [the mayors] will have to explain one day to the communities why they hate Law 70, why they don't want to understand that in reality Law 70 belongs to the black people.

(interview with Walberto Banguera, Guapi, 5 February 1999; my translation)²²²

Although not all legal representatives have had such a negative experience with their respective mayors, it is clearly not necessarily a harmonious relationship. With Law 70 and the constitution of collective territories administered by community councils, it is easy to understand that some mayors may see this as curbing their own political influence and power in these areas. Traditional party politics and clientelism are so deeply embedded in the political and social structures in the Pacific coast that the emergence of community councils as new political actors is bound to upset the interests of some mayors and other

²²¹ Since 1988 the mayors are popularly elected in Colombia. Before then, they had been nominated by the governors of their respective departments according to the clientelist structures of conventional party politics. The election of mayors forms part of a series of norms of political decentralisation which paved the way to the wider changes introduced later by the new Constitution of 1991. With the legislative change towards the popular election of mayors, a trend towards independent candidates presenting themselves for election has been observed. Nevertheless, they frequently reproduce clientelist structures by 'rewarding' their voters with favours.

²²² "Los políticos no han querido que la Ley 70 se expandiera como se ve ahora, los políticos locales. Ellos, como que sienten que la Ley 70 a ellos como les estorba. No lo va a seguir dejando manejar a la gente como ellos quieren. Y eso es el problema con los políticos. Inclusive lo vemos ahorita con el alcalde. No quiere conocer que el consejo comunitario es la máxima autoridad de gente de su territorio. No quiere entender eso. Mire, yo como representante legal del consejo, para el alcalde antes de que él se sentaba, era uno de los mejores amigos. Y yo pensé que montando este alcalde iba a tener un consejo comunitario de mayor beneficiencia. Cuando es al contrario. Y a todos los consejos nos tiene así. [...] La Ley 70 es una ley para negros. Y siendo los alcaldes negros, ¿por qué no tienen orgullo a la Ley 70? A mí me duele mucho eso. Yo quisiera tener un espacio, un medio como publicarle eso para el mundo, pues, para el mundo se dar cuenta por qué. Porque ellos [los alcaldes] algún día tuvieran decir a las comunidades, por qué ellos odian a la Ley 70, por qué no quieren entender que en la realidad la Ley 70 es del negro." By using this extensive quote, I also hope to provide, at least partially, an arena for Banguera to make public his complaints.

local politicians, many of whom fear seeing their political influence dwindle in the moist heat of the Pacific rivers.²²³ Therefore, although ‘the mayors are black’, as the representative of the Community Council Guapi Abajo pointed out above, ‘race’ as a category does not *necessarily* act as a unifying force in the struggle of black communities to attain cultural recognition and territorial rights. Issues of class, gender and the complex power relations in the region have to be examined in more detail to account for the relation between ‘new’ and ‘old’ political identities, their entanglements, and the spatial differences in the organisational experiences *within* black communities. The emerging community councils are political spaces deeply entangled with local traditional political structures, at times challenging them, but at others co-operating with them and/or reproducing them. In fact, the community councils themselves emerge as potential spaces of co-optation by traditional party politics, as they are in many ways mediated through the interests of economic and political actors in the region. To exemplify this debate, I will discuss the case of the Community Council Unicosta in the Department of Nariño, and show how the processes of community representation have been mediated in this case by the interests of capital on the one hand and by government institutions on the other. I will then go on to discuss in more detail the different strategies adopted by the Colombian Institute of Agrarian Reform INCORA to influence, shape and mediate the organisation processes of black communities.²²⁴ As one of the movement leaders in Nariño pointed out when

²²³ Alvarez and others (1998) have shown for the Latin American case that clientelism as ‘regular political practice’ can be traced historically back to the system of social authoritarianism in the 19th century, which was dominated by an ‘out-of-place liberalism’, one orientated towards European political developments and an oligarchic conception of politics characterised by favouritism that regarded politics as the ‘business of the elites’. Although the 20th century saw a political incorporation of the popular masses due to increasing urbanisation and industrialisation, the political system was still characterised by an elite-based democratisation that maintained structures of personalism and clientelism. See also Auyero (1999) for a discussion of clientelism as a common political practice throughout Latin America. In Chapter 1, I have briefly discussed Colombia’s bipartisan clientelist structures and hereditary party identification. A detailed analysis of the phenomenon of *clientelismo* as constitutive of Colombia’s political system can be found in Leal Buitrago and Dávila (1991). For a regional analysis of *clientelismo* in the Chocó department see Khittel (1999), in Tumaco see Hoffmann (1999), and for Guapi, the Pacific coast and among black populations in general see Agudelo (1999, 2000).

²²⁴ The Colombian Institute of Agrarian Reform INCORA (Instituto Colombiano de Reforma Agraria) is the government institution responsible for all aspects regarding the collective land titling processes in the Pacific coast. The first six collective land titles were issued on 13th December 1996, all in the Department of Chocó. By the end of 1998 a total of 23 collective land titles had been awarded to black communities on the Pacific coast, comprising an area of over 1.3 million hectares, with over 30 applications still pending (IGAC 1999:99). The official aim is to title collectively over 60% of the lands of the Pacific coast region by 2002: 1,501,608 hectares as indian *resguardos* or reservations and 1,158,060 hectares of collective lands of black communities awarded by 1998, with some 1,343,000 hectares being negotiated currently, some 1,500,000 hectares planned for titling between 2000 and 2001, and some 600,000 hectares planned for the year 2002, giving a total of 4,600,000 hectares of collective lands for black communities (INCORA 1998e). This represents an unusually high proportion of collective lands in any region on a global scale.

reflecting on the need for clearly articulated movement strategies: “if we don’t have some clear criteria with relation to the government institutions, we can fall into their clientelist webs” (Cortés 1999:138; my translation).²²⁵

Mediating community representation I: enter capital

The Community Council Unicosta lies in the municipality of Iscuandé in the north-western part of the department of Nariño with a population of 1,561.²²⁶ INCORA awarded an area of 16,063 hectares as collective lands to the community council in resolution 158 of 9th February 1998 (IGAC 1999:99). Unicosta was the first community council to be awarded collective lands in the department of Nariño, and this was mainly because it had been actively promoted and financed by a company, ALENPAC (Alimentos Enlatados del Pacífico), which has exploited the palm hearts of the *naidí* palm tree in the area for over seventeen years. In the exploitation process, locals fell the *naidí* palm tree and cut out the almost one-metre long palm heart, which they then deliver in bulk to one of the storage centres that the company has established in the area. From there, the palm hearts are delivered to a processing plant in Guapi in the neighbouring department of Cauca, where the palm hearts are duly peeled and then cooked in a hot steam bath before being cut into pieces and placed in tins or glasses. The finished product, locally referred to as *palmiche*, is then shipped in bulk to Buenaventura and from there to France, the only buyer for ALENPAC.

Before Law 70 of 1993, ALENPAC needed a permit for the palm heart’s exploitation issued by the regional autonomous development corporation Corponariño. However, with the new legislation these proceedings have changed; Corponariño now gives a permit for exploitation to the community council, which then contracts with the company. Aware of this fact, the company’s director encouraged and supported the formation of a community council which would encompass the lands from which the company had so far extracted *naidí* palm hearts. He financed workshops in eight communities on issues regarding Law 70, produced hand-outs and gave operational and

²²⁵ “[...] si nosotros no tenemos unos criterios claros de relación con las instituciones del gobierno podemos caer en sus redes clientelistas.”

²²⁶ The population data is derived from the census carried out by the local communities, as prescribed in Decree 1745, Chapter IV, Article 20 (4). The technical visit by INCORA, carried out between 26th and 30th April 1997, as prescribed in Decree 1745, Chapter IV, Article 22, gave as the official census a population of 1,352. These differences can partly be accounted for by high levels of spatial mobility and migration, both short-term and long-term, a characteristic of black people on the Colombian Pacific coast (Whitten 1986, Vanín 1999).

logistic support in arranging meetings. He also provided all of the necessary means to elaborate the application for a collective land title to be made to INCORA by the local communities. It is hence unsurprising that both the current president and the co-ordinator of the community council Unicosta are contractors of the company, and that an exclusive contract for the exploitation of the *naidí* palm tree has been granted to the company by the community council. In order to legitimise its intervention in the organising processes, ALENPAC has constantly appealed to the sustainability of the *naidí* palm hearts' extraction process. As the administrator at the processing plant in Guapi pointed out, ALENPAC opted for the strategy of 'sustainable management of the forests' that would guarantee a natural reproduction of the *naidí*. They rejected the alternative strategy of re-forestation and plantations of *naidí* palm trees on the grounds that pests might be provoked in this way.²²⁷ It is also clear that the latter strategy would be more expensive for the company to implement. Their argument neatly reflects the discourses of sustainability which have entered the entire region of the Pacific coast (Escobar & Pedrosa 1996). On first sight, ALENPAC's enterprise seems a promising venture for local sustainable development. Although it may appear 'irrational' to cut down a whole palm tree for the extraction of a single palm heart, ALENPAC argues that with good management only the mature palm tree is cut, and that one of its 'sons' grows into its place since the *naidí* palm grows in clusters of up to twenty trees: thus, the same palm can be used for up to fifteen years and guarantees constant harvesting. Furthermore, in contrast to other extractive activities such as timber and gold-mining, the palm hearts are processed locally in their totality, thus providing employment for up to fifty people in Guapi.

Yet, the complete picture of the process looks somewhat different, and serious doubts have been raised over the claimed sustainability of the extraction process. Although there is currently no scientific evidence that 'sons' of the *naidí* palm do not grow into place after the mature tree has been cut, the problem seems to lie in management. The tree cutters are not employed by the company, but they are simply paid for the number of palm hearts that they provide to the storage centres. In February 1999, the company paid \$130 Colombian pesos for each palm heart delivered by the cutter; each palm tree was therefore worth five British pence! For the individual cutter, only a bulk harvest of at least 100 palm hearts makes the labour worth it while, which means that it is not only the mature trees that

²²⁷ Personal communication from Jorge Yoría, Guapi, 11 February 1999.

get felled but also the younger ones. Restrepo (1996b:366-367) has also claimed that it is considerably harder work to cut the more mature trees, and that in order to make the task easier and to speed it up, cutters often prefer to cut younger trees. Furthermore, the processing plant in Guapi does not only receive palm hearts extracted from the sites in Nariño for which they have a permit of exploitation issued by the regional autonomous corporation Corponariño, but also from the surrounding areas, which is strictly illegal.²²⁸ On my visit to the processing plant I saw a dugout canoe filled to its rim with *naidí* palm hearts arriving from Penitente, a settlement on the river Guapi opposite the processing plant. Although the company's administrator *in situ* had assured me in the interview that ALENPAC did not receive any deliveries of palm hearts from areas other than the designated sites for which they had exploitation permits, the workers went straight to processing the recent delivery.

These factors have contributed to a considerable depletion of the *naidí* palm in the entire area. Although there is no statistical data available to prove this point, it is most visible in local people's complaint over the lack of *naidí* juice. The *naidí* palm has traditionally been used by collecting its fruits, which are made into juices or sweetened snacks. Black people also attribute an important cultural significance to the *naidí* fruit in that it is said to be 'good for the blood', which means it gives physical strength and increases sexual potency. It is considered a 'cold' food within the complex cultural valuation system of black people on the Pacific coast, and is therefore forbidden to women during their menstruation, as they require 'hot' foods then (Restrepo 1996b:355-356).²²⁹ Whereas the fruits of the *naidí* palm are much liked and sought after by local people, the palm heart, the *palmiche*, is not appreciated locally. Within the traditional classification and representation system of black communities, the *naidí* palm is considered a wild plant that belongs to the forest and is not cultivated. It is therefore subject to destruction, which,

²²⁸ Similar company practices have been observed in the exploitation of the bark of mangrove trees to derive tannin for the processing of leather. Similar to the exploitation of the *naidí*, the mangrove tree has to be felled to strip it of its bark. The companies *Liscano Hermanos e Hijos Ltda.* of Cali and *Industria de Mangle S.A.* of Bogotá exploited the mangrove bark between the 1950s and 1980s, first on concessionary lands granted by the Ministry of Agriculture, and from 1968 onwards, following the creation of the National Institute of Renewable Natural Resources INDERENA (Instituto Nacional de Recursos Naturales Renovables), with a class A permit on awarded lands (Leal 1998:417-419). However, just as in the case of the *naidí* today, the companies also processed mangrove bark from other areas: "Although the companies principally worked in the awarded areas, they also exploited mangroves outside the delimited zones along the entire coastline" (Leal 1998:418; my translation of: "Aunque las empresas centraron sus trabajos en las áreas adjudicadas, la explotación también se realizó a lo largo de toda la costa, fuera de las zonas demarcadas").

²²⁹ See also Losonczy (1993) on nutrition patterns in the symbolic system of black populations on the Pacific coast.

given its abundance, is not seen as problematic (Restrepo 1996b:357); the palm is traditionally felled when collecting the fruits, and normally no attempt is made to conserve the particular palm tree. Given its perceived abundance, its natural reproduction process, and the low pressure on the *naidí* palm by these traditional uses, availability has not been a problem until recently. Increased pressure on the *naidí*, however, as a result of its accelerated extractive exploitation has led to a scarcity of the palm. As a result, the price for its fruits has sharply risen on the local markets, a fact which locals constantly and loudly deplore.

Turning to the employment justification, it should be noted that labour in the processing plant in Guapi is seasonal, and that the entire process is dependent on external markets. In March 1999 the processing plant was closed for four months because the company's only clients in France had started to import the cheaper palm hearts of the peach palm tree (*chontaduro*) from Ecuador. This situation not only affected the workers at the plant, but also the tree cutters who could no longer sell the palm hearts. Local opinions of the company's director have changed rapidly, from seeing him as the gentleman from Bogotá who provided work, to 'the guy who did not keep his word' and abandoned the workers.

It is evident in this case how the specific interests of capital in retaining control over a territory for its exploitation have been legitimised by discourses of sustainability and channelled into processes of mediation and co-optation of local organisations. The formation of the Community Council Unicosta followed less the spatial patterns of the river basin as organising structure, and more the specific demands of external capital. What is particularly worrying in this scenario is the fact that the *naidí* exploitation forms part of the typical externally-induced extractive logic in the Pacific which is subject to the same basic boom-and-bust cycles as its 'predecessors' rubber, *tagua* (ivory nut) and tannin (Whitten 1986). There has been a negative historical experience within all of these extractive economies, in that they are extremely unstable, fluid, limited in time and space and dependent on external markets and demands. They also present the phenomenon of 'profit flight' (Leal 1998:400), in that surplus value is appropriated by companies external to the region. The implications for the local organising processes are clear. If a community council is formed around the extractive logic of the exploitation of the *naidí*, and this industry falls into decline (as in the case of ALENPAC), the whole spatial organising logic around the *naidí* lands falls into pieces, and the Community Council Unicosta loses its very

reason for existence. Breaking with the logic of the river in favour of external capital demands has potentially set off a spatial segregation of the river basin, which may express the current economic logic based around the exploitation of the *naidí*, but which in the future, with the decline of this extractive economy, may weaken the local organising structures. In other words, the quest for a counter-space, as aimed at by the social movement of black communities, has been co-opted by capital, which in its profit-seeking drive reproduces the dominant representations of space of the Pacific as a region providing natural resources. It effectively ignores the integrated vision of the Pacific coast as a ‘territory-region’ and the logic of the river, as formulated by PCN, in favour of a capitalist extractive logic that seeks short-term profits.

Mediating community representation II: enter the state

The example of the Community Council Unicosta is not an isolated case, but a tendency that has been welcomed by government institutions. INCORA’s regional office in Guapi has valued Unicosta’s experience positively in these words:

The Community Council Unicosta is the first of its kind in the municipality of Iscuandé. That is why it has to become a model for the following councils to be created. That is why its communities and leaders have to assume the role of leaders to *support and give orientation* to neighbouring communities in the whole organising process. (INCORA 1997, point 10; my emphasis and translation)²³⁰

This ‘orientation’ was indeed given to the local communities living on the lands of a second large area of *naidí* palm heart extraction in the middle section of the river Patía. Here too ALENPAC provided all necessary financial and logistic support, and as a result El Progreso became the second community council in the department of Nariño to be awarded collective land rights.²³¹ The quotation above reveals INCORA’s functional interest in these matters. As a government institution, it has to comply with the legal requirements of Law 70, in particular Chapter III and Decree 1745 of 1995 to establish community councils and award collective land titles. There is not necessarily a real concern for community representation in the institution, and local organising dynamics are often not taken into account, although certain individuals within INCORA may feel and do show

²³⁰ “El consejo comunitario Unicosta es el primero en su género en el municipio de Iscuandé, razón por la cual debe convertirse en modelo para los próximos consejos que se constituyan. Razón por la cual sus comunidades y líderes deben asumir un papel de líderes para apoyar y orientar a las comunidades vecinas en todo el proceso organizativo.”

²³¹ INCORA resolution 1178, 12 May 1998.

commitment to the organising processes in the rivers. In fact, a patronising attitude of INCORA towards the local organising processes can at times be observed, as expressed in the following quote from INCORA's report of their technical visit to the Community Council River San Francisco:

With the commitment that the process of collective land titling implies for black communities, the officials of INCORA's Guapi branch visited all of the settlements along the banks of the river San Francisco in order to get to know in detail the socio-economic, historical and cultural reality of *the people whose level of life we intend to raise by organising them* in a community council administered by a central committee that will have the function to co-ordinate and preserve the natural resources and ethnic-territorial control of the lands that they have owned and protected since the 18th century. (INCORA 1998c:1; my emphasis and translation)²³²

The black communities appear in this quotation as passive receivers of their organisation by grace of the state as represented by INCORA. Similarly, on several visits when I accompanied a representative of INCORA to the settlements of the Community Council Guapi Abajo to conduct a census, I noted some lack of commitment and feeling for the situations encountered on the part of the representative. She fired a number of questions at locals, storming into their houses and demanding the number of their identity cards, the names of the household members, their level of education, and so on.²³³ I was rather shocked by this insensitive approach, and used these moments to ask locals about their ideas of a community council and what they thought about Law 70 and the notion of

²³² "Con el compromiso que el proceso de titulación colectiva implica para las comunidades negras, los funcionarios del INCORA, del área zonal de Guapi, visitaron todas las poblaciones asentadas en las riveras del Río San Francisco para conocer de cerca la realidad socioeconómica, histórica y cultural de los pueblos que se les pretende elevar el nivel de vida organizándolos en un consejo comunitario administrado por una junta central quien tendrá como función, coordinar y conservar los recursos naturales y control étnico - territorial de las tierras que han poseído y salvaguardado desde el siglo XVIII."

²³³ The questionnaire asked for: 1) the names of the household members; difficult to establish at times owing to high levels of short- and long-term mobility, and given the large number of family members and relatives who may stay only temporarily in a given household; 2) identity card; problematic since many people do not have one; 3) the level of education; the question asked was: 'Can you read?', which many people answered, 'I sign my name', an affirmation judged as equal to illiterate; 4) people's origins; most people originated from the area; 5) absentees; many family members had left the household mainly in search of work and education; 6) the existence of schools and health centres. The 'methodology' of INCORA's representative intrigued me, as she stormed into people's houses, and without much ado asked them for their identity cards. Locals' answers were reluctant at times, and at other times they simply refused to hand over their identity cards. Their reaction was related to rumours that had spread recently in and around Guapi of a white, foreign man going round houses asking their owners for their IDs and then marking their houses with the triple six '666', sign of the devil, an action that doomed the household and its members. There were even rumours of some young people having hanged themselves after having been visited by this foreigner in a settlement further south in the department of Nariño. The fact that INCORA's representative on her visit turned up with me, a white male foreigner, only exacerbated people's suspicions. Frankly, I hoped that nobody would hang him/herself shortly after my visit, or I would have been associated no doubt with these suicides. On the other hand, INCORA's representative did not take these issues very seriously, and neither did she change her tactic of screaming at people from the boat on the river: 'what's your ID?'

collective lands. The vast majority responded negatively to my questions and neither knew what a community council entailed nor had they even heard of such a thing before, a finding that I continued to make in other communities as well. A recent appraisal of the current organising processes of the community councils in and around Guapi published by the Institute of Environmental Research of the Pacific IIAP (Instituto de Investigaciones Ambientales del Pacífico) similarly stresses the lack of people's awareness about the existence of community councils and their functions (Villa 2000:26-28). Furthermore, in a recent report by IIAP's branch in Guapi that evaluated the experience of designing an Environmental Management Plan for the Community Council River Napi, a recommendation is made to intensify campaigns of conscientisation of locals towards the concept of the community council, its functions and the people's part in it, since 90% of the local people were estimated not to have the slightest idea of its existence (IIAP 2000).²³⁴ Insufficient conscientisation, a notion called for by Freire (1971) and discussed in Chapter 4, is one of the principal impediments to wide-spread mobilisation of black communities on the Pacific coast and to a truly collective appropriation of their territories. Yet, this is not the first time that a state-induced organisational form, as is the community council with all its legal figures and requirements, board of directors, and so on, has not been successfully assimilated by black communities. It is worthwhile to reflect at this stage on the prior experience of a state-governed co-operative that was introduced in the Pacific, and from whose failure important lessons can be learnt for the contemporary community councils.

The Agricultural Co-operative of the Pacific CAP (Cooperativa Agrícola del Pacífico) was a state programme established by INCORA in the mid-1960s, mainly to promote the commercialisation of the coconut that was cultivated on a large scale in the region as a productive strategy initiated and promoted by INCORA at the time. The term 'co-operative' may deceive here, however, since it was a strategy implemented and regulated by the state and not a peasant initiative (Grueso & Escobar 1996). One of its problems lay in the fact that the peasants never really assumed it as their own organisation, and many never even understood what the co-operative was all about and what it was for.

²³⁴ The problem is described in this report as a "lack of awareness of the concept of a community council both by the board of directors and by the community in general [caused by the] weakness in the formation of leaders, [the] bureaucratisation of the leaders of the process of black communities in the region [and the] misappropriation of public and NGO funds obtained to socialise the Law 70 of 1993 and its statutory decrees" (IIAP 2000, point 4.5.2.1).

In the words of don Ricard, current legal representative of the Community Council River Guajuí and former member of CAP's vigilance committee from 1972 to 1976 and then book-keeper until 1983, when CAP declined and ceased to exist:

The co-operative was founded in '64, '65, more or less. [...] It was a programme of INCORA. It was to take charge of the commercialisation of the products, especially of the coconut, and of the programmes of agricultural input. That was the co-operative's objective. [...] But the individual member did not have sufficient knowledge of what a co-operative was. So what happened? He didn't learn to manage it, we were few who managed to understand what a co-operative really was. [...] And the administration was between INCORA and the co-operative's employees. And not the member because of his ignorance. [...] They [INCORA] gave him credit: 'This is for you to be a member'. They didn't even explain what this credit was for. First the co-operative was established, 'take this, be a member of the co-operative'. So the people entered into the co-operative without knowing what a co-operative was. After that sometimes they gave workshops. Some understood something, others nothing. That's how the co-operative failed. Because the members did not know, the members said, 'no, the co-operative belongs to INCORA'.
(interview with Ricardo Castro, Guapi, 27 April 1999; my translation)²³⁵

CAP, as a state strategy to organise the rural black farmers on the Pacific coast, never managed to create collectivities and wide-spread participation among local farmers, and no conscientisation programmes were introduced to explain not only the function of the organisation itself but also the wider ranging difficulties and problems that can occur when adopting a coconut monoculture in the region.²³⁶ As many other state initiatives aimed at 'developing' the region of the Pacific have shown (Escobar & Pedrosa 1996), CAP was a patronising and bureaucratised state intervention that was implemented without having created a sufficiently large awareness among the local people who it was meant to benefit.

The parallels to the contemporary community councils are frightening in many ways. The community councils themselves may become bureaucratised spaces owing more

²³⁵ "La cooperativa se fundó en el '64, '65, más o menos. [...] Era un programa del INCORA. Entonces la finalidad que tenía era, es decir, encargar para el mercadeo de los productos, especialmente del coco, y para los programas de los insumos agrícolas. Eso era el objetivo de la cooperativa. [...] Pero el socio no tenía la suficiente ilustración que era una cooperativa. Entonces, ¿qué pasó? No aprendió a manejar, fuimos pocos que logramos a entender lo que era en sí la cooperativa. [...] Entonces, el manejo directo estaba entre el INCORA y los empleados de la cooperativa. El socio por su desconocimiento pues, no. [...] Ellos [el INCORA] le daban su crédito. 'Esto es para que usted sea socio'. Ni siquiera le explicaban. No, 'vaya, esto es para que Usted sea socio'. No le explicaban para qué era eso. Primero se montó la cooperativa, 'tenga Usted, hágase socio de la cooperativa'. Entonces la gente entraba en la cooperativa sin saber lo que era una cooperativa. Después a veces dictaron algunos talleres. Algunos asimilaban algo, otros no asimilaban nada. Así se acababa la cooperativa. Porque el socio en sí no sabía, es decir, los socios decían, 'no, la cooperativa es del INCORA'."

²³⁶ CAP's failure dealt a devastating blow to many local peasants who had abandoned traditional multiple economic practices (see Chapter 6) and replaced it with a coconut monoculture. When no commercialisation channels and markets were found for the coconuts from the Pacific, these were virtually rotting away in their overabundance on the lands. And when finally a beetle pest known as *anillo rojo* attacked the coconut palms, for many local farmers this meant a near ruin.

to the legal requirements of holding elections regularly than to real efforts of raising awareness among the local population over their rights. Many community councils are being established before locals really know what they are all about. Some workshops have been given, but the concept of a community council has not yet been understood and certainly not appropriated by the large majority of the riverine inhabitants. In spite of this, INCORA has pressed for a rapid establishment of community councils in the region, and their policy of sending contractors from Bogotá to establish community councils on the Pacific coast has opened up scenarios of political corruption and favouritism (*politiquería*), in which some contractors can and do channel their own political interests and state resources to influence the local organising processes.²³⁷ Don Por, as the legal representative of the Community Council Mandela in Nariño is called, draws out these connections between personal political interests, clientelism and the establishment of community councils:

In the creation of the community councils we encountered some difficulties: INCORA, who was in charge of distributing the money for the formation of community councils, channelled part of it through the [organising] process [of black communities], and another part through the politiqueros [corrupt politicians]. With certain people who lived in Bogotá, they channelled funds via the politiquería and handed them over to these politiqueros, who then created maybe some four councils; and they are the ones that have most problems now with collective land titling. A certain person who lived in Bogotá, they told him, 'You, why don't you work in the process of Law 70? Take these funds, and go and form this community council!' So this person looked for someone else of the same political line and also told him, 'Well, take these resources and go and form that community council!' If he decided 40 millions [Colombian pesos - around 15,000 British pounds] to go there, that was hardly reflected in the formation of the council. But since they are politiqueros, and not people involved in the [organising] process [of black communities], the result is a badly-formed council. But in spite of this, we do our work and try to change these things. So that the people understand what a community council is, and what it is for. But this is how INCORA works.

*(interview with Porfirio Becerra, Tumaco, 16 January 1999; my translation)*²³⁸

²³⁷ Some social movement leaders of black communities have also now recognised the danger that lies in the rapid establishing of community councils without having created the conditions for popular participation. Instead, they stress the need for more training of the community council leaders, so that the councils become an "organising authority of wide participation, where we discuss and gain in orientation of the social movement with the base groups" (OCN 1996:248; my translation of: "instancia organizativa de amplia participación, donde se discute y se gana en la orientación del movimiento social con las bases").

²³⁸ "En esa creación de los consejos comunitarios se presentaron algunas dificultades tal como estas: El INCORA, que venía encargado de repartir el dinero para el trabajo de conformación de los consejos comunitarios, parte canalizaron a través del proceso, y otra parte la canalizaron a través de los politiqueros. Con cierta gente que vivía en Bogotá, a través de la politiquería canalizaron recursos que los entregaron a estos politiqueros, que entonces crearon de pronto algunos cuatro consejos; y son que más conflictos tienen ahora en el problema de titulación colectiva. Un determinado personaje que vivía en Bogotá, le dijeron, 'Usted, ¿por qué no trabaja en el proceso de la Ley 70? ¡Tome estos recursos, váyase a conformar este consejo comunitario!' Entonces ese buscaba otro de su misma línea política, y también decía, 'bueno,

And this is how INCORA has worked on several occasions. In 1997, the then national director was a woman originating from Guapi. She sent a fellow *guapireño*, who also resided in Bogotá, to the Cauca coast to establish community councils there. However, when this person arrived in Guapi, he soon realised that locals had already organised themselves into a community council, and that they resisted his intentions to set up various smaller community councils. As the legal representative of the community council Guapi Abajo explains:

When this person Carlos Ledesma arrived here to constitute the community council, we had already formed one. He came afterwards. The people from Cococauca had requested in Bogotá the constitution of the council. Around one month later, Carlos Ledesma arrived with the constitution of a small community council. He came to form a community council between Temuey and Sansón. So that the rest of the territory was somehow up in the air. But we had already formed the council from Boca de Napi to Playa de Obregones [Figure 5.1; p.134]. So the community told him, 'no, we already have our council constituted'. And then the guy says that in Bogotá they had given him money for this, and that he has to justify his work.

(interview with Walberto Banguera, Guapi, 5 February 1999; my translation)²³⁹

¡tómese estos recursos y váyase a conformar ese consejo comunitario!' Si el decidía 40 millones para allá, acaso se reflejaron allá en la conformación del consejo. Pero como son politiqueros, no gente que están metidos en el proceso, entonces hacen la conformación de un consejo mal conformado, que no ha tenido resultados. Más sin embargo, a pesar de eso, nosotros, nos hemos metido a hacer un trabajo por allá, y estamos tratando de cambiar las cosas. Para que la gente entienda lo que es un consejo comunitario, y para qué es. Pero así funciona el INCORA."

²³⁹ "Cuando el señor Carlos Ledesma vino aquí a conformar el consejo comunitario, nosotros ya habíamos conformado este consejo. Él llegó después. Los muchachos de Cococauca, ellos solicitan la conformación del consejo a Bogotá. Como al mes aparece Carlos Ledesma con una conformación de un consejo comunitario pequeño. El venía a conformar un consejo comunitario entre Temuey y Sansón. Entonces se quedaba volando el resto del territorio. Entonces nosotros ya habíamos conformado el consejo desde Boca de Napi hasta Playa de Obregones. Entonces la comunidad le dijimos, 'no, nosotros ya tenemos consejo conformado'. Entonces el tipo dice que a él le habían dado una plata en Bogotá, y que tiene que justificar su trabajo." Banguera did not go into detail during our conversation as to what 'arrangement' was finally found to 'justify' the use of these funds from Bogotá, and it is not up to me to speculate on where and how they ended up. However, after the community council Guapi Abajo was established, accusations were raised by local organisations against INCORA's contractor, Carlos Ledesma, for having misused some of the funds. Mr Ledesma was consequently expelled from the colony of *guapireños* living in Bogotá, as they accused him of having operated in Guapi under the name of the association without their knowledge and consent. Currently, in September 2000, I myself became involved in this messy situation, as Mr Ledesma accused me of defamation of his person when I presented my fieldwork results and interpretations in a conference paper that I gave at a recent forum on black communities organised by ICANH. Although Mr Ledesma was not even present at this forum, he claims 'to have heard' of my defamations against him and the *colonia guapireña*, accusations void of any grain of truth and which are complete nonsense of course. He, furthermore, proceeded to accuse me, the "researcher of black people [of] most likely reproducing retarded models of the awful colonialism which has so much hurt our [the black] communities" (letter of Carlos Ledesma directed at ICANH, dated 15th August 2000). He circulated this letter around the different organisations of black communities and state institutions (amongst others the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of the Interior and the Attorney General's Office), leaving me in the awkward situation of having to write to all of these institutions, explaining the absurd situation and sending them a copy of my paper to clear my name and my integrity with the organisations of black communities in Colombia. I did this with the utmost care and the necessary seriousness that the case required, although most of my friends and black movement

The communities of the river Napi had a similar experience with INCORA's intervention in their organising processes. In the words of their current legal representative:

We formed our community council with funds from INCORA, which I requested from Mr. Carlos Ledesma, who was the contractor of these funds. Well, he wanted to organise a community council in every village. But since we already brought a dynamic with us through Law 70 - we had already attended a number of meetings - we thought that it was not worthwhile to form a community council in every village. Instead, we said that we would create a single community council along the river. And that's how we started.
(interview with Humberto Villa, Guapi, 24 April 1999; my translation)²⁴⁰

In this case, the logic of the river and local perceptions of the aquatic space and its implications for the organising processes resisted the institutionalised intervention. In the case of the river Micay in the northern part of the Cauca coast, however, things turned out differently. There, the local organisation processes had barely started, and INCORA's representative, a native from the river Micay living in Bogotá, encountered little resistance when he proposed the establishment of five community councils within a short time. In April 1997, all five councils held their first General Assembly and elected a council board. Yet in January 1999, the local communities themselves requested from INCORA in Bogotá that these community councils be reformed, since even council board members felt uneasy about their positions, not knowing what were their tasks and responsibilities. These were precisely some of the 'badly-formed' community councils about which don Porfirio talked, where no or only very little conscientisation of local communities was achieved prior to their establishments. Don Porfirio is not alone in criticising INCORA's impact on local

leaders found the situation rather funny. No doubt that the exchange of letters between Mr Ledesma and myself, copies of which I sent to all organisations and institutions, will contribute to the rapidly spreading much-loved *bochinche*, the gossip that I referred to in Chapter 4. As one of the movement leaders in Guapi explained to me: "It is good that this has happened to you. So you know what it felt like for us when the local political elite here in Guapi started to attack us and accuse us of all sorts of things" (telephone conversation with Dionisio Rodriguez, Cococauca, Guapi, 3 September 2000). I recently received important support in this case by Juan de Dios Mosquera, General Secretary of the Afro-Colombian Human Rights Movement *Cimarrón*, who was present at my paper and who expressed his support for both my arguments and the analysis presented, at the same time rejecting the xenophobic attitude of Mr Ledesma (letter directed at ICANH dated 11th September 2000). Since then I have also received support from the local organisations in Guapi, some of whom have warned me of 'that crazy and dangerous guy Ledesma'. This case serves to illustrate the multiple ways in which one can get caught up as a 'committed researcher' in the messy field of politics. Yet it also sheds some light on and supports Gilroy's (1993) critique of the 'dangerous obsessions with racial purity in black politics'.

²⁴⁰ "Nosotros nos constituimos en consejo comunitario con unos recursos del INCORA, los cuales pedí del señor Carlos Ledesma que fue el contratista de esos recursos. Él quiso, pues, tratar de organizar en cada pueblo un consejo comunitario. Como ya nosotros traíamos una dinámica de la Ley 70, ya habíamos asistido a una cantidad de reuniones, miramos pues de que no era rentable, en cada pueblito o vereda constituir un consejo comunitario. Sino que dijimos que al nivel del río íbamos a hacer un solo consejo comunitario. Y así iniciamos."

organising processes, though, for the scenario he described, and which is replicated in the experiences and words of Walberto Banguera and Humberto Villa, shows the multiple ways in which ‘new political identities’, as aspired to by community leaders, are all too often entangled with bipartisan political clientelist structures, personal interests and state and capital mediation, each pursuing their own interests and goals in these processes. It would hence be wrong to regard the community councils as an already accomplished differential space (in a Lefebvrian understanding) that resists dominant representations of space. Instead, the community councils have themselves become ‘spaces of struggle’ where multiple interests converge and where the entangled geographies of domination/resistance are acted out.²⁴¹

INCORA’s attitude towards the land titling process, once the community councils have been established, has also been heavily criticised by local communities. Movement leaders accuse government officials of deliberately delaying this process. In the case of three community councils on the Cauca coast (Río Alto Guapi, Río San Francisco and Río Napi), it took a whole year between INCORA’s decision to grant collective land titles and publishing them in a local newspaper, a necessary step to validate these titles legally.²⁴² This only happened after the community councils concerned had threatened to take INCORA to court. So, while INCORA displays a desire to establish community councils rapidly, at the same time it considerably delays the handing over of land titles to the local communities. This shows the ambiguous nature of INCORA’s involvement in these processes, not acting as a homogenous unit that articulates a consistent politics towards the local organising processes, but as a ‘fragmented institution’²⁴³ in which individuals operate

²⁴¹ See my discussion of the ‘entanglements of power’ and geographies of domination/resistance (Sharp *et al.* 2000) in Chapter 3.

²⁴² Resolutions number 1081, 1082, and 1083 assign collective land titles to the Community Councils River San Francisco (26,232 hectares), River Napi (47,007 hectares), and River Alto Guapi (103,742 hectares). They were signed by INCORA’s director on 29th April 1998. Yet, they were only published in a regional newspaper, *Costa Caucana*, on 20th April 1999 (INCORA 1999:3-8).

²⁴³ I am applying here the notion of the ‘fragmented state’ (Paddison 1983) to the institutional level. Paddison has shown that the modern state cannot be regarded as a homogenous unit deploying a unilinear politics, but that quite on the contrary different state institutions may in fact articulate different politics towards a same issue. While such an analysis can be applied to all forms of states, be they dictatorships, democracies or socialist varieties of the two, it is a common phenomenon in today’s Western-style democracies where at times quite disparate state politics are put into practice by diverse institutions. In the Colombian case, for example, we can distinguish between two very different development programmes designed for the region of the Pacific coast. On the one hand, *Plan Pacífico*, a development plan devised and implemented by the National Planning Department (DNP 1992) and supported financially with resources from the Inter American Development Bank, and on the other hand (and at the same time) the already mentioned *Proyecto Biopacífico* (GEF-PNUD 1993, *Proyecto Biopacífico* 1998). Whereas *Plan Pacífico* aims at ‘developing’ the region of the Pacific coast through large infrastructure works, *Proyecto Biopacífico*

that may favour the organising processes of black communities, others that impede them, and still others that do not really care. The same is true for other state institutions as well, and Colombia emerges in these considerations as a 'fragmented state' (Paddison 1983) that does not act as a homogenous unit devising a consistent politics towards the organising processes of black communities, but rather one that is constituted of a range of institutions with at times quite different politics towards the Pacific coast region. The state itself must be understood as an arena of multiple institutional interactions in which concrete politics are constantly negotiated and re-defined; it is hence also an arena in which the organisations of black communities can and do interfere, articulate their demands and defend their needs.

To support this claim, I will now examine the current conflict over the mangrove areas which the government has so far refused to include in collective land titles for black communities. I will, furthermore, argue that the aquatic space as the locale for black communities on the Pacific coast and as a spatial precondition in the formation of community councils along river basins, as explained in this chapter so far, is an important analytical tool which can be drawn upon in supporting the arguments of black communities in this conflict.

Defending the logic of the river: the conflict over mangrove swamps

It is clear that the aspirations of the community councils go beyond the mere administrative functions of the collective territories as envisaged by Decree 1745. In fact, they continue to challenge the central government on the very definition of a collective territory, and on the question of which areas are to be included in or excluded from it. This confrontation has become most apparent in the still unresolved issue of mangrove areas, which the central government has refused to include in collective land titles, since it considers the extensive

has applied a 'conservationist strategy' in the Pacific region. Although this footnote cannot allow a closer examination, it is clear that *Plan Pacifico* can be regarded as a 'modern form of capitalisation of nature', to use Escobar's (1996) phrase, and *Proyecto Biopacifico* as a 'postmodern form'. Both projects are a concrete expression of Colombia's 'fragmented state', in that they devise quite different and at times contradictory politics for the same region and its people. In the same line of argument, we can interpret a recent statement of the National Planning Department outlining the basis for a politics of sustainable development in the region of the Colombian Pacific coast, in which they point to the 'excessive fragmentation of the region' and the need for "institutional adaptations [since] numerous institutions [are] without a clear role" (DNP 1998:14). My argument about the 'fragmented institution', though, goes beyond the *inter*-institutional relations, and focuses on the *intra*-institutional level as well. I argue that at the level of the individual state institution itself, fragmentations occur in its internal logic and in its concrete actions and politics, which may be quite ambiguous and/or even contradictory at times.

mangrove areas in the southern part of the Pacific coast as ‘areas of public interest’ which are not eligible for inclusion in collective land titles under the regulations of Law 70 (Chapter III, Article 6, a). Yet, the position of many black populations is that they effectively live within mangrove areas, where “they have made use of the beaches and the rare sandy islands to settle” (Leal 1998:403).

The mangrove swamps on Colombia’s Pacific coast cover an area of 283,775 hectares and thus constitute 77.5% of the entire mangrove area in Colombia (Leal 1998:400). The mangrove trees function as a barrier of coastline protection against the wave activity of the sea, as well as providing a catchment area for sediments and nutrients which provides rich feeding grounds for over 380 different fish species recorded as entering or living in the mangrove swamps of the Colombian Pacific coast (Von Prah *et al.* 1990:85). Mangrove areas are thus a complex and one of the world’s most productive ecosystems rich in fish species, molluscs and shells upon which local populations depend in their fishing and gathering activities (see Chapter 6). Strong social and commercial links have also existed between the coastal mangrove areas and the middle and upper sections of the rivers:

The inhabitants of these areas have made use of this generous environment to satisfy their needs of consumption and to trade with those who in the upper parts of the rivers do not have the bliss to enjoy fresh fish every day. (Leal 1998:399; my translation)²⁴⁴

Changing productive practices along the river have favoured the development of an important system of product exchange, as a fisherman from San Juan de la Costa remembers:

People dedicated themselves to fishing, to the growing of coconuts and a bit of agriculture. [...] One fished to take it upstream, to sell it in the rivers, [...] in exchange of plantain, rice and *panela* [unrefined cane sugar]. One went upstream by paddle and sold from house to house. This took four days, six days; when the sale was slow it took two weeks before getting back home. (quoted in Leal 1998:407-408; my translation)²⁴⁵

With the increasing use of engine-driven canoes and the emergence of concentrated commerce in centres such as Guapi, Tumaco and El Charco, these manifestations are

²⁴⁴ “Los habitantes de estas áreas han usado este medio generoso para satisfacer sus necesidades de consumo y para comerciar con quienes río arriba no tienen la dicha de gozar del pescado fresco a diario.”

²⁴⁵ “La gente se dedicaba a la pesca, al cultivo del coco y un poco a la agricultura. [...] Se pescaba pa’ escalarlo, pa’ ir a venderlo a los ríos [...] por cambio de plátano, arroz y panela. Se subía a canaleta, se vendía de casa en casa. Se gastaban cuatro días, seis días; cuando estaba la venta mala uno se gastaba quince días pa’ poder llegar a su casa.”

changing. People living in the mangrove areas rarely travel upstream these days to sell fish to individual peasants in the middle and upper sections of the rivers. Instead, we can observe a new ‘spatialised commercial logic’, which has reshaped and concentrated commercial and social interactions towards nodal points of commerce and exchange of products in the form of emerging trading centres in the larger villages or towns. This new spatialised commercial logic has also strengthened new commercial actors, such as the *revendedoras*, as explained in Chapter 6, mainly women who travel in their dugout canoes to the mangrove areas where they wait for the local fishermen to buy their catch and re-sell it (*re-vender*) on the local markets. The *revendedoras* effectively replace part of the voyage that the fishermen from the mangrove areas used to undertake to sell their produce further upstream, and they can be considered as the human links between the mangrove areas and the other river parts, embodying these socio-economic and cultural connections in their everyday travels.²⁴⁶

These socio-economic and cultural characteristics have important implications for the political organising processes, in that black communities have insisted that mangrove areas be included in their collective land titles. The government’s refusal has so far meant that all of those community councils that have a coastline in the southern Pacific, and that therefore invariably include mangrove areas, have not yet been issued with land titles. Instead, INCORA has offered to issue land titles excluding mangrove areas for the time being while continuing to negotiate. This offer has been rejected by the existing community councils on the Cauca coast, who demand ‘all or nothing’. The spatial unit of the river basin as organising structure has been instrumental in this confrontation. In line with the notion of the logic of the river stressing the interconnectedness and interdependence of the various river sections, mangrove areas form an integral part of the socio-cultural system of black communities in the Pacific region, and cannot be regarded separately. Current trends indicate that at least in one case an ‘agreement’ has been reached between local communities and INCORA. The Community Council Acapa in the southern coastal part of the Department of Nariño received a collective land title in March 2000, one that includes mangrove areas under a special concessionary status (Rivas 2001). This arrangement, however, grants the government an opt-out clause by which the mangrove

²⁴⁶ It would be an interesting exercise to apply Hägerstrand’s time-space model of the everyday routine actions and movements to the *revendedoras* of the southern Pacific coast. Whereas their paths towards and the stations within the mangrove areas are stable in space, a shifting and unstable time dimension of their movements and travels must be taken into account owing to the constantly changing tidal rhythm.

areas could be excluded again in the future. The arrangement was the result of negotiations between representatives of the Community Council Acapa and government representatives, and it does not constitute a generally applicable norm; as of May 2001, the Community Councils River Guajuí, Guapi Abajo, and Chanzará in the Department of Cauca have *still* not received their respective collective land titles.

Clearly in this conflict the locale as the physical setting of social interactions has been mobilised by black communities to defend their spatialised cultural logic and territorial aspirations. As entangled as the quest for a counter-space may be with party politics and clientelist structures, there is a clear spatial underpinning to the ways in which local black communities draw up the boundaries for their community councils. As I have explained in this chapter, these boundaries have not always followed the spatial river logic, but have sometimes been mediated by the state and capital. It is important to point to these differential experiences and to understand their implications for the current organising processes. It is obvious that local people in the Community Council Unicosta, for example, at first welcomed the interventions of outside capital in the form of the company ALENPAC, as it provided them with employment and earnings. Yet, these forms of co-optation must not be confused with a local political project affirming itself; and this has clearly not happened in the case of the Community Council Unicosta. These entanglements are difficult to deal with for social movement leaders, as they face a capitalist logic of intervention that they accuse of exploiting the region and its inhabitants so long as they provide the required resource base and workforce, but which in the more immediate present does provide locals with employment and an otherwise unavailable income. In the following chapter I will discuss in detail such a confrontation that I was lucky enough to witness one day between local (and yet non-organised) peasants and their social movement leaders and community council representatives. It is of utmost importance to understand the potentially conflictual nature of the relation between local populations and social movement leaders, not only on a theoretical and methodological level, but also on the very practical level, as in some cases these realities have in effect been fragmented by the intervention and co-optation or coercion by capital and the state. I will therefore examine in detail in the following chapter both the state discourses that have created the specific legal figure of the community council and the actions and procedures of local people in the formation of their respective community councils. I will also use this empirical material to show that the state's conservationist discourse applied to the Pacific coast region and its

inhabitants constitutes a 'discursive fix' typical of late capitalism's efforts at restructuring in the face of an ecological crisis, as I have explained theoretically in Chapter 3. The community councils as an organisational figure thereby provide a privileged field of inquiry into the interactions between dominant representations of space (state discourses, politics and legislation towards the Pacific) and representational space (the aspirations of local communities to appropriate their territories).

CHAPTER 8

The formation, ideals and practices of the community councils

Thinking and dreaming about the desired community council implies making different abstractions that permit us to pass from the current scenario to a future scenario.

Plan Pacífico (2000, point 6.1; my translation)²⁴⁶

Introduction: the ambiguity of the community councils

The community council is an ambiguous organisational figure. On the one hand, it offers black communities new opportunities for political self-expression under a legislation that recognises their collective land rights for the first time. It also entails a recognition of local representational space, accepting the notion of collective land ownership as traditional practice among these communities. Moreover, following my theoretical debating of a Lefebvrian spatial dialectics in Chapter 3, one could argue that the community council, as the highest territorial and administrative authority of the lands that it entails, forms part of the differential space to which black communities aspire, as it protects their territorial claims and rights against outside interventions (albeit not the armed and violent ones). The fact that some community councils have been co-opted by capital or by the state, as argued in the previous chapter, is not so much a problem or a fault of the organising figure as such, but an expression of the differential experiences, entanglements and struggles that surround each and every council's constitution in its own particular local circumstances.

Yet, there is a different kind of ambiguity associated with the community councils that often impacts negatively on local organising processes and forms of conscientisation. It is the very discourses that have created the legal figure of the community council and the organisational structure to which it has been made to adhere, which have introduced an outside structural logic of administration that does not correspond to local forms of organising but represents the state's necessity to create a 'communication partner' in the region with whom to deal. This outside administrative logic is expressed in the detailed directives laid out in Decree 1745: of how a community council is to be formed via a General Assembly that will elect a board of directors and a legal representative; a range of

²⁴⁶ "Pensar y soñar sobre el Consejo Comunitario deseado, implica realizar diferentes abstracciones que permitan pasar del escenario actual a un escenario futuro."

different technical committees that a community council is expected to create; and the strictly prescribed conservationist function that the community councils must adhere to to preserve the natural environment for future usage. These legal impositions require local communities to organise themselves in forms that are different to how they have done so far, and they bind them to applying a conservationist strategy in their productive activities, one that has been their traditional way of ‘doing things’ but which is now being threatened by external actors and agents of modernity that are increasingly penetrating the region of the Pacific coast. The conservationist function imposed on the community councils is of particular relevance to my argument outlined in Chapter 3 on the ‘discursive fix’ in capitalism’s most recent processes of restructuring when faced by an ecological crisis that results in the serious deterioration of nature as production condition. I will therefore show in this chapter how the Colombian state has created the figure of the community council as part of its conservationist strategy towards the Pacific region, and also how local communities have appropriated this figure in their organising processes and quest for a counter-space.

From tradition to obligation: conservationist strategy and state discourse

Colombia’s new Constitution of 1991 introduced important changes to the structures of the Colombian State, declaring the nation to be a Social Constitutional State (Estado Social de Derecho) that “recognises and protects the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Colombian Nation” (Article 7), and that “enables the participation of all in the decisions that affect them and in the economic, political, administrative and cultural life of the Nation” (Article 2). With particular reference to the rural black populations on the Pacific coast, Transitory Article 55 states:

Within two years of the current Constitution taking effect, Congress will issue [...] a law that grants black communities who have been living on state-owned lands in the rural riverside areas of the Pacific basin, in agreement with their traditional production practices, the right to collective property over the areas that the law will demarcate. [...] The same law will establish mechanisms for the protection of the cultural identity and the rights of these communities, and for the promotion of their economic and social development. (my translation)²⁴⁷

²⁴⁷ “Dentro de los dos años siguientes a la entrada en vigencia de la presente Constitución, el Congreso expedirá [...] una ley que les reconozca a las comunidades negras que han venido ocupando tierras baldías en las zonas rurales ribereñas de los ríos de la Cuenca del Pacífico, de acuerdo con sus prácticas tradicionales de producción, el derecho a la propiedad colectiva sobre las áreas que habrá de demarcar la misma ley. [...] La misma ley establecerá mecanismos para la protección de la identidad cultural y los derechos de estas comunidades, y para el fomento de su desarrollo económico y social.”

This law was passed on 27th August 1993 and is known as Law 70. It is the result of intense negotiations that took place between government officials, academics and representatives of black communities in the Special Committee for Black Communities (Comisión Especial Para Comunidades Negras) that was created by Decree 1332 of 11th August 1992 (Wade 1995, Arocha 1998). Law 70 delimits in Article 2 the area of the Pacific coast basin (point 1), names the rivers included in this area (point 2), defines the ‘rural riverside zones’ as “the lands adjacent to the river banks [...] that are outwith the urban perimeters defined by the Municipal councils” (point 3), and refers to the *tierras baldías* as “the lands situated within the limits of the national territory that belong to the state and have no other owner” (point 4). It further defines ‘black community’:

It is the total of families of Afro-Colombian descent that have a culture of their own, share a history and have their own traditions and customs within the relation countryside-town, which reveal and conserve an identity consciousness that distinguishes them from other ethnic groups. (Article 2, point 5; my translation)²⁴⁸

In this definition Afro-Colombian identity is indeed seen as relational, as I have discussed in Chapter 2, and hence as affirming itself in reference and in distinction to other identities and ethnic groups.

Chapter III, ‘Recognition of the right to collective property’, deals more specifically with the areas to be titled as ‘lands of black communities’ (Article 4), for which a community council has to be established (Article 5). The functions of the latter are clearly inscribed in this legislation, and particular reference is made to its conservationist function:

to watch over the conservation and protection of the rights to collective property, the preservation of cultural identity [and] the good use and conservation of the natural resources. (Article 5; my translation)²⁴⁹

The ecological and conservationist functions of the community councils are referred to and further specified throughout Law 70:

The use of the forests [...] will have to guarantee the persistence of the resources. [...] Soil use will take into account the ecological fragility of the Pacific basin. Consequently the successful applicants will develop practices of conservation and management compatible with the ecological conditions. For that purpose, appropriate models of production will be developed [...], designing suitable mechanisms to

²⁴⁸ “Es el conjunto de familias de ascendencia afrocolombiana que poseen una cultura propia, comparten una historia y tienen sus propias tradiciones y costumbres dentro de la relación campo-poblado, que revelan y conservan conciencia de identidad que las distinguen de otros grupos étnicos.”

²⁴⁹ “velar por la conservación y protección de los derechos de la propiedad colectiva, la preservación de la identidad cultural [y] el aprovechamiento y la conservación de los recursos naturales.”

stimulate them and to discourage unsustainable environmental practices. (Article 6; my translation)²⁵⁰

At first glance, there should be no need to remind black communities about the importance of sustainable production practices, since these have historically been practised in ecological harmony, as I have discussed in Chapter 6. Yet, Article 14 of Law 70 stresses the *compulsory* function of local communities to conserve the environment:

In the administrative act, by means of which collective land property is granted, the *obligation* will be assigned to observe the norms on conservation, protection and on the rational use of the renewable natural resources and the environment. (my emphasis and translation)²⁵¹

The right to collective land property is thereby directly linked to the obligation of conservation for which the local communities are held responsible. The legislation is then not simply a recognition of ancestral territorial rights, customs and traditions (representational space), but effectively produces new representations of space that regard the Pacific coast as a container of ‘megabiodiversity’ (DNP 1998) which needs to be conserved for future potential exploitation. This is a new discourse on the Pacific coast which adheres to global trends of environmentally sustainable development, biodiversity and the protection of ethnic minorities. The global, national, regional and the local are all inscribed and entangled in these discourses, which effectively produce rural black communities as ‘guardians’ of the tropical rainforests of the Pacific coast and of their ‘valuable genetic resources’. In a revealing quote, INCORA’s resolution 1081 of 19th April 1998 that awards collective land rights to the Community Council River San Francisco, both the direct link between the traditional production practices of black communities and their conservationist trends and the obligatory character of this relation become enshrined. The fact that these relations are being idealised and may in fact produce an essentialist vision of rural black communities, a kind of ‘illusionary sociology’ (Villa 1998:447), does not seem to matter in the legal discourse. The idealised forms of traditional productive practices are inscribed as obligation in the new legal discourses:

²⁵⁰ “El uso de los bosques [...] deberá garantizar la persistencia del recurso. [...] El uso de los suelos se hará teniendo en cuenta la fragilidad ecológica de la Cuenca del Pacífico. En consecuencia los adjudicatorios desarrollarán prácticas de conservación y manejo compatibles con las condiciones ecológicas. Para tal efecto se desarrollarán modelos apropiados de producción [...], diseñando los mecanismos idóneos para estimularlos y para desestimular las prácticas ambientalmente insostenibles.”

²⁵¹ “En el acto administrativo mediante el cual se adjudique la propiedad colectiva de la tierra se consignará la obligación de observar las normas sobre conservación, protección y utilización racional de los recursos naturales renovables y el ambiente.”

These traditional productive systems used by the Black Community of the river San Francisco have been up to today the most appropriate forms of conserving the natural ecosystems [...]. In them, knowledges of hundreds of years of experiences and perfecting of techniques based on a living with nature and on a respect of the collective, co-operation, solidarity and interdependence have been accumulated. The region where the community that is interested in the collective title is situated is considered within the National Environmental Policy as a *strategic ecosystem* that has to be conserved, since the *valuable genetic resources* and the biodiversity that exist today in this great ecosystem constitute a public good, property of the Nation, over which the Colombian State recognises the ancestral knowledge of the communities, [...] guaranteeing the participation of the communities in the investigations in order to know and to value this resource, all with a view to the search for guaranteeing the protection of these ecosystems, considered vital for the future of humanity. That is why Law 70 of 1993 imposes a *set of obligations* onto the beneficiaries of the collective titles in environmental terms. [...] Equally it has to be considered that the collective title includes property of the beneficiary community over the areas of forests delimited in it with the *clear obligation* for the community to make a persistent and sustainable use of the same. (INCORA 1998; my emphases and translation)²⁵²

The tropical rainforests, which are logged and reach a crisis level of irrecoverable deterioration as a production condition, are now discursively produced as a ‘strategic ecosystem’ containing ‘valuable genetic resources’ that are ‘considered vital for the future of humanity’. As argued in Chapter 3, capitalism’s discursive fix, faced with an ecological crisis with nature’s deterioration, produces this shift from nature to environment, from timber-rich resource base to strategic ecosystem, and from rural black riverside dweller to guardian of ‘this great ecosystem’ as a necessary condition for capital’s future exploitation of nature in more sustainable ways that guarantee its survival.

As also argued in Chapter 3, these processes are far from being clear-cut but are shot through with ambiguity, discontinuity and plain contradictions. This can be illustrated

²⁵² “Estos sistemas tradicionales de producción utilizados por la Comunidad Negra del Río San Francisco, han sido hasta el momento, las formas más apropiadas para conservar los ecosistemas naturales [...]. La región donde se halla la comunidad interesada en el título colectivo, es considerada dentro de la Política Ambiental Nacional como un ecosistema estratégico que debe ser conservado, pues los valiosos recursos genéticos y de Biodiversidad que hoy existen en este gran ecosistema constituyen un bien público de propiedad de la Nación, frente al cual el Estado Colombiano reconoce el saber ancestral de las comunidades sobre el mismo, [...] garantizando la participación de las comunidades en las investigaciones para conocer y valorar este recurso, todo en la búsqueda de garantizar la protección de los ecosistemas, considerados como vitales para el futuro de la humanidad. De allí que la ley 70 de 1993 impone a los beneficiarios de los títulos colectivos un conjunto de obligaciones en materia ambiental [...]. Así mismo, debe considerarse que el título colectivo incluye la propiedad de la comunidad beneficiaria, sobre las áreas de bosques delimitados en el mismo con la clara obligación de la comunidad de hacer un aprovechamiento persistente y sostenible del mismo.”

with a revealing quote from Chapter IV of Law 70, entitled ‘Land use and protection of natural resources and environment’:

The members of the black communities, holders of collective land rights, will continue to conserve, maintain or cause the regeneration of the protective vegetation of the waters and guarantee by an adequate use the persistence of particularly fragile ecosystems, such as the mangroves and wetlands, and protect and conserve the species of fauna and wild flora that are threatened or in danger of extinction. (Article 21; my translation)²⁵³

It seems ironic and contradictory that black communities are reminded to protect the mangrove areas, which consequently the state has not been willing to include in collective land titles, as I have explained in the previous chapter. If this example shows the ambiguity in the legislation, recent events have exposed the plainly contradictory attitude with which the government treats the Pacific coast region and its peoples. In September 2000, the national anti-narcotics police began to fumigate large areas in the departments of Nariño and Cauca of what were perceived to be illegal coca plantations. These areas served as ‘testing grounds’ shortly before massive US aid was to be channelled into the large-scale illegal drug eradication campaign Plan Colombia. Hours before fumigation started in the areas south of Guapi, light police aircrafts dropped thousands of glossy leaflets over the town which announced in brightly coloured letters: “In Colombia the days of illicit crops are numbered”.²⁵⁴ And on the other side of the leaflet the farmers were kindly advised that “if you continue sowing illicit crops, we will continue eradicating them. Look for an alternative legal crop to sow”. As I am writing these words, the fumigation planes are covering the forests of the Pacific lowlands in the departments of Nariño and Cauca with poisonous clouds, making no distinction between what appear to be coca plantations and what are local food crops. First reports have reached the capital Bogotá of people having died because they were in their plantations while the area was being fumigated, with children complaining about skin rash from exposure to the toxic clouds or after bathing in the rivers. Long-term consequences of contaminated rivers, affected fauna and flora and damaged food crops are impossible even to estimate at this point. While these crimes to humanity and the environment take place completely unnoticed by the (inter)national press,

²⁵³ “Los integrantes de las comunidades negras, titulares del derecho de propiedad colectiva, continuarán conservando, manteniendo o propiciando la regeneración de la vegetación protectora de aguas y garantizando mediante un uso adecuado la persistencia de ecosistemas especialmente frágiles, como los manglares y humedales, y protegiendo y conservando las especies de fauna y flora silvestre amenazadas o en peligro de extinción.”

²⁵⁴ I obtained one of these leaflets retrospectively from a Guapi resident.

and no governmental institution has issued a communiqué regarding these atrocious acts, locals are afraid to denounce the fumigations openly as paramilitary groups have entered the town of Tumaco to silence voices of protest. Such unbelievable disrespect for both human life and the ‘natural’ environment shows the pathetic realities of a state that issues a legislation obliging rural black communities on the Pacific coast to “protect and conserve the species of fauna and wild flora threatened or in danger of extinction” (Law 70, Chapter IV, Article 21), while at the same time the same government that has signed this legislation goes about fumigating these areas and invariably pushing these species closer to extinction. This is no longer just a ‘fragmented state’, as argued in Chapter 6, but a plainly contradictory and cynical state.

Regulating community representation: Decree 1745 and its stipulations

On 12th October 1995, Decree 1745 was passed regulating Chapter III of Law 70 with regard to the constitution of community councils and the process of collective land titling. It stipulates in Chapter II that the community council consist of a General Assembly and a board of directors:

The General Assembly is the maximum authority of the community council. [It] will meet ordinarily each year to take decisions, to pursue and evaluate the work of the community council’s board of directors and to discuss topics of general interest [...]. The Assembly in which the first board of directors is elected will be called by the existing community organisations that are recognised by the community. From then onwards, it will be called by the board of directors; if the latter does not do this appropriately, a third of the members of the General Assembly can do so. [...] The notice of meeting has to be given at least 30 days in advance. (Article 4; my translation)²⁵⁵

The detailed prescriptions of how the General Assembly has to work continues in Article 6, which defines as its functions amongst others:

- to elect the members of the board of directors;
- to approve or to disapprove the plans of economic, social and cultural development which the board of directors designs;

²⁵⁵ “La Asamblea General es la máxima autoridad del Consejo Comunitario. [...] se reunirá ordinariamente cada año para la toma de decisiones, para el seguimiento y evaluación de las labores de la Junta del Consejo Comunitario y para tratar temas de interés general [...]. La Asamblea en la cual se elija la primera Junta del Consejo Comunitario, será convocada por las organizaciones comunitarias existentes reconocidas por la comunidad. En adelante, convoca la Junta del Consejo Comunitario, si esta no lo hiciera oportunamente, lo hará la tercera parte de los miembros de la Asamblea General. [...] Las convocatorias deberán hacerse con un mínimo de treinta (30) días de anticipación.”

- to watch over the use and conservation of natural resources in agreement with the environmental legislation and the traditional production practices and others that guarantee the sustainable management of the natural resources; and
- to elect a legal representative for the community council.

Clearly the specific legal language used to outline the workings and functions of the community councils, the General Assembly, its board of directors and so on, owes more to global discourses of a Western-style liberal democracy than to traditional organising forms amongst rural black populations in the Pacific. There indeed exists a risk that to insist on the universality of liberal democracy, as expressed in Decree 1745, is to impose on other cultures systems of local government unrelated to their skills and talents, reducing them to “mimics, unable and unwilling to be true either to their tradition or [...] imported alien norms” (Parekh, quoted in Slater 1997:269).

This is an exceedingly difficult issue to resolve. As shown in the previous chapter, there have been real problems with rural populations not appropriating the legislation and not participating in full in the organising processes. The imposition of an outside logic of local government has not always found wide-spread acceptance in the interior of black communities, and the legislation itself is the result of complex interactions between the inside/outside and the local/global in the current processes of restructuring territorialisations at the national level. Slater calls attention to these entanglements of the inside/outside and the local/global in the geopolitical arena, although he ultimately does not provide us with a closer insight into how these relations are concretely acted out in space:

In the context of social movements, struggles for a decentralization of political power within a given national territory, and for a radical re-structuring of the territorial power of the state can be identified as exemplifying the more inner-oriented form of the geopolitical. [...] In a parallel way, it is possible to argue that in the analysis of democracy and processes of democratization there is also an inside - the territorialization of democracy within a given nation-state, and an outside - the struggle for a democratization of institutions that operate at the global level, but which have multiple effects within the territorial politics of the countries of the South. Clearly in the cases of social movements and democracy, the inside and outside of the geopolitical are not to be realistically seen as separate, but as overlapping and intertwined in a complex of relations. (Slater 1997:259-260)

This ‘complex of relations’ characteristic of the inside/outside and local/global couplets nevertheless has to find a *common* form of expression and a *common* language in which the ‘overlapping and intertwining’ take place and the (dis)agreements, concessions and results

are expressed. Whereas leaders of the black communities in Colombia act on both the inside (local, culturally-specific) and the outside (global, discourse-specific), their negotiations and agreements with government representatives and the resulting legislation are expressed in the hegemonic logic and grammar of a liberal democracy which black leaders assume as a tool in order to press for the 'radical re-structuring of the territorial power of the state' about which Slater talks. The problem then does not so much lie in the use of a *grammar from the outside* being applied by black community leaders in their discourses, but rather in the implementation of *structures from the outside* in local communities. If we also consider these structures as tools that provide rural black communities in the Colombian Pacific with new legal means of appropriation of their territories, then more emphasis should be placed on how to make these structures more 'culture-friendly', by, for example, articulating them in local languages and logics. This seems to me one of the great challenges for black community leaders these days: how to translate an *outside structural logic* into an *inside mode of appropriation*.

Mobilising in the rivers: from 'palenques' to community councils

Relatively few community organisations existed in the rivers of the Cauca coast prior to the new Constitution of 1991. The scenario there was different from the organising experiences in the departments of Chocó and Nariño, where a number of peasant associations already existed and would later add a considerable dynamic to the organising processes. This difference is reflected, for example, in Decree 1332 of 11th August 1992 that created the Special Committee for Black Communities. Article 1 states that there should be three representatives of each departmental Advisory Committee in the Special Committee, and Article 3 names the organisations that form part of each departmental Advisory Committee. The smallest number of such organisations is given for the department of Cauca, with only five. Ten of the twelve organisations of the department of Nariño are 'peasant associations', whereas six of the eight organisations of the Chocó carry the denomination 'peasant'. For the department of Valle del Cauca three of the seven organisations are organised around the defence of their river, and have a less peasant oriented discourse.

Other forms of pre-existing organisation on the Cauca coast were mainly state-driven initiatives inscribed within the overall logic of a paternalistic state. As today's legal representative of the Community Council River Napi explains:

In the river we had a Committee of Communal Action, an Ecclesiastical Committee that dealt with the management of the church, a Committee of Family Fathers, and later, when the Family Welfare System was created, we also had a Welfare Committee.

(interview with Humberto Villa, Guapi, 24 April 1999; my translation)²⁵⁶

These committees have formed part of the ongoing paternalistic logic of a state that aims at exercising control over the rural populations in the Pacific by organising them. These committees are nation-wide initiatives that do not reflect a culturally specific logic according to the region where they are implemented, so that they are much the same, for example, in the Colombian Pacific as in the Andean region.

In the river Guapi, a previous short organisational experience was the association of fishermen ASOPEZ (Asociación de Pescadores) that aimed at improving living and working conditions for the fishermen of the lower part of the river Guapi. The current legal representative of the Community Council Guapi Abajo remembers:

In this river here there was no organisation before Law 70. The only one that existed was an association of fishermen that we founded, ASOPEZ Guapi Abajo. We fought for legal recognition, but we didn't manage to get it. So when the community council was formed, we decided that the organisation should be part of the community council.

(interview with Walberto Banguera, Guapi, 5 February 1999; my translation)²⁵⁷

The river Saija is a special case on the Cauca coast in that it had a river organisation, ASOPRODESA (Asociación Prodesarrollo del río Saija), prior to the Constitution of 1991. In a similar way to the experiences in the Chocó, this organisation was actively encouraged and supported by a priest. As a leader of black communities from Timbiquí explains:

Because the Saija is a different case, an older organisation, it was better formed, they had, well, they followed another kind of process. With ASOPRODESA [...]. Well, the experience that I have with the [river] Saija is that maybe it wasn't an organisation that was born out of the feeling of the black communities of the Saija. But that they were supported by a priest, father Epifanio Sotelo. With all respect and initiative of the people maybe, but well, external people had a lot to do with this. The father was the founder of ASOPRODESA.

(interview with Mirna Rosa Herrera, Timbiquí, 17 February 1999; my translation)²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ “En el río existía la Junta de Acción Comunal, existía la Junta Eclesiástica, que tiene que ver con el manejo de la iglesia, Junta de Padres de Familia, y luego, cuando nace Bienestar Familiar, también existía la Junta de Bienestar.”

²⁵⁷ “Aquí en este río no había ninguna organización antes de la Ley 70. La única que estaba por allí era una asociación de pescadores que la pusimos, ASOPEZ Guapi Abajo. Estuvimos luchando por la personería jurídica, y no alcanzamos a conseguirlo. Entonces cuando se conformó el consejo comunitario nosotros decidimos que la organización fuera parte del consejo comunitario.”

²⁵⁸ “Porque el Saija es otro cuento, una organización más antigua, tenía más forma, habían, pues seguido otra clase de proceso. Con ASOPRODESA. [...] O sea, la experiencia que tengo del Saija es que de pronto no fue una organización que nació por el sentir de las comunidades negras del Saija. Sino que ellos estuvieron apoyados por un sacerdote, el Padre Epifanio Sotelo. Con todo el respeto e iniciativa de pronto de la gente, pero pues, mucho tuvieron que ver con una gente externa. El Padre fue el fundador de ASOPRODESA.”

With Law 70 of 1993, the communities in the rivers Guapi and Napi formed into *palenques* to discuss the stipulations of the new legislation and the territorial rights for black communities:

The palenque was an organisation of the people who organised the communities while the community council was being constituted. When the community council was put in place, the palenque disappeared. The palenque existed since '93, with Law 70. The people from JUNPRO supported the palenque in those days.²⁵⁹ They helped us establish it.

(interview with Walberto Banguera, Guapi, 5 February 1999; my translation)²⁶⁰

First, there was a palenque, we call it like that. Through the palenque we met in the community. Many already knew about Law 70, because we already carried a working dynamic. That was motivated here by an organisation, COCOCAUCA, you see. They organised since Transitory [Article] 55 as territorial organisation. And they, well, they were the co-ordination. So they moved around and gave a lot of workshops, and so one spoke of Law 70, from Transitory 55 to Law 70, from Law 70 to [Decree] 1745 that already assigned the rights to land titles. So with that dynamic we knew already more or less.

(interview with Humberto Villa, Guapi, 24 April 1999; my translation)²⁶¹

By referring to this first organisational experience in the rivers oriented around ethnic and territorial rights as a *palenque*, the black communities involved established an historical link to the resistance tradition of the runaway slaves during the times of slavery (see Chapter 6). At this time, *palenques* were the fortified villages where the maroons sought refuge and defended their freedom against the colonial army and the slave owners:

Palenque is the name of the process of struggle, you have heard of the Palenque de San Basilio. We call ours Palenque de Napi, because there slavery lived its historical processes as well, you see. One of the oldest villages in the area was the village of San Agustín. There existed slavery. There a lot of things happened. So we decided to call ours Palenque de Napi.

(interview with Humberto Villa, Guapi, 24 April 1999; my translation)²⁶²

²⁵⁹ JUNPRO (*Juventud Unida para el Progreso*) was the first community organisation to emerge in Guapi. Mainly consisting of young professionals and ex-students, they are also the founding members of Cococauca, the first regional organisation in the Cauca coast with an 'ethnic-territorial' discourse that aims at co-ordinating the struggles of black communities on the Cauca coast.

²⁶⁰ "El Palenque era la organización del grupo de personas que organizaban a las comunidades mientras se conformaba el consejo comunitario. Cuando ya se conforma el consejo comunitario entonces desaparece el Palenque. El Palenque existía desde el '93, con la Ley 70. Al Palenque en este tiempo lo apoyó los muchachos de Junpro. Ellos fueron que nos ayudaron cómo se conformaba eso, y tal."

²⁶¹ "Primero había un palenque, que le llamamos nosotros así. Por medio de ese palenque nos reuníamos en la comunidad. Muchos ya conocíamos lo que era la Ley 70 porque ya traíamos una dinámica de trabajo. Eso lo motivó aquí una organización Cococauca, ¿no? Que desde el Transitorio 55 se organizó como organización territorial. Y ellos, o sea eran la coordinación. Entonces se movían, y hacían muchos talleres, y ya uno hablaba de lo que era la Ley 70, del Transitorio 55 hasta la Ley 70, de la Ley 70 hasta el 1745, que ya da el derecho de la titulación de tierra. Entonces, nosotros con toda esta dinámica ya teníamos más o menos conocimiento."

²⁶² "Palenque es el nombre del proceso de la lucha, ya oye del Palenque de San Basilio, ya oye. Nosotros decimos Palenque de Napi, porque allá la esclavitud vivió también sus procesos históricos, cierto? Fue uno

The act of naming evokes not only a powerful historical imagination of resistance but also of a territorialisation process in that the *palenques* provided the runaway slaves with a ‘homeplace’ where they were free from the oppression and surveillance of the Spanish Crown.²⁶³ The historical and territorial resistance imagery has also been adopted into their name by the Tumaco-based ethnic-territorial organisation Palenque de Nariño that aims at co-ordinating the struggles of black communities in the department of Nariño. Yet, the *palenques* were only a transitional space, as Banguera explains above. The ultimate aim was the creation of community councils, adhering to the steps prescribed in Decree 1745:

So we conducted a census, and after the census we did the history of all the villages, how they began, who were their first inhabitants, and then we began to form the board of directors, which was when we called the assembly. From that census we were going to take the delegation that would go to the assembly. So for each village we appointed according to the number of families that each village had. From that we got the board of directors, of which I am the president, the legal representative. This assembly we had in May ‘97. And from there we entered into the process of application for the title. After we received the registration of the mayor’s office, we began to prepare with INCORA the application for the collective title.

*(interview with Humberto Villa, Guapi, 24 April 1999; my translation)*²⁶⁴

In his narrative Humberto Villa describes the process of the constitution of the Community Council in the river Napi following the stipulations of Decree 1745. The census that local communities undertook and the local history that they documented are legal requirements demanded by Decree 1745 in Article 20, which states that the application for collective land titles has to be accompanied by ‘ethnohistorical records’ (*antecedentes etnohistóricos*) and a demographic description of the community (points 2 and 4 respectively). This information, together with a physical description of the respective territories to be titled and a description of the traditional practices of production (points 1 and 7 respectively), formed part of the report that had to be presented to INCORA. Having completed the

de los pueblos más antiguos que tuvo esta zona, el pueblito de San Agustín. Allá hubo esclavitud. Allá hubo muchas cosas. Entonces por eso votamos por decirlo Palenque de Napi.”

²⁶³ See my discussion in Chapter 6 applying hook’s (1991) notion of ‘homeplace’ to the *palenques* established by runaway slaves during colonial times in Colombia.

²⁶⁴ “Y, hicimos un censo, después del censo hicimos lo que fue la historia de todos los corregimientos, cómo se iniciaron, quiénes fueron sus primeros habitantes, y luego ya principiamos a conformar la junta directiva, que fue para la cual se convocó la asamblea. De ese tipo de censo era de que íbamos a sacar la delegación que iría a la asamblea. Entonces por cada pueblo se fue nombrando de acuerdo al número de familias que tenía, pues, cada corregimiento. De allí sacamos la junta directiva, de la cual yo soy el presidente, el representante legal. Esta asamblea la tuvimos en mayo del ‘97. Y desde allí ya entramos al proceso de solicitud de título. Después de que recibimos el registro de la alcaldía ya principiamos a hacer con el INCORA la solicitud del título colectivo.”

census, the communities sent representatives to the first General Assembly in the river Napi in May 1997, where they elected the board of directors. Article 9 further states the need to register the members of the board with the mayor's office that then forwards the register to the Office of Affairs for Black Communities of the Ministry of the Interior in Bogotá. Having fulfilled these legal requirements, the board of directors then proceeded to apply for a collective land title.

The General Assembly as arena of conscientisation

The territory has been, is and will continue to be the space that makes possible the development of life throughout the ages.

Consejo Comunitario Guapi Abajo (1998:3; my translation)²⁶⁵

Although the procedures described above have introduced a heavy bureaucratisation to the organising processes, the specific requirements of forming a General Assembly and of preparing a report that contains detailed information on local history, land ownership and conflict situations, have certainly played their part in the conscientisation of local dwellers in these new processes of (now legally guaranteed) territorialisation. Many locals could not be motivated to attend these meetings, partly due to their negative experiences of traditional party politics and clientelism (see Chapter 7). For many others, however, the General Assembly was a first 'hour of meeting', just as was the journey along the river San Juan for the members of the river organisation ACADESAN (as described in Chapter 7). The elderly were called upon and heard as they uncovered the collective memories narrating the history of settlements along the river banks and recalling traditional forms of production. They spoke of collective work forms such as *minga* and *cambio de mano*, the traditional forms of social organisation in the rivers, which, although they can still be found today, are increasingly replaced by the general monetarisation of all aspects of social life.

During the assemblies people remembered other forms of collective production practices as well, such as *posear* in fishing when the catch is shared equally between the participants, *la cogienda* as a form of sharing the harvest, or the loan of land and seed to those who lack it, a favour being paid back at a later stage. The elderly also remembered that the patron saint festivities used to last two whole weeks, and that the trees in the

²⁶⁵ "El territorio ha sido, es y seguirá siendo el espacio que posibilita el desarrollo de la vida a través de los tiempos."

forests could only be felled by axe and in times of *menguante*, the period of the waning moon, which only then would guarantee the good quality of the timber. These traditional temporalities are not respected any more by the sawmills that demand constant and continuous timber supply (Consejo Comunitario Guapi Abajo 1998). The insensitivity of the instruments of modernity has not only contributed to a tension between tradition and modernity, but it has effectively broken with the traditional temporalities and spatialities of black communities as intimately bound up in their relation to nature.

The elderly also remembered the times when Guapi still produced rice and eggs in excess and exported these goods together with fruits and other products to Buenaventura. This was before INCORA promoted coconut monoculture in the region around Guapi in the 1960s, discouraging at the same time the production of rice which they argued was not profitable compared to the large-scale rice plantations in Tolima and Huila in the interior of the country.²⁶⁶ The ‘hour of meeting’ also served as a critique of the state, which local populations felt had abandoned them. The communities that later were to form the Community Council Guapi Abajo complained that there was no running water supply, no sewage system, no telecommunications, nor a health centre in any of their villages. Only two of sixteen communities (Chamón and Sabana) enjoy an electricity supply, and this only for four hours daily (Consejo Comunitario Guapi Abajo 1998).

The communities that came together on 28th September 1997 for the General Assembly which was to constitute the Community Council River Guajuí used the meeting to agree on a common strategy for telling those people who were illegally exploiting the forests around the area of Guare, in the middle parts of the river, to stop their activities. With their decision they referred to Chapter VI of Decree 1745, and in particular to Article 37, which states that licences or permits for the exploitation of natural renewable resources

²⁶⁶ This dominant argument is still used today by governmental institutions to discourage local rice production in the Pacific. Studies conducted in 1998 by the Municipal Unit of Agrarian Assistance UMATA (Unidad Municipal de Asistencia Técnica Agraria) and the national Agrarian Institute ICA (Instituto Colombiano Agropecuario) have shown a rice yield of 1,000 kg and 1,750 kg respectively per hectare in the Pacific coast, compared to an average of 5,000 kg per hectare in the departments of Huila and Tolima (interview with Silvio Sinisterra, director of the regional office of Plan Pacífico in Guapi, 12 February 1999, and documents presented there). Silvio Sinisterra still supports the official argument that the problem in the Pacific is one of scale, and that large areas of trees should be felled in order to increase the area of cultivation, an unsustainable argument given the particularities of the Pacific ecosystem. This dominant vision is also in sharp contrast to initiatives by local farmers who have resumed small-scale rice cultivation along the river banks over the last two years to guarantee self-sufficiency in one of the most important staple diets in the region without the intervention or assistance of UMATA or other state institutions. What locals do demand, though, is the provision of *piladoras* or *molinos*, mechanic rice hulling mills, to be installed in various strategic locations along the different rivers. Until then rice is still hulled manually in a *pilón*, the traditional wooden mortar, with a pestle, a strenuous task mostly undertaken by women.

on lands that are likely to be titled collectively to black communities can only be issued in benefit of the communities affected. The 35 people that had come from Buenaventura to log the forests in the river Guajú were therefore acting illegally, and local community resistance to these interventions thus successfully applied the existing legislation to defend their rights. As further conflicts in the region, locals mentioned the impact of *retroexcavadoras*, or backhoes, that since 1995 have been employed in gold mining at a place called El Mero, some ten minutes from the largest settlement San Antonio de Guajú in the middle parts of the river. This activity has resulted in the contamination of the river and in considerable social costs, since labourers had come to the region from the outside and with plenty of money (Consejo Comunitario Río Guajú 1998). The latter situation reminded locals of the fate of the inhabitants of Santa María de Timbiquí on the neighbouring river, where in the 1980s Russians had exploited gold resources, and their spending habits had led to a sharp increase in the prostitution of local women and other conflicts with locals. The communities of the river Guajú also used the report that accompanied their application for a collective land title to denounce the educational system in the region, and also to voice a strong criticism of the teachers themselves as being only interested in the economic benefits of their jobs without a real commitment to the education of the youth. Apart from the lack of resources, such as libraries and books, the report denounces the “de-contextualisation and the uselessness of the education in the region to which the adolescent is subject”, and which was argued to be one of the reasons for emigration out of the region (Consejo Comunitario Río Guajú 1998).

It is hence clear that the General Assembly was much more than a simple fulfilment of legal requirements with its instrumental functions of electing a board of directors and the legal representative. For many communities, it was indeed a first awakening to many dimensions of the new territorialisation processes. It was also in the General Assembly where they voiced their critique of the state and of their perceived abandonment, and where they analysed existing territorial conflicts and other problems. Although these issues had always been discussed on an everyday basis, the General Assembly turned them into an organised form and a collective articulation through the medium of the report that accompanied the application for a collective land title.

It is important to point out that above-described events were a general tendency, the intensity of which nonetheless differed from river to river. Processes of conscientisation over ethnic, cultural and territorial rights were often slow, ambiguous and contradictory.

Yet, precisely because these local processes have been at times discontinuous, both spatially and temporally, there is an interpretative danger of rendering them invisible or of underestimating their potential for social change, a danger to which academic passers-by easily succumb. Having spent a prolonged period ‘in the field’ (see Chapter 4 on methodology), I have been able to witness the often interrupted nature of local organising processes, when nothing much seemed to happen for months at a time, and then all of a sudden an intense mobilising dynamic arose. It is therefore my intention to take seriously these ‘moments of mobilisation’, and to point to the continuous potential of the “radical restructuring of the territorial power of the state” (Slater 1997:259) on the Colombian Pacific coast.

Social cartography as a tool in the articulation of collective territorialisations

In the local definitions of territory, use and meaning prevail over the establishment of boundaries and their defence. These definitions are ample and cover all necessary spaces for the physical, social and cultural reproduction.

Vargas (1999:147; my translation)²⁶⁷

The arena of the General Assembly was one of these ‘moments of mobilisation’. The consecutive meetings and workshops on social cartography in which riverside dwellers developed a sketch of the area that they wanted titled collectively (Decree 1745, Article 20, point 1) were other such mobilising moments. The communities received important technical and logistic assistance from NGOs or from Colombia’s Geographical Institute IGAC (Consejo Comunitario Guapi Abajo 1998, IGAC 1999, Vargas 1999). The communities in the lower section of the river Guapi, for example, were supported by the Cali-based NGO Fundación La Minga, for whom the project of social cartography implies the development of maps with and for local communities in their own terms.²⁶⁸ In this exercise, local people’s mental maps serve as the common starting point, in that paper and pens are provided and locals discuss amongst themselves how to draw a map of their territory.²⁶⁹ The cartographic ‘expert’ accompanies and encourages this process, tries to

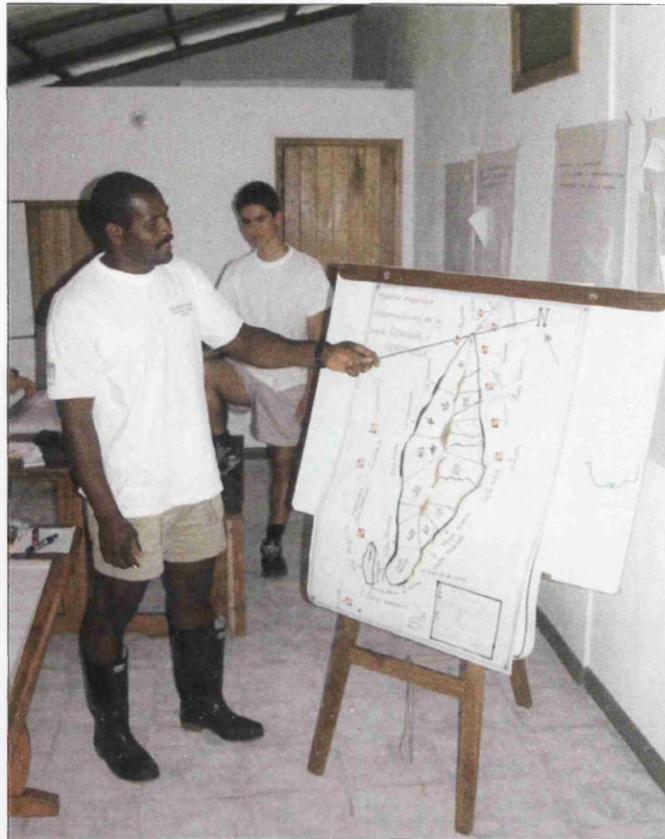
²⁶⁷ “En las definiciones locales de territorio prima el uso y la significación sobre el establecimiento de límites y la defensa. Estas definiciones son amplias y cobijan todos los espacios necesarios para la reproducción física, social y cultural.”

²⁶⁸ Interview with Guillermo Santamaría, managing director of Fundación La Minga, Cali, 16 December 1998.

²⁶⁹ Mental maps have been one of the principal concepts of behavioural geography referring to the representation of places as revealed in exercises of cognitive mapping (Gould & White 1974). More recently they have become of interest within cultural and social geography that regard these representations as constructed through social discourse and practice. Mental maps have also become a key tool in the

answer questions arising, and oversees the collective production of a mental map of the area. This activity allows on the one hand an interpretation of local territorial perceptions, as the participants choose to draw and to represent those environmental features that they consider important, and on the other hand it enables the participants themselves to 'walk around' the aquatic space in their imaginations in a kind of 'mental appropriation of their territory'. The workshops on social cartography thereby also fulfil a role of conscientisation where the riverside dwellers think and talk to one another about their river and the surrounding lands, and in so doing reflect on territorial conflicts and other problems affecting the community. The central orientating feature in most mental maps is the main river, which is normally drawn first by participants and around which they then spatialise their territorial imagination, adding other features such as tributaries, plantations and settlements. People's spatialised environmental imaginary around the aquatic space, as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, is put to paper in these exercises (see Figure 6.2; p.192). Subsequently participants are instructed in the use and the reading of 'official' maps, to then produce a new map that considers scale and technical details such as co-ordinates, topographical features and a legend. This map accompanies the respective community's application for a collective land title presented to INCORA. The objective of social cartography is hence twofold: for participants to know their territory - an *internal* process of conscious territorialisation; and for them to make their territory known - an *external* process of articulation and communication of their territorialities.

preparation of land rights claims for minority ethnic groups such as the Aborigines in Australia (Jacobs 1988), First Nations in Canada (Sparke 1998) or, here, the black communities on Colombia's Pacific coast.



Social cartography workshop led by the author with the resident population on the island of Gorgona, 8th July 1999



Workshop on local history and environmental education with local teachers; Vuelta Larga, Community Council Unicosta, Nariño, 20th June 1999

Although some movement leaders have pointed out that they “have their cartography clear in their heads”,²⁷⁰ the exercise itself raises questions over territorial conflicts and the very nature of the boundaries to be drawn. Whereas private property amongst rural black populations is clearly delimited, mainly by using natural boundaries such as certain streams, rocks or trees (see Chapter 6), the mountain backlands (*respaldo de monte*), which are used in activities such as hunting and gathering, are perceived as an open, collective space without any clearly established boundaries. The need to delimit these areas on maps therefore runs against traditional spatial and territorial visions. Furthermore, with regard to inter-ethnic relations between black communities and indigenous groups, there have traditionally existed what I would term ‘overlapping territorialities’ in that black people may enter and use what is perceived as or known to be indigenous collective territory and vice versa, always if their respective activities do not infringe upon the other ethnic group’s territorial rights. There have traditionally existed what can be called ‘tolerated territorialities’ between black communities and indigenous groups on the Pacific coast that consist of ‘fluid boundaries’ which are nevertheless clearly marked and respected in imaginary space:

[...] between neighbouring groups there exist *fluid territorial and social boundaries* crossed by relations of co-operation and of commerce. Therefore, the resources or the land that belong to one group can be used by others if the social relations are sufficiently close in order to turn strangers into practical members - yet, without them acquiring rights. (Vargas 1999:149; my emphasis and translation)²⁷¹

Yet, it is now the very legislations with regard to the creation of indian reservations (*resguardos*) and collective lands of black communities that are causing inter-ethnic conflicts by imposing the previously unimportant notion of fixed boundaries that have to be delimited in space, on maps and thus also in the territorial imaginations of both indigenous and black communities. We are currently witnessing an external imposition of fixed boundaries onto local epistemologies of fluid boundaries and tolerant territorialities, forcing local communities to translate their territorial aspirations onto maps which Western-style institutions will accept as legitimate documentation to accompany their land rights claims. This is a little discussed but important side effect of the legislation, and one

²⁷⁰ Commentary of Florentino Carvajal, legal representative of the Community Council Unicosta in Nariño, made during my conversation with the board of directors, Madrid, Nariño, 8 May 1999.

²⁷¹ “[...] entre grupos vecinos hay fronteras territoriales y sociales fluidas atravesadas por relaciones de cooperación y de comercio. Por lo tanto, los recursos o la tierra que pertenecen a un grupo pueden ser utilizados por otros si las relaciones sociales son lo suficientemente cercana para volver a los extraños miembros prácticos - sin que por ello adquieran derechos.”

which has to be judged negatively, as it has led to increasing territorial conflicts between black and indigenous communities. Yet, given the increasing penetration of capital and external actors in the region, the drawing of clearly established and fixed boundaries does protect the land rights of indigenous and black communities, and potentially arising territorial conflicts between the two populations may therefore be considered the smaller evil. As a way of avoiding inter-ethnic conflicts from breaking out, a number of mechanisms have been drawn up, such as inter-ethnic committees for discussion and negotiation between indigenous groups and black communities, entailing a mixed committee consisting of representatives of the communities involved, INCORA, the Office for Black Community Affairs and the Office of Indigenous Affairs. These inter-ethnic committees have to take the final decision over the delimitation of territories that involve claims from both black communities and indigenous groups (Decree 1745, Article 22, point 5).

‘Planes de Manejo’: planning the new territorialities

Once potential territorial disputes have been resolved and the more technical details have been arranged, INCORA issues a collective land title to the respective black community in the form of a resolution (Decree 1745, Article 29) that contains information on the exact location, area and borders of the collective lands. It also includes a section on special requirements related to the norms over the conservation of natural resources:

The territory titled as Lands of Black Communities will be managed and administered by the board of the community council based on the internal regulations that are approved by the General Assembly. The board of the community council has to establish *mechanisms of administration and management* that [...] allow the sustainable use of the natural resources from which all the members of the community profit, fulfilling the social and ecological function of the property, in accordance with Chapter IV of Law 70 of 1993. (Decree 1745 of 1995, Chapter V, Article 32; my emphasis and translation)²⁷²

These ‘mechanisms of administration and management’ are to be expressed in so-called Management Plans (Planes de Manejo) that the community councils have to develop. The first plan of its kind on the Pacific coast was produced for the Community Council Napi,

²⁷² “El territorio titulado como Tierras de las Comunidades Negras será manejado y administrado por la Junta del Consejo Comunitario con base en el reglamento interno aprobado por la Asamblea General. La Junta del Consejo Comunitario deberá establecer mecanismos de administración y manejo que [...] permita un aprovechamiento sostenible de los recursos naturales del cual se beneficien todos los integrantes de la comunidad, en cumplimiento de la función social y ecológica de la propiedad, conforme se reglamente el Capítulo IV de la Ley 70 de 1993.”

co-ordinated by Plan Pacífico with funds from the World Bank.²⁷³ The Management Plan identifies problems affecting the population and the ecosystems of the lands of the river Napi as perceived by its inhabitants and interpreted by ‘experts’ (Plan Pacífico 2000). Furthermore, it develops a general outline of action, together with more specific programmes and projects to be implemented within the territory of the community council. Geographers, biologists and forest engineers participated in the analysis with their ‘expert knowledges’, and representatives of the local communities were also involved, as well as government officials overseeing the logistics of the project. A general environmental deterioration of fauna, flora and aquatic resources is identified as the main problem affecting river communities. As a result of over-fishing, fishing with dynamite and the intrusion of people from outside the region to exploit these resources, some fish species are reported to be on the verge of extinction. A similar problem is reported for the animal species subject to hunting. On the other hand, soil degradation is partly attributed to increasing population pressure on the characteristically little fertile lands and to the intensification of the exploitation of natural resources. In some areas, in fact, traditional productive activities are no longer viable due to the loss of the natural resource base and the deterioration of land quality through erosion and contamination (Villa 1998:447). This leads to the paradoxical situation of a conservationist legislation that appeals to traditional productive practices to be implemented in an already deteriorated environment that cannot sustain such practices any longer (and neither the people practising them).²⁷⁴

As socio-economic limitations, the Plan considers the lack of an effective commercialisation of local products to be one of the main reasons for low income and low quality of life. Although some areas within the territory of the community council of the river Napi do not produce enough food to guarantee self-sufficiency, other areas show an

²⁷³ I was in Guapi at the time when the Trinidad and Tobago-born World Bank representative visited and spoke to the various community council leaders on the Cauca coast. It was in these meetings that a decision was taken in favour of the Community Council Napi that was to benefit from direct World Bank support. There were in fact only two other contenders, since one of the conditions for being eligible for World Bank funding was the prior issue of a collective land title, and, as explained in Chapter 7, the community councils with a coastline and mangrove areas have not yet been issued with such titles. Whereas the Community Council San Francisco was promised support by Plan Pacífico for the development of their Management Plan, the one of the river Napi was elected ahead of the one of Guapi Arriba due to its better prior organisation.

²⁷⁴ It is, for example, difficult to obtain fresh fish for lunch in the river Patía in the department of Nariño. A combination of over-fishing and contamination of the river by excessive and uncontrolled mining and logging industries has contributed to the drastic decline of fresh water fish in the river. Attending a meeting in one of the local communities, we were served canned tuna and salty biscuits for lunch. This illustrates the drastic food situation that people live in the river Patía.

overproduction of certain food items. Such is the case in the upper parts of the river, where a surplus of maize is produced that, due to the absence of an effective commercialisation and a lack of storage centres in the region, frequently rots away.²⁷⁵ The lack of an organised transport system is another factor that has hindered a more integrated vision of commercialisation, at least on a local and intra-regional level.

I do not want to examine all of the aspects of the Management Plan, which also embraces the fields of health care and education. Rather, I will analyse a certain contradiction evident in the Plan when it values the ‘local’ and the ‘traditional’ *vis-à-vis* the ‘modern’. On the one hand, the Management Plan calls for the need of a more planned development of the region, thereby reflecting global trends in the increasing importance of planning (Escobar 1992b) as a means of (p)reaching development, while at the same time it rejects local, un-planned ‘improvisation in management’. On the other hand, the Plan highlights the continuing existence and importance of traditional production practices as a viable way of achieving sustainable exploitation of the natural resources. The Plan criticises, for example, the ‘traditional cultural conception’ of local housing and argues that some 98 per cent of the materials used in its construction are of low quality and duration (Plan Pacífico 2000). This is indeed a surprising analysis, and no information is given on the methodology employed in reaching these results. Over 95 per cent of the housing in the rural Pacific uses local timber and is built on stilts to prevent flooding, a specific adaptive strategy of rural black populations to the physical environment (Whitten 1986), and more specifically to the aquatic space (see Chapter 6) which has been developed over the past 350 years. These local forms of knowing of rural black populations are the result of long-standing learning processes, reflecting a wealth of accumulated experiences that have been handed down from generation to generation. In the words of the legal representative of the Community Council Mandela in Nariño, they have generated ‘native technologies’, as, for example, in local agricultural production systems:

Before our fathers sowed plantain, they researched and experimented. For example, when they went hunting, and they had to spend the night away, if it was a long distance, they left the way well marked. Returning from the hunt they took a few clusters of plantain and planted them there. And that later showed them if it was suitable, if it produced or not. [...]

²⁷⁵ Personal observation and interviews with Humberto Villa, legal representative of the Community Council River Napi.

The old folks always experimented. A little bit here, a little bit there, trying out. The plantain comes on well here. Here as well. But it lasts less. So we are going to plant it over there. That was the native technology.

(interview with Porfirio Becerra, Tumaco, 16 January 1999; my translation)²⁷⁶

Valuing these native technologies, others exclaim that “our grandfathers have always been right” (Balanta 1996:273). In a similar way, native technologies showed locals what woods to use for the construction of houses, and thus they found out that the *guayacán*, due to its strength, was particularly suitable for the stilts that carried the construction. Doña Celia, currently living with her daughter, wants to build her own house and points out that it should be one of six *guayacanes*, that means that it is to be built on six stilts of the strong and resistant *guayacán* wood. It is hard to imagine that these native technologies should have resulted today in 98 per cent of low quality materials in the construction of houses, as stated in the Management Plan for the Community Council River Napi. The problem seems to be one of the particular perspective, or the ‘lens’, through which a certain phenomenon is observed and assessed. Critiquing the overall ‘traditional cultural conception’ of local housing exposes the different cultural parameters employed in some of the document’s discourse and the frequent low valuation of local cultural practices.

This tendency is further expressed in the critique of an absent ‘commercial culture’, in that the locals supposedly only concentrate on self-consumption, neglecting the potential for commercialisation of local products, thereby showing a ‘lack of an entrepreneurial mentality’. This critique, however, stands in contrast with the almost triumphant analysis given to me by a black intellectual on the dawn of New Year’s Day 1999. Although we had both not stopped drinking for the last twelve hours, I perfectly remember the last part of our conversation analysing and critiquing the devastating impact of neoliberal policies in the Pacific, a discussion he enigmatically declared finished with the comment: *Los negros somos una curiosidad para el capitalismo* - “We blacks are a curiosity for capitalism”.²⁷⁷ Although I do not intend to essentialise black culture as anti-capitalist, there are indicators that the historical absence of a capitalist logic of accumulation and entrepreneurial

²⁷⁶ “Nuestros padres, antes de sembrar plátano, primero investigaban, experimentaban. Ellos, por ejemplo, a través de la cacería, se iban, y les tocó dormir por allá, y si era lejos el trayecto, lo dejaban bien marca’ito. Al regreso de la cacería se llevaban unos cuantos racimos de plátano allí y lo dejaron sembrado. Y eso les indicaba posteriormente si era apto, si daba o no. [...] Los viejos siempre experimentaban. Un poquito aquí, un poquito allá, ensayando. Aquí se da el plátano. Acá también. Pero dura menos. Entonces vamos a sembrar allá. Esa forma era la tecnología nativa.”

²⁷⁷ Personal communication from Santiago Arboleda, Cali, 1 January 1999, sometime before sunrise.

mentality amongst rural black populations in the Pacific resists the ‘smooth’ implementation of development programmes in the region.²⁷⁸

The Management Plan for the Community Council River Napi has a strong discursive component that is oriented towards global discourses on sustainability and conservation. On first sight it seems to make more sense to outsiders to the region than to local peasants and fishermen, and doubts may be raised as to how viable it will be to translate the Plan’s propositions into practice. Yet, its elaboration with the active participation of the community has also managed to raise consciousness levels over the problematic environmental situation in the Pacific and over the new legislation and the ensuing mobilisation of black communities in the rivers of the Pacific. As an observer of this process pointed out, a lot of young students were keenly involved in the discussions of the final assembly called by the Management Plan committee,²⁷⁹ and the conscientisation of these young people may in future lead to their active participation in the local organising processes or indeed in the national social movement of black communities, a point theoretically argued in Chapter 2.

Making the legislation their own: resistance against outsider interventions

Black communities have already applied the new legislation in a number of cases to protect their territorial claims against outsiders keen on exploiting the rich natural resources. As the legal representative of the Community Council River Napi narrates their experience with a company that intended to exploit the rich gold resources in their river:

A company wanted to enter the river Napi, and we had to stop them. First of all, their procedure was not the most adequate, because they dealt with people who did not have credibility in the community. Secondly, they made clear to us that they would go ahead at any price, because they had the money. So that was the fear we had in a region where we have been peaceful. [...] We are afraid of all this, because we have already lived an

²⁷⁸ In many ways I have also experienced this ‘curiosity’ and even initial incomprehension at times when faced with certain non-accumulative principles among rural black populations in the Pacific. Doña Celia, for example, lives in what would be termed ‘poverty’ by socio-economic parameters, earning at irregular intervals in different informal activities less than the minimum monthly wage. Among other traditional practices, she prepares *botellas curadas*, cured bottles of balsamic weeds and sugarcane spirit that have the potency to cure a number of ailments, ranging from the general weakness of the body via menstruation problems to snake bites and malaria. Doña Celia sells such bottles at between 50,000 and 70,000 Colombian pesos (17 and 24 British pounds respectively). Yet, she showed little interest when I suggested that she might commercialise these bottles in order to raise her income. I was definitely more excited by the idea than she herself. I am still left with this curiosity towards her lack of interest in using her knowledge to raise her income. Maybe that is what it means to celebrate difference, the differences in perspectives that allow us to keep thinking and dreaming about alternatives to this mad rush and need for accumulation to which many of us are so accustomed and upon which we are so dependent.

²⁷⁹ Interview with Gaspar Torres, director of Plan Pacífico, Bogotá, 8 September 2000.

experience like this. We knew that where these people arrive, there are already the guerrillas, there are paramilitaries, and there are common criminals. So we are not friends of these kind of people, because they maybe walk around with criminals to defend their interests. [...] So the community spoke out, people organised themselves, and in each village we began to have meetings. We managed to repeal a concession given by the CRC [regional development corporation of the Cauca department]. We had to go to the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Mining, the Ministry of Defence, well, we protested in front of all these people from the State. That was in '96. We began to look at the destruction that the retro power shovel had caused in the river Timbiquí, because there was a serious problem. [...] If they came, maybe, to sit down to talk with the community and present their proposal. In the case of mining and of the forest, the companies should also leave something behind, and not just take what is there and then disappear. Because we have to prepare the future for those who come after. So we should not finish what is there, as if we were the owners, no. Because we have preserved this during so much time. [So we denounced them,] first in the mayor's office, then with the CRC, and then we went to the Institute of the Environment for them to issue a resolution over this issue. So they gave a resolution, and we have a copy that no institution could any longer come in without the consent of the community councils. That law 1745 existed, which gave autonomy to the community councils for them, together with the regional corporations, to give permits for the exploitation of resources. [...] We declared that we were not enemies of the organisations that come to exploit our resources, but that they have to leave a contribution with the community. But the ones that think that they can simply come here to grab the resources and then leave, no, there we have to resist.

(interview with Humberto Villa, Guapi, 24 April 1999; my translation)²⁸⁰

²⁸⁰ “En el Napi vino una compañía que se iba a meter, y se tuvo que frenar esa parte. En primer lugar su proceso, su procedimiento de ellos, no era el más adecuado, porque se pegaron de personas que no tenían credibilidad en la comunidad. Segundo, pues, ellos nos manifestaban que a cualquier precio se metían, porque ellos tenían su plata. Entonces, pues, el temor de uno, en una zona donde nosotros hemos sido pacíficos. [...] A nosotros nos da temor todo eso porque ya nosotros hemos vivido una experiencia. Nosotros ya vimos, donde llega esta gente, ya está la guerrilla, ya están los paramilitares, están los delincuentes comunes. Entonces nosotros no somos amigos de esa clase de personas, porque ellos a lo mejor andan con los delincuentes para que les defiendan sus intereses. [...] Entonces la comunidad se manifestaba, la gente se organizó, y en cada pueblo se principió a hacer reuniones y manifestaciones. Se logró de derogar a una concesión que dio la CRC. Hubo que ir al Ministerio del Medio Ambiente, al Ministerio de Minas, al Ministerio de la Defensa, o sea nos manifestamos a toda esa gente del Estado para defender esa parte. Eso fue en el '96. Cuando ya principiamos a mirar lo que fue el destrozo que hizo la retroexcavadora en el Timbiquí, que allá hubo un problema serio. [...] Si ellos entran, de pronto, más sentarse a hablar con la comunidad, qué propuesta, o qué oportunidad traían. El proceso de la explotación, en el caso de la minería, y lo forestal, hecho con empresas, que también dejen algo de vida, que no simplemente se lleven lo que hay, y desaparezcan. Porque nosotros tenemos que preparar también el futuro de los que vienen. Entonces, no es simplemente acabar con lo que hay, o sea dueño para acabar con lo que hay, no. Porque esto lo hemos conservado durante tanto tiempo, y por un rato de mal, de hambre que se dice uno, no. [La denuncia se hizo] en la alcaldía primeramente, y de allí nos tocó hacerlo a la CRC, y luego nos dirigimos al Instituto del Medio Ambiente para que ellos dictaran una resolución referente a esa vaina. Entonces ellos dieron una resolución, y nosotros tenemos una copia, que ninguna institución ya podría entrar sin el concepto de los consejos comunitarios. Que había aparecido la ley 1745. La cual daba autonomía a los consejos comunitarios para que sea quien, en compañía a las corporaciones regionales, que digan y den algunos conceptos de explotación de recursos. [...] Nosotros manifestamos que no somos enemigos de las organizaciones que vengan a explotar los recursos aquí, pero que también dejen un aporte a la comunidad. Pero la que pensó que únicamente viene acá para llevarse los recursos y va a dejar a la comunidad, no, allí tenemos que hacer resistencia.”

It is important to stress that neither local farmers nor the community leaders are wholly opposed to the extraction of natural resources from their lands. Rather, a consciousness is being generated and articulated around the fact that these extractive processes have to be sustainable, whatever this exactly means in technical terms, although in practice the consensus is evidently that this means to 'have to prepare the future of those who come after'. Most of the externally induced penetrations of the Pacific coast exploiting natural resources have been ruthless extraction processes that leave locals and the environment abandoned and often degraded, usually as soon as the profit margins look more promising in other areas. The new organising processes of black communities challenge this capitalist extractive logic, not only in environmental terms but also in human terms concerning the quality of life. And, as Humberto Villa relates, the current legislation, however faulty it may still be, provides an important tool for local communities in defending their rights against outsider interventions in their rivers, at least in theory. It is of course another question if these rights can be put into practice when facing armed actors such as guerrillas and paramilitaries.

I was fortunate enough to witness local resistance first-hand when I was invited on a trip to the river Guajuí, where I held an informal meeting in the village of El Carmelo with members of the river organisation ASODERGUA on Sunday, 7th February 1999. One hour into our conversation, the meeting was interrupted as rumours were spreading that two sawmill owners had assembled the people of San José de Guare, a village further upstream, to come to an arrangement regarding the establishment of a sawmill opposite their village. Alarmed by this news, we set off immediately in two speedboats to arrive half an hour later in San José. We were accompanied by the community council's representative Ricardo Castro and a young local anthropologist, a member of the directive committee of ASODERGUA. The two sawmill owners were politely asked to leave for half an hour, a time during which the members of the directive committee explained to locals the parts of the new legislation referring to timber extraction and to the rights of local communities. A heated debate ensued in which locals made it clear that they were in favour of working with the two sawmill owners, since they promised at least some sort of income in an otherwise poor region. When the two sawmill owners returned to the meeting, they made use of the internal discord promising work for anyone interested and asked: "Are there people here willing to work with us?" They ignored the current legislation on exploitation permits being given by the regional development corporations to the

respective community councils, who then have to deal directly with the parties interested; but so too did most of the locals, notwithstanding the community council's representative doing his best to explain the situation. As the deadlock in the debate continued, the two sawmill owners suddenly demanded locals to take a quick decision that same day, threatening to go elsewhere in the event that they turned down their offer. According to them, there were enough trees in other rivers as well, at which point I made my intervention, asking why therefore it was to the river Guajuí that they had come, suggesting that this might have something to do with the fact that the river was still one of the more peaceful ones, where almost no guerrilla activities had been recorded to date. The river Saija, to which they had suggested going, was much more affected by a strong guerrilla presence. It was also symptomatic for them to have come from Nariño, where the forests around the rivers Iscuandé and Patía have been so intensely exploited that not much is left to be logged there.

After the sawmill owners had left, threatening never to return, a loud discussion ensued among locals, some insulting the community council's representatives for only talking nonsense (*sólo hablan carreta*) while they were suffering hunger and hardship. It was a predictable conflict, of course, certainly accentuated by the attitude of the two sawmill owners, aggressive, big fellows, their fingers decorated with large gold rings, bellowing their demands at locals into the round. Yet, it was also a necessary conflict, because only there and then, discussing these issues, did it become clear what might be the practical implications of the current legislation. Beyond the discourses of a Management Plan, it was in this meeting where popular power, even if somewhat confused and inchoate, was articulated against external capital interests. Many locals were unhappy with the sawmill owners leaving never to return, as they felt that urgently needed cash opportunities were evaporating in the moist air of their river. Nevertheless, even the more aggressive ones admitted that the sawmill owners' attitude had been disgraceful, that they should not have demanded an immediate decision of locals but taken their time, that further information should have been gathered over possible logging rates in the area, and that the regional development corporation should have been consulted over an exploitation permit.

When I returned one week later to San José, people were still intensely debating this event. The conflict had set off a conscientisation process that might never have taken place in countless workshops given on the scope and the limitations of Law 70. Leaders had been keen on pointing out that they were not generally opposed to the exploitation of

timber in the region, but that it had to be done in ways guaranteeing future exploitation of the resource. In San José de Guare the discourses on sustainability and conservation had found a practical application of popular resistance where, no matter the different attitudes internally, locals used the legislation to claim their rights. It is clear that these processes are internally contested, and that there are and will always be different interests at stake, even within the same community. But it is precisely in these conflicts generated by the penetration of external capital that consciousness is constructed, maybe more so than in areas that have not experienced any significant external capital intervention.

Leadership as important human resource

Crucial in this scenario was the intervention and guidance of local leaders. Without them it seems likely that the plan of installing a sawmill in San José de Guare would probably have gone ahead, even if being strictly illegal. It is therefore important to examine issues of leadership in the local organising experiences.

RMT emphasises the role played by leaders in social movements. Although the organisational structure of the community council on the Colombian Pacific coast has been prescribed by the legislation, as discussed above, it is important to examine the kind of leadership that has crystallised within these new associative organisational structures. Who are the leaders of the community councils? Where do they come from, and what previous organisational experience do they bring with them into these new political mobilisations? What motivates them to engage as leaders in these processes? These are only some of the questions that I intend to answer in this section.

A general trend can be observed comparing black leadership in the river-based community councils and in the urban-based social movements in Colombia. Whereas most of the urban social movement leaders are young, educated former students or (ex)professionals, most of the leaders in the rivers are older peasants, fishermen and/or miners with longer standing organising experiences in popular or state-driven initiatives. This also means that there are frequently differences in discourse and vision between the younger and the older leaders. Although it would be wrong to talk of a generation gap, simply reducing these differences to age, it is clear that the older peasant leaders often have a more materially based discourse rooted in on-the-ground realities and experiences previous to Law 70, whereas the discourses of the younger urban leaders have predominantly been formed during the more recent mobilisations around Law 70 and its

ethnic-territorial aspects. As don Por, a senior leader with a long-standing tradition of working in peasant associations, explains:

I am 62 years old, and I come from the minga experience, from rice production, from plantain cultivation, from canoe construction, I know all these things. I know how to till, I know a lot of things. But the [regional and national organising] process is not led by people who know these things. It is led by people who were born here [in Tumaco], who only know of the urban. This is a critique that we have made for some time now, that intellectually one can do certain things, but that this position makes other people wonder: 'This one is not a farmer, that one does not know how to row a canoe. So why is [s]he leading the process?' [...] Because people believe a veteran more than the young ones, they believe more in their experience. It is not the same saying things like, 'I am from the Process of Black Communities'. All that is important, but it does not reach people the same way than when it is said by a skilful person with a lived experience. That is to say, it is not the same doing than being. To be is one thing, and to do is another. The lines of action that come from above for the process here, they do not sink in.

(interview with Porfirio Becerra, Tumaco, 16 January 1999; my translation)²⁸¹

These differences in age and in 'lived experience' are reflected in the different discourses of the various leaders, and at times in different conceptions of what should be understood as economic development and as a management plan. As don Por further points out:

Regarding the process of economic development, there are two tendencies. One that we [the older peasant leaders] put forward, that any institution, state, international or other, support environmentally sustainable programmes and projects of agricultural activities. This is one position, which I support. And the [community] council supports this one. There is another tendency of [the younger leaders] supporting the management plans and territorial ordering. But people begin to ask themselves why we should need a management plan, because what we have managed until now, we know already, within the communities we do know that. We know when to hunt, yes, we know that. We know when to hunt rabbit, for example. And we can impose a close season during their gestation period. We know that. We know that this area is suitable for the production of chontaduro [peach palm], we know that through practical experience. We know that we have to look after this land, we know that, this is fundamental. Because people have always done that. It is not necessary to order it, to systemise it. But now people are talking of management plans and territorial ordering. And this is the discourse right now.

(interview with Porfirio Becerra, Tumaco, 16 January 1999; my translation)²⁸²

²⁸¹ "Yo tengo 62 años, y yo soy de allá de la minga, de la producción del arroz, de la siembra del plátano, de la canoa, yo sé hacer todo eso. Yo sé labrar, hacer muchas cosas. Y el proceso no está dirigido por esta gente que sabe. Está dirigido por gente que nació aquí, que sólo sabe de lo urbano. Eso es una crítica que venimos haciendo desde hace mucho rato, que intelectualmente se puede hacer cosas, pero esa posición hace que la otra gente dice: 'Este no es campesino, este no sabe andar en potrillo, en una canoa. Entonces, ¿por qué está dirigiendo?' [...] Porque la gente lo crea más a un veterano que a los jóvenes, les creen más, por la experiencia. No es lo mismo echar la carreta, 'yo soy del proceso de comunidades negras'. Todo eso es importante, pero no cala tanto como si lo habría dicho una persona hábil con una experiencia vivida. Es decir, no es lo mismo hacer que ser. Ser es una cosa y hacer es otra cosa. Las líneas que vienen de arriba para el proceso de acá no calan. Porque la gente no las entendemos."

²⁸² "Incluso frente al proceso del desarrollo económico. Entonces hay dos tendencias. Dos tendencias, una que es la que planteamos nosotros, que cualquier institución, del Estado, internacional, o sea quien sea, apoye programas y proyectos de actividades agrícolas, ambientalmente sostenibles. Esa es una posición, la

Don Por's critique of the Management Plans as not serving local people's interests echoes similar concerns as in the case of the obligation to establish clear boundaries for land rights claims in the context of local fluid boundaries and overlapping territorialities (as discussed above). The Management Plans form integral part of the state's conservationist strategy towards the Pacific coast, and in a way black communities are forced to 'play the game' if they want to achieve legal recognition of their collective territorial aspirations. This necessity has maybe been recognised more by the younger leaders than by the older ones, who are more concerned with practical hands-on support for local communities in the rivers whose life they have shared for decades. I will return to this difference at the end of this chapter, but it is clear that the different experiences of community leaders and their different formations, as students educated in the cities or as long-standing peasant leaders in the rivers, are an important resource in popular mobilisation - and should be of great interest in RMT.

The formation of leaders: personal experience as driving force

Ricardo Castro was 26 years old when he left his native village of El Carmelo on the river Guajuí to work on the sugar plantations in Palmira in the department of Valle del Cauca in 1964, where he also studied commerce and accounting in the evenings. He was actively involved in union activity, and in 1966 he was elected General Secretary of a sugarcane workers' union. Yet, in 1967 don Ricard returned to the Cauca coast to work as a teacher in Coteje on the river Timbiquí, where he also became Secretary of the Committee of Communal Action JAC (Junta de Acción Comunal). The JACs are a nation-wide state-driven initiative, rather than popular organisations, that organise in local committees to watch over everyday community affairs. They have pre-given structures and hierarchies without actively encouraging popular participation, and in many cases they only exist on paper without any real activities in favour of community welfare:

cual apoyo yo. Y el consejo apoya eso. Hay otra tendencia del apoyo a los planes de manejo, de ordenamiento territorial. Es decir, la gente comienza a preguntarse por qué necesitamos un plan de manejo territorial. Porque lo que hemos viniendo manejando, eso ya se sabe, en las comunidades, sí lo sabemos. Sabemos cuando se puede cazar, sí, nosotros sabemos eso. Sabemos cuando se puede cazar el conejo, por ejemplo, sabemos eso. Y nosotros podemos establecer períodos de veda, porque en tal época están en gestación. Eso lo sabemos. Sabemos que esta zona es apta para mantener cultivos de chontaduro, eso lo sabemos, en la práctica. Nosotros sabemos, que esta tierra hay que cuidarla, eso lo sabemos, eso es fundamental. Porque lo ha hecho la gente. La gente lo ha hecho. No hace falta ordenarlo, sistematizarlo. Pero ahora la gente le va a decir, plan de manejo y ordenamiento territorial. Pero eso es el discurso de ahorita.”

In 1967 I came to Timbiquí. I was around thirty years old. They appointed me to the JAC, because the teacher, as the most able person, always occupied the post of Secretary of the JAC. Then I went, as a teacher as well, to Belén, on the river Napi. And there too I was Secretary of the Committee of Communal Action during the time I worked there. There they said the same, that the teacher had to be the Secretary of the JAC.

*(interview with Ricardo Castro, Guapi, 27 April 1999; my translation)*²⁸³

In 1972 don Ricard retired from teaching and dedicated himself to agriculture in his native village of El Carmelo. There he was a member of the Supervising Committee (Junta de Vigilancia) of the Agricultural Co-operative of the Pacific CAP (Cooperativa Agrícola del Pacífico), a rural agricultural programme set up by INCORA (see also Chapter 7):

After I retired from teaching, I dedicated myself to agriculture. I had a loan from INCORA, since we had land in El Carmelo to cultivate coconut. There I became a member of the Agricultural Co-operative of the Pacific. This was a programme of INCORA. So, as a member of the Agricultural Co-operative in El Carmelo, they chose me as delegate to the Assembly in 1972. And in the Assembly they elected me member of the Co-operative's Supervising Committee, which watches over the management and the movements of the Co-operative. And in four consecutive periods, I was member of CAP's Supervising Committee.

*(interview with Ricardo Castro, Guapi, 27 April 1999; my translation)*²⁸⁴

Around the same time don Ricard was elected Secretary of the Municipal Board of Directors of the Peasant Association ANUC (Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos) from 1974 to 1975. He also held the post of treasurer of the Association of Family Fathers (Asociación de Padres de Familia) from 1992 to 1993 and acted as president of the same association from 1994 to 1995. Furthermore, in 1994 he was town councillor of the Conservative Party in Guapi for one year, his only experience in official party politics, which he claims not to have enjoyed very much. Following Law 70, the river organisation ASODERGUA was formed in the river Guajuí in 1994, of which don Ricard has since been treasurer, and on 26th September 1997 he was elected legal representative of the Community Council River Guajuí. Like don Por in Nariño, don Ricard has gained

²⁸³ “En el ‘67 me vine a Timbiquí. Tenía unos treinta años. Allá me nombraron a la JAC, porque allá, el maestro, como la persona más capaz, siempre ocupaba la Secretaria de la JAC. Luego pasé, como maestro también, a Belén, en el Napi. Y allí también fui Secretario de la Junta de Acción Comunal durante el tiempo que allí trabajé. Allá decían lo mismo, porque el maestro debe ser Secretario de la JAC.”

²⁸⁴ “Después cuando me retiré del magisterio, me dediqué a la agricultura. Entonces yo fui prestatario del INCORA. Ya en El Carmelo. Como teníamos tierra allá para sembrar coco. Allí entré como socio de la Cooperativa Agrícola del Pacífico. Era un programa que tenía el INCORA. Entonces, como socio de la Cooperativa Agrícola del Pacífico, en El Carmelo me cogieron como delegado a la Asamblea de 1972. Entonces, en la Asamblea me eligieron miembro de la Junta de Vigilancia de esa Cooperativa. Es decir, la Junta de Vigilancia es la que vigila, es decir, el manejo, el movimiento de la Cooperativa. Entonces yo fui cuatro periodos consecutivos miembro de la Junta de Vigilancia en la CAP.”

political and community leadership experience in a variety of organisations prior to Law 70, which he now draws upon in the organisation of his community council.

Humberto Villa from the river Napi has a similar story to tell. As a young man, he too left his native river to work in the sugarcane plantations of the Valle del Cauca region, where he worked for thirteen years and became a union leader. He fell into trouble for his militant activities defending the workers' rights for a minimum salary, and he eventually left the union and quit his job, disappointed at not having achieved unity amongst the workers:

So I retired and went home, where I have lands to work. I came here, and here I am. And I got here, well, with the vision to keep working with the people. First I lived here in the municipal centre [Guapi]. And from there I went upstream, where I had a fiasco. With what the liquidation gave me, I set up a little business. But the boat sank, and I lost everything it carried. And here, what else was left for me to do? So I went upstream. There are the mines, with something I have to live with my family. That was in '89. [...] So I returned to my lands, and I dedicated myself to organising a co-operative group. We formed a mining co-operative. Of that co-operative I was vice-president.

*(interview with Humberto Villa, Guapi, 24 April 1999; my translation)*²⁸⁵

Both Ricardo Castro and Humberto Villa have lived the cycle of circular migration (explained in Chapter 6), leaving the Pacific coast as young men in search of salaried work, which in the 1960s and 1970s was frequently found on the sugarcane plantations of the Valle del Cauca region. There they acquired organisational experience engaging in union work which would then be a valuable resource for their current leadership positions on returning to their respective rivers on the Cauca coast. Although they may judge some of their previous organising experiences as failures, the *spirit* of wanting to organise has remained and still nurtures their hopes today:

Well, some of us have lived this experience of belonging, of wanting to be involved in the organising processes. This thing, well, it fascinates me. Yes, I like it, I like it. Maybe there were failures in the organising question, maybe not all of us managed to assimilate these things, the knowledges. But at least for some of us the experience remains for the future.

*(interview with Ricardo Castro, Guapi, 27 April 1999; my translation)*²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵ “Y me retiré, y, me voy pa’ mi casa, allá tengo tierra donde trabajar. Me vine y estoy acá. Y llega uno pues acá con esa visión de seguir trabajando con la gente. Primero estuve viviendo aquí en la cabecera municipal. Y de allí me fui pa’riba. Yo tuve un fracaso también. Con lo que me dio la liquidación me puse un negocito allí. Y en un barco fracasé, se me perdió todo lo que traía. Y aquí, ¿qué me quedó hacer? Me voy pa’riba. Allí hay mina, con algo tengo que vivir con la familia. Me fui. Allá estoy. Eso fue en el ‘89. [...] Entonces yo regresé a mi tierra, y me dediqué pues a organizarme en un grupo cooperativo. Hicimos una cooperativa minera. De esa cooperativa yo era vicepresidente.”

²⁸⁶ “Pues algunas personas, pues que hemos traído esta experiencia, esta cuestión de pertenecer, de querer vivir metidos en la cuestión organizativa, sí. A mí, pues, me fascina de hacer esa vaina. Sí, me gusta, me gusta. De pronto el fracaso en cuanto a cuestión organizativa, de pronto no todos alcanzamos a asimilar las cosas, los conocimientos. Pero al menos a unos les va quedando algo de experiencia para el futuro.”

These personal feelings play an important part in an individual's decision to engage in collective action or in leading organising processes. Beyond Olson's (1965) 'rational choice theory' of collective action, discussed in Chapter 2, it is an individual's desires, aspirations and feelings that are important factors encouraging or discouraging someone's motivation to work collectively. Don Ricard's exclamation 'Yes, I like it, I like it' clearly supports this point. So does Mirna Herrera, a teacher and leader of the women's movement Apoyo a la Mujer (Support for Women) in Santa Bárbara de Timbiquí and also member of the National Advisory Committee of Black Communities, when she affirms that 'these are things we are born with', referring to her personal reasons for getting involved in the organising processes:

Well, I think that the organising process, as well as other decisions that one takes, is like an ambition, a compromise, a vocation that one has as a person. I mean that since I was young I formed part of the group of the missionary childhood. Well, we had to sing in mass, read the holy words, that is to say something special that has to do with popular religiosity of the community here. Later I formed part of a dance group that through song, music and dance made claims of ethnic values. And that allows one to share and each day long for other more important things, not for someone personally but in community. And also the work as a teacher, you see. And then all of that was linked up, entwined with the process of black communities that has been taking place since the Constitution, with Transitory Article 55 that somehow concerned the organised black communities, and the intervention began so that this later would turn into Law 70. [...] I think that the first grass-roots organisation that was formed here in the municipal centre [Santa Bárbara de Timbiquí] was the association Apoyo a la Mujer. We are five years old. The other thing that we can identify is that there are other forms of organisation that are very natural, as in the case of the minga. This is an organisation that has very specific, very concrete objectives and that contributes to the construction of an organising process as well. [...] But my organisation of origin, my grass-roots organisation, is Apoyo a la Mujer. When the organisation was formed, I was its president up to last year, up to 7 August [1998]. And now I am an advisor. But I tell you that I have been participating in all grass-roots organisations that have existed in Timbiquí. I mean the interest was that people sort of really began to participate in their things through the organisations. But I say that it is not because I see that someone is involved in something that this calls my attention to begin to participate myself, no, but really these are things that someone is born with.

(interview with Mirna Herrera, Timbiquí, 17 February 1999; my translation)²⁸⁷

²⁸⁷ "A ver, yo pienso de que tanto el proceso organizativo como otras decisiones o determinaciones que uno toma es como una ambición, un compromiso, una vocación que uno tiene como persona. O sea desde muy pequeña, yo que hacía parte del grupo de infancia misionera, o sea nos tocaba cantar la misa, nos tocaba leer la palabra, es decir algo especial que tiene que ver con la religiosidad popular de aquí de la comunidad. Más adelante hice parte de un grupo de danza, ya que eso a través del canto, de la música y del baile se hacía como una reivindicación de valores étnicos. Entonces eso le permite a uno como compartir y cada día querer anhelar otras cosas más importantes, no como para uno como persona sino en comunidad. Además el trabajo de maestro, ya. Y ahora sí, eso se encadenó, se entrelazó con el proceso de comunidades negras que se estaba dando a partir de la Constitución, o sea cuando quedó el Artículo Transitorio 55 que de alguna manera tocaba a las comunidades negras organizadas, y empezó la intervención para que eso más adelante se convirtiera en

For many of today's leaders, there is a 'logic of continuity' to their participation in the current organising processes. Mirna Herrera suggests that the ethnic component, today consciously articulated in the process of black communities, was already central to her dance group as expressed in music, songs and dances. Present ethnic-territorial organisations draw on these cultural pre-conditions and experiences to articulate them in their political dimension. In this sense, rural black identities are mobilised as a resource in the cultural politics of black communities on Colombia's Pacific coast, which, although encouraged and to a certain degree structurally shaped by externally induced legislation, draws on the 'authentic' experiences of rural black populations. Insights of both RMT and IOP are reflected in such an interpretation without the need for a grand synthesising theory of social movements.

The ANUC, an ambiguous organisational experience

Whereas many previous organisational experiences have helped in the formation of leaders for the current organising processes, other experiences are more ambiguous and may even have negative implications for today's processes. It is important to examine critically these previous experiences, since they also shed a light on some of the problems that the current organising processes face. For many peasants on the Pacific coast the National Peasant Association ANUC (Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos) was a first important organising experience. It was created by governmental decree in 1967 under the Conservative president Carlos Lleras Restrepo, and aimed at encouraging the peasants to become users of state services at a time of the country's most significant agrarian struggles over land (Zamosc 1986). ANUC was, together with an agrarian reform, part of a governmental strategy that aimed at stopping the migratory tide of peasants to the cities and at defending a free peasant economy protecting small land holders. By 1970 some one

la Ley 70. [...] Yo pienso que la primera organización de base que se conformó aquí en la cabecera municipal fue la asociación 'Apoyo a la Mujer'. Tenemos 5 años. Lo otro que podemos identificar es que hay otras formas de organización, que son como muy naturales como en el caso de la minga. Es una organización que tiene como unos objetivos bien puntuales, bien concretos, y aporta a la construcción de un proceso organizativo también. [...] Pero mi organización de origen, de base, es Apoyo a la Mujer. Cuando se conformó la organización yo era la presidente hasta el año pasado, hasta el 7 de agosto. Nos conformamos el 8 de agosto del '94. O sea de esa fecha tenía la presidencia hasta el 7 de agosto del año pasado. Y ahoritica soy asesora. Pero le digo que yo había venido participando en todas las organizaciones de base que existían en Timbiquí. O sea el interés era como que realmente la gente a través de las organizaciones empezara a participar en sus cosas. Pero yo digo que no es tanto que porque yo vea que alguien está metido en algo, a mí me llame como la atención para empezar a participar, no, sino realmente son cosas que como nacen con uno."

million farmers were affiliated to ANUC (Zamosc 1989). Yet the more radical voices in ANUC demanded a clear government commitment to wide-ranging agrarian reform, which was rejected by the following Conservative president Misael Pastrana (1970-1974)²⁸⁸ who practised a double politics of divisiveness and coercion towards ANUC and its leaders, the more radical ones becoming subject to harsh government repression. As a result ANUC declined from 1974 onwards and was divided into two sections, a radical wing and a loyalist section (Zamosc 1989:118). The mid-1970s were also a time when the government gave relatively free hand to landowners to organise armed gangs in defence of their lands and to prevent invasions by landless peasants. In 1981 a reunification congress of ANUC took place, sponsored by the Ministry of Agriculture. It was seen as a conservative reaction of conciliation, and resulted in the co-option of radical leaders and the extension of an eventual hegemony over a defeated peasantry (Zamosc 1986, 1989).

ANUC had a considerable impact on black peasants in the Pacific lowlands, especially in Nariño. As Porfirio Becerra describes his involvement with ANUC and other organisations:

I belong to the village of San Bernardo, which is 46 kilometres from here, Tumaco. And from 1965 onwards, I began community work in the Communal Action Committees. There I lived a very healthy and serious experience, for example, through the mingas, through cambio de mano, work committees, and this experience was very rich, and is what has given me the opportunity to continue with an organising process. In 1965 the communities of my village elected me director of the Communal Action Committee. Subsequently, when the National Peasant Association [ANUC] was formed, I was also leader of the National Peasant Organisation at the municipal level, and president, treasurer first, and then president of the Municipal Peasant Association. And from there I climbed up until I was a national peasant leader, where I learnt a lot of things. Later we formed the Regional Association of Peasants of the Pacific, that covered the area from Nariño to Valle. There I learnt to manage organisations. Yet, the Peasant Association began to decline from 1976 to today, it began to decline with the division. [...] With Pastrana, the old Pastrana, the father of that one today. So the organising rhythm of the National Peasant Association slowed down on all levels.

*(interview with Porfirio Becerra, Tumaco, 16 January 1999; my translation)*²⁸⁹

²⁸⁸ Misael Pastrana was the father of today's president Andrés Pastrana, an indication of Colombia's party political system being run as a 'family business'.

²⁸⁹ "Yo pertenezco a una vereda de nombre San Bernardo, que queda a 46 km de aquí de Tumaco. Y, a partir de 1965 inicié mis labores comunitarias a través de las Juntas de Acción Comunal. En ese viví una experiencia muy sana y muy seria, por ejemplo, a través de las mingas, a través del cambio de mano, juntas de trabajo, y esa experiencia fue muy rica, y es la que me ha dado la oportunidad de continuar con un proceso organizativo. Posteriormente, ya le digo, en 1965, las comunidades de mi pueblo, pues, me eligieron directivo de la Junta de Acción Comunal. Y, de allí, cuando ya resultó la Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos, entonces, también fui dirigente de la Organización Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos a nivel municipal, y presidente de la, tesorero primero, y después presidente de la Asociación Municipal de Usuarios Campesinos. Y de allí fui escalando hasta ser directivo nacional de Usuarios Campesinos, donde pude aprender muchas cosas. Posteriormente constituimos la Asociación Regional de Usuarios Campesinos del

The ANUC experience is a classic example of state co-option of the principal movement leaders, something that was initiated when a radical position took hold within ANUC that the government considered dangerous. The lesson learnt from ANUC can help to foresee similar difficulties arising for the social movement of black communities and to reflect on ways of countering the potential pitfalls of co-option.

Regional experiences with ANUC have differed considerably, and ANUC had only a weak presence on the Cauca coast:

The ANUC didn't really work in Cauca. Not as in other parts of the country such as in Nariño, for example. There it was strong. Especially in the municipality of Guapi, it didn't work. The leaders are not even from the rural areas any more but people from the town centres. The last board of directors was already formed by people from the town centre, and rural folks didn't even bother any more. People paid little attention to ANUC. I don't know why, but the rural folks didn't bother much about ANUC. Let's put it like this, ANUC was of no use to the peasants of the Cauca coast. Look, when we went to the Assembly in Tumaco in '76, where I was elected a member of the Pacific region, it so happens that there the leaders of ANUC attacked the Agricultural Co-operative of the Pacific. So I proposed to them the following: 'Look, the Agricultural Co-operative is a peasants' enterprise. Instead of attacking the Co-operative, what the ANUC has to do is to take part in saving the Co-operative, and not to go against it, because it belongs to the peasants. So the ANUC is to look at the situation of the peasants' needs. So instead of rejecting it we have to save the Co-operative. Even rescue it.' [...] ANUC's internal division I do not remember very well. Here there was only one ANUC, the one that was managed by José Reyes Prado, who was the representative for the Pacific coast. After that I retired. Here in the Cauca it almost doesn't have any presence any longer.

(interview with Ricardo Castro, Guapi, 27 April 1999; my translation)²⁹⁰

Pacífico, que abarcaba desde Nariño hasta el Valle. Allí aprendí a manejar organizaciones. Y desde los '76 hacia acá comenzó a decaer, con la división. [...] Con Pastrana, el viejo Pastrana, el papá de este de ahora. Entonces, se fue bajando el ritmo organizativo de la Organización Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos en todos sus niveles.”

²⁹⁰ “La ANUC en el Cauca realmente no funcionó. No como, por ejemplo, en otras partes del país, como en Nariño. Allí fue fuerte. Sobre todo, como le dije, en el municipio de Guapi, no funcionó. Existió así, pero un trabajo fuerte no, inclusive ya dejaron de ser los directivos de las partes rurales, y ya los tomaron fue la gente del casco urbano. La última junta directiva ya fue gente del casco urbano, o sea ya la gente de la parte rural no le paraba bola a eso. La gente le dio poca importancia a la ANUC. No sé por qué, pero, la gente del campo no le ha parado mucha bola a la ANUC. Digamos así, la ANUC, al campesino de la costa caucana no le sirvió. Inclusive, mire, cuando venimos a la Asamblea en Tumaco, en el '76, donde yo salí en este como miembro de la región del Pacífico, sucede que allá los dirigentes de la ANUC atacaban a la Cooperativa Agrícola del Pacífico. Bueno, entonces yo les propuse allí lo siguiente: 'Mire, la Cooperativa Agrícola del Pacífico es una empresa de campesinos. En vez de atacar a la cooperativa, lo que tiene que hacer la ANUC es tomar parte para salvar la cooperativa, y no irse contra ella, porque eso es de los campesinos. Entonces la ANUC es para que mire la situación de la necesidad del campesino. Entonces en vez de rechazarla tenemos que salvar a la cooperativa. Inclusive rescatarla. [...] Lo de la división interna en la ANUC no recuerdo muy bien. Aquí había una sola ANUC, era la que manejaba José Reyes Prado, que era el presidente, el representante nacional por la costa del Pacífico. Yo ya después me retiré. Aquí en el Cauca ya casi no tiene presencia ahora la ANUC.”

These previous organisational experiences have also had a considerable impact on today's forms of mobilisation. On the one hand, they have generated personal learning experiences for many of the leaders, a positive result if we judge this effect for future mobilisations. On the other hand, ANUC's low profile in the Cauca coast, the peasants' general lack of interest in this association, and CAP's failure have all led to the considerable disillusionment of many peasants in the region. This disillusion translates into a non-involvement in current mobilisations of the community councils, a considerable problem, as don Ricard explains:

The work of the social movement, especially here in our region, hasn't really happened yet. Because the majority of the people doesn't know anything about all that. So what we said about ANUC has an impact. What is happening then? Because these are things that have not been fruitful. And people have that in mind as well. Until now many people have played this thing of the community councils down. People don't believe in the importance of the councils. Because people compare the community councils with ANUC, or with the Co-operative [CAP], which was something totally different from the community councils. But people already have this experience.

*(interview with Ricardo Castro, Guapi, 27 April 1999; my translation)*²⁹¹

There are both positive and negative effects arising from the previous organisational experiences, then, and in many cases the ghosts of ANUC and CAP hang over the rivers in the Pacific. In many places such as in Nariño, for example, there have even been confrontations between the still existing ANUC and the emerging ethnic-territorial organisations and community councils, especially over the notion of 'collective land rights' which ANUC rejects (Cortés 1999:134):

The Peasants Association [ANUC], for example, has also contributed to the difficulties that have come up for people to accept collective land titling. Because the peasant sector [ANUC] is in favour of individual titling, in favour of a credit system.

*(interview with Porfirio Becerra, Tumaco, 16 January 1999; my translation)*²⁹²

Furthermore, ANUC's struggle over land in the Pacific has never appealed to ethnic elements or proposed a rational use of the forests, both central elements of today's struggle

²⁹¹ "El trabajo del movimiento social, más que todo aquí en nuestra zona, todavía no se ha dado. Porque la mayoría de la gente desconoce todo eso. Entonces tiene incidencia eso que decíamos lo de la ANUC. ¿Qué es que pasa? Porque son cosas que no han dado ningún fruto. Entonces la gente también tiene en mente eso. Hasta ahorita la gente, mucha gente le resta importancia a este asunto de los consejos comunitarios. La gente no cree en la importancia que tienen los consejos. Porque la gente está comparando esto de los consejos comunitarios con esta, con la ANUC, o con la Cooperativa, que era una cosa muy diferente a los consejos comunitarios. Pero la gente ya tiene esa experiencia."

²⁹² "La Asociación de Usuarios, por ejemplo, también ha influido mucho en las dificultades que se han presentado para que la gente acepte la titulación colectiva. Porque el sector campesino es partidario de la titulación individual, es partidario del crédito."

by black communities.²⁹³ This difference has not been made sufficiently clear to and/or understood by black peasants, and there are real problems of conscientisation in the local organising processes.

‘They don’t want to understand’: the discontinuities of conscientisation

It is clear that there has been no massive mobilisation of black peasants, fishermen and miners in the rivers of the Pacific coast. The organising processes on the local and regional levels have been relatively slow, with only few people getting actively involved so far. Whilst taking into account that this temporal assessment of ‘slowness’ on my behalf is subjective and culturally specific to my own perceptions of time, ones not necessarily in line with the ‘local temporal epistemologies’, most black leaders share this interpretation. Surprised at first by many people’s general lack of knowledge over issues of community councils, collective land rights and the legislation concerning the Pacific coast, I decided to conduct an in-depth survey in one population to try to understand such an absence of conscientisation.

On 18th February 1999, I crossed the river Timbiquí at Santa Bárbara accompanied by a local teacher to walk along the opposite shore known as Calle del Pueblo, aiming to ask locals in each house that we passed about their ideas on community councils and collective land rights as issued by Law 70. Without offering a statistical analysis, I can conclude that the overwhelming majority of people were not even aware of such a thing called ‘community council’. Some locals had heard about Law 70, but without being able to give me an idea of what it meant or stood for. One woman, an active member of the local Communal Action Committee, had no idea about the community councils to be established in the region. She was actually quite suspicious of my ‘mission’, as she referred to what I was doing in the village, an easily understood concern taking into account the involvement of foreigners, especially Russians, in the gold-mining activities in the river Timbiquí. In a few houses we had spontaneous meetings with neighbours turning up, curious about my presence. I talked with them about the legislation, the possibilities that it gave to black communities, the need to organise themselves and the intentions to create a community council in their area with their active participation. Everyone seemed interested

²⁹³ In the 1970s, for example, the regional branch of ANUC with its seat in Buenaventura managed to receive a concession for the exploitation of a forest area between the river Dagua and Anchicayá in the department of Valle del Cauca. Within this concession, however, they followed the same extractive logic of the large timber extraction companies (Villa 1998:440-441).

in these issues, but appeared not to have heard of these topics before. Great was my surprise, therefore, to find out one week later that in fact a community council *had* already been formed in the area, including the village whose people I had talked to. So how should I understand their behaviour? Did they really not know about these things? Did they know but not want to talk with me about them? Had they maybe never been informed about the community council being formed? Did they maybe not understand when community leaders came to explain to them issues regarding the legislation? Or maybe no-one ever came to talk to them about these issues?

I cannot speculate on what exactly happened here, but this situation was frequently encountered in other populations as well, not only by me. Talking to various community leaders about this matter shed some light on this seemingly quixotic situation, and suggests that all of the questions above could be answered with a ‘yes’. As the legal representative of the Community Council Guapi Abajo explains:

There are people who really don't know what a community council is. These are people who don't even know how to elect someone to represent them. This annoys me a lot, it annoys me. People have to know what their position is. In our council, we have met with the council's committees. Where we met, we invited the local people and began to talk with them, what is a community council, what a community council is for, what we are going to do, what we can do with the community council.

(interview with Walberto Banguera, Guapi, 5 February 1999; my translation)²⁹⁴

So why then did so many people still claim never to have come across the concept of ‘community council’? Some people would deny knowing about these issues simply because they are not interested, or because they perceive collective land rights as going against their own interests. When I asked Banguera why the people who I visited at Playa de Obregones, a coastal settlement at the mouth of the river Guapi, had all denied knowing about the Community Council Guapi Abajo, he responded:

That they don't want to understand is something else. Since they are Obregones. And according to them they have their lands titled. So they say that they don't want to attend to what is Law 70, because they don't want to get involved collectively with no-one else. That's why they aren't bothered about these things. But I have been there, we have been there with Dionisio from Cococauca, yes. And we have explained to them, we have told them what collective land titles are. We have told them what the community council is for. That they don't want to understand is another thing. Because they don't like to be told

²⁹⁴ “Hay gente que no sabe en realidad qué es lo que es un consejo comunitario. Es una gente que no sabe ni elegir un compañero siquiera para que los represente. A mí me da bastante malo eso, me da malo. La gente tiene que saber qué es su posición. En el consejo de nosotros, nosotros nos hemos reunido con las juntas del consejo. En las partes donde nos reunimos, invitamos la gente de allí de la localidad y empezamos a hablar con la gente, qué es un consejo comunitario, para qué sirve un consejo comunitario, qué íbamos a hacer, qué podemos hacer con el consejo comunitario.”

what to do. [...] These people, the Obregones, only do what they are told by the people who live here in Guapi. And unless those from here, the Obregones here, or those who live in Bogotá, tell them, 'get involved in the community council', they won't do it. Because this is their territory. That's the problem.

(interview with Walberto Banguera, Guapi, 5 February 1999; my translation)²⁹⁵

There are evidently discontinuities in the processes of conscientisation in that some communities within the same council do accept the notion of collective land rights while others resist. In a way there exists a resistance within resistance, to use the 'entanglements' notion discussed in Chapter 4, in that not all community council members are willing to form part of it, let alone participate in meetings or collective action. This example also throws into relief my previous discussion of the multiplicity of subject positions (Chapter 2) and entangled power relations (Chapter 4), in that the Obregones peasants and fishermen are, on the one hand, affected by the legislation and have active rights to participate in the community council, but, on the other, are restricted as tenant farmers on the lands that they work and depend upon the orders given by their relatives in Bogotá (who are the owners of those lands).

The situation is further complicated by the widespread myth that collective land rights would make already existing private land titles invalid, and thereby abolish private land ownership. This is not the case, of course, as the legislation only talks about the *tierras baldías*, the state-owned lands in the Pacific that have no other owner, as being subject to collective land titling. Yet, it is common to find opposition arising to these collective processes due to a lack of clarity over these issues. As a coffee shop owner told me in Santa Bárbara de Timbiquí on one occasion: "I don't want them to tell me what to do on my lands". There is a direct link between the rejection of support for collective land ownership and a lack of conscientisation. The latter task has been particularly difficult for organisations and leaders who have to fight with the 'ghost' of ANUC:

²⁹⁵ "Que no *quieren* entender es otra cosa. Porque ellos, como son, ellos son Obregones. Y según ellos tienen sus tierras tituladas. Entonces ellos dicen que no quieren atender lo que es la Ley 70 porque no quieren meterse en colectivo con ninguna otra clase de persona. Entonces ellos por eso no paran bola a las cosas. Pero que yo he estado allí, hemos estado con Dionisio de Cococauca, sí. Y les hemos dado a entender, les hemos dicho qué es la titulación colectiva. Les hemos dicho para qué el consejo comunitario. Que ellos no quieren entender es otra cosa. No lo han querido entender. Porque a ellos no les gusta tener, aquí, por ejemplo, en esta zona, no les gusta tener, o sea, que les digan las cosas. [...] Esta gente, los Obregones, no son sino mandados por la gente que vive aquí en Guapi. Entonces mientras que los de aquí, los Obregones de aquí, o los que viven en Bogotá, no les digan, 'méntanse en el consejo comunitario', no lo hacen. Porque eso es un territorio de ellos. Es el problema así."

It was very difficult for us, this job of conscientisation, of motivation, of making our people aware, in order to get them to truly assume collective land titling. Because people began to think, well, if we are not able to do what we want. This was difficult.

(interview with Porfirio Becerra, Tumaco, 16 January 1999; my translation)²⁹⁶

Most black leaders agree that the conscientisation process is still one of the principal challenges for the organising processes:

I think that the most important and significant thing that we have achieved is the organising process, because, although not everyone wants to assume responsibilities, we have reached people who are working for the good of the community. I think that this is the most important thing. Raising awareness with people.

(interview with Mirna Herrera, Timbiquí, 17 February 1999; my translation)²⁹⁷

The lack of knowledge and the confusion that exist over the extent of collective land titling among riverside dwellers have also been exploited by corrupt party politics, which, as explained in Chapter 6, often work against the creation of community councils:

I think that people have their hands tied by traditional politics. They are dominated by the politician here, because it is the politician who arrives and buys their votes, and the one who buys the votes is the one who takes people's consciousness.

(interview with Walberto Banguera, Guapi, 5 February 1999; my translation)²⁹⁸

In Guapi it has become common political practice to buy votes openly during election campaigns, and the candidates for mayor do not waste much time any more on making empty promises (Agudelo 1998). Facing these clientelist practices of 'buying consciousness', one equally needs resources and finances to counter them:

The work of conscientisation with people, it seems very hard to me. For this work one needs resources. Without resources there is nothing one can do. In order to raise people's awareness one has to arrange, for example, a meeting one day. During this meeting one has to provide at least lunch. In order to collect the participants [from their houses] one needs petrol, and if one hasn't got a single peso [...].

(interview with Walberto Banguera, Guapi, 5 February 1999; my translation)²⁹⁹

²⁹⁶ "Nos quedó muy difícil hacer ese trabajo de concientización, de motivación, de sensibilización con nuestra gente para llevarlos a que asumieran una titulación realmente colectiva. Ya la gente comienza a pensar, bueno, y qué pasa aquí, si no vamos a poder hacer cada uno lo que quiera de lo suyo. Fue difícil."

²⁹⁷ "Yo pienso que lo más importante y trascendental que hemos alcanzado es el proceso organizativo, ya, porque realmente aunque toda la gente no quiera asumir con responsabilidad lo que toca, hemos llegado a personas que están trabajando por el bien de la comunidad. Yo pienso que eso es lo más importante. Conscientizar la gente."

²⁹⁸ "Yo lo que veo es que esa gente está maniatada por la política tradicional. Esa gente la domina el político aquí, porque el político es que llega a comprarles votos, y el que compra voto es que toma la conciencia de la gente."

²⁹⁹ "El trabajo de concientización con la gente, a mí me parece que es bastante duro. Para ese trabajito se necesita tener recursos. Sin recursos no se puede hacer nada. Porque los recursos para conscientizar la gente hay que hacer, por ejemplo, una reunión un día. En esa reunión hay que darle por lo menos un almuerzo a la gente. Para recoger la gente se necesita gasolina, y donde uno no tiene ni un peso"

The availability of financial resources is of great importance to social movements, as RMT emphasises, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine in detail the multiple impacts that resources have on the social movement of black communities in Colombia. Nevertheless, I want to focus in the following sections on some of the more 'curious' issues that the (non-)availability of resources generate, and I will hint at the difference that space makes in this respect, with particular regard to the implications of mobilising in an aquatic environment.

'No cash, no food, no transport, no meeting': the thorny issue of resources

It is frequently expected that the organisers of meetings in the Pacific will offer lunch to participants during the event, and it is not uncommon to hear locals commenting on meetings that they have attended in terms of the food quality served there, rather than reflecting on the topic treated. A particularly telling instance occurred during a workshop organised by the research project Proyecto Naidí that examines possibilities for the sustainable exploitation of the *naidí* palm in Nariño, case study material already discussed in Chapter 7. I accompanied the project's co-ordinators on 8th May 1999 to a meeting arranged with representatives of the Community Council Unicosta in the village of Madrid. We set off at 8am from the place where we had spent the previous night, and picked up various community leaders on the way to the meeting place, where we arrived around 10am. When I thought the meeting was about to start, the participants demanded breakfast. This was not an isolated case either. At a later meeting on 20th June 1999, during a workshop on Environmental Education Plans in the village of Vuelta Larga of the same community council, one local leader remarked that "if there wasn't lunch, we wouldn't be here anymore".

As funny as the situation might look like retrospectively, this 'no food - no meeting' attitude can be exasperating for anyone trying to organise a meeting. It is a particularly serious issue if, as in the case of collective mobilisation, the leaders do not necessarily have many resources at their disposal. It is therefore not a trivial issue at all, but can develop into a serious obstacle for successful mobilisation. Yet, things have not always been like that, and don Ricard remembers that locals even used to provide food themselves to those who came to give workshops and talks on the new legal situation and collective land titling:

I'll tell you one thing. In those days with Act 55 [in 1991], people mobilised. You got to a meeting and it was packed, in any community. But since then, I don't know what happened with the people. Even in the river Guajuí, we mobilised, so what did we do? Often we arrived, and 'ah, ok, this community lives from fishing, they can bring fish then, this community cultivates papa china [a tuber typical of the region], let them bring papa china then', and that's how we arranged meals. Or we went to a community, and when we got there, they said, 'well, we will prepare you a guava juice'. And they made the juice. 'Well', said others, 'since these people already made the juice, we will prepare some food'. And that's how it went. So that whenever you got to a community, they prepared lunch. After that, when Law 70 came, people were not ready any more to contribute, and all of this was lost.

*(interview with Ricardo Castro, Guapi, 27 April 1999; my translation)*³⁰⁰

One of the results of these customs 'being lost', is that any kind of meeting becomes very expensive; even more so if we add the characteristics of the aquatic space, in that transport on the rivers either takes a long time (by dugout canoe) or is costly due to transport in speed boats and high petrol prices in the area:

It so happens that it is not the same calling a meeting in the North of Cauca, or in any other place of the interior of the country, because the transport conditions are simply different, completely different from here. The very geographical location, the transport among other things. So we haven't had the space of co-ordination, the space of dialogue, which is important I think.

*(interview with Mirna Herrera, Timbiquí, 17 February 1999; my translation)*³⁰¹

Yet, these 'spaces of dialogue' are important in raising the levels of awareness among the local populations in the rivers, as has been the case with ACADESAN's journey along the river San Juan (see Chapter 7) or with the General Assemblies which were real spaces of dialogue and conscientisation (discussed earlier in this chapter). Yet, while the latter were funded by the central government as prescribed in Decree 1745, local communities increasingly depend on themselves to finance meetings. In particular, the high transport costs are often held responsible by community leaders for exploding budgets for meetings

³⁰⁰ "Le digo una cosa. Esto cuando fue la vaina del Acta 55, la gente se movilizó. Usted llegó a una reunión y no cabía, cualquier comunidad. Pero de allí para acá, no sé qué pasó con la gente. Inclusive en el río Guajuí, nosotros nos movilizábamos, ¿qué hacíamos? En muchas ocasiones llegábamos, 'ah, bueno, esta comunidad produce pescado, que traiga pescado, esta comunidad produce papa china, que traiga papa china', y así hacíamos comidas. O nos íbamos a cualquier comunidad, apenas llegábamos y decían, 'no, les vamos a preparar una, un jugo de guayaba a la gente'. Daban el jugo. Entonces, ¿qué pasó? 'No', decía la otra gente, 'si esa gente ya hizo el jugo, entonces nosotros preparamos una comida'. Y así fue. Entonces ya la gente, ya a cualquier comunidad que usted llegaba le preparaban un almuerzo. Después cuando ya la cuestión de la Ley 70 fue que ya la gente ya no estaba dispuesta, se perdió todo eso".

³⁰¹ "Sucede que no es lo mismo convocar una reunión en el Norte del Cauca, o sea en cualquier lugar del interior del país, porque sencillamente las comodidades del transporte son diferentes, totalmente diferentes de acá. La misma ubicación geográfica, el transporte entre otras cosas. Entonces no hemos tenido espacio de concertación, espacio de diálogo, que yo pienso es importante."

or in the implementation of small-scale community-orientated development initiatives funded by NGOs. Using the region's typical rhyming style (see Chapter 5) in their informative bulletin, the Fundación Chiyangua, a women's organisation on the Cauca coast, explained the following to the NGOs who funded their project 'Strengthening of women groups dedicated to the cultivation and planting of food and medicinal plants on *azoteas*':

*Sabe lo que nos pasó
doctor, con este proyecto?
eran veinte azoteas
y cuatro grupos en esto*

Do you know what happened
doctor, with this project?
Twenty *azoteas* it was going to be
and four groups were in it

*Pero por sus objetivos
más el evento primero
resultaron azoteas
para tirarle al hilero*

But because of its objectives
and the first event
many more *azoteas* sprang up
all over the place

*Doce en la zona urbana
treinta y dos en la rural,
cómo la plata de transporte,
no se iba a disparar?*

Twelve in the urban area
thirty-two in the rural,
how was the money for transport
not going to explode?

*Porque a Naciones Unidas
hoy les queremos contar
no es lo mismo andar en carro
que en lancha subir y bajar.*

And the United Nations
we want to tell them today
it is not the same to drive by car
than up- and downstream by boat.

(Fundación Chiyangua 1998:20, my translation)

Although some might say that this argument is used to justify high expenses in the budgets of projects, and this alone of course cannot explain difficulties in the organising processes in the rivers, it is clear that the particularities of the aquatic space have a considerable impact on the forms of organisation such as transport and time schedules. The availability of financial resources as connected to specific transport, timetabling and other needs occasioned by the riverine environment has become of prime importance to understand the organising processes in the rivers today, because in its crudest sense RMT applied on the Cauca coast does indeed mean 'no cash, no transport, no food, no meeting' - hence no organising, no resistance, no change.

Productive projects: a practical strategy of conscientisation or ‘welfare mission’?

Such an expectant attitude towards receiving a material contribution from the outside has been cultivated and encouraged within other contexts for some time. As Agudelo (1998, 1999) shows, political clientelism and favouritism is common political practice in the Colombian Pacific, and people in the rivers have come to expect material contributions instead of promises by local politicians. There is a danger that the current organising processes are simply reproducing this attitude, which ultimately does not encourage active participation if it is not remunerated. Yet, as don Ricard has reminded us, this has not always been the case. During the period immediately following the new Constitution and the diffusion of the impact of the new legislation, people contributed themselves to the successful arrangement of meetings in the rivers. This raises the question as to why this positive approach at a local level has now been largely lost, and equally one has to think about what could be done to encourage people to shed those attitudes that prove detrimental to local organising processes. As don Ricard analyses the problem:

There is another phenomenon, serious, and this is that our people always expect something. So what happens? With [Transitory] Article 55, when people realised that our territory was in danger, they got involved. After that, people went from workshop to workshop, and they said, ‘no, but how much longer these workshops, and nothing coming out of them’. So my proposal is the following: training parallel to productive projects. This is the only way that people take part.

(interview with Ricardo Castro, Guapi, 27 April 1999; my translation)³⁰²

Indeed, many workshops regarding Law 70 have been given by different organisations, NGOs and institutions, and many people are simply getting tired of attending meetings that do not show any concrete effects in the end. It certainly seems that the initial enthusiasm in attending and taking part in meetings has faded away. This also suggests that the initial message did not come across, and that the conscientisation process has been flawed, partly due to the methodologies used in many workshops. Often, for example, workshop organisers arrived from the interior of the country with plenty of hand-outs and other kinds of publications, yet many people in the rivers are illiterate and not able to read or to assimilate information given in this manner. The legal jargon of Law 70 is certainly another obstacle in the way of successfully assimilating the information provided if it is not

³⁰² “Hay otro fenómeno, grave, y es que nuestra gente, tenemos esa, como esperando algo, uno siempre está esperando algo. Entonces, ¿qué pasa? Yo entiendo que el labor del Acta 55 fue, cuando se dieron cuenta que nos iban a sacar el territorio, entonces la gente se metía, ‘¿y cómo así?’, todo el mundo se metía. Ya después, la gente ya, taller y taller, y la gente dice, ‘no, ¿pero hasta cuándo taller?, y no se ve nada’. Entonces yo, mi propuesta es la siguiente: capacitación paralelo a los proyectos. Es la única forma de que la gente llegue.”

presented in a more ‘people-friendly’ way. There is little point in distributing copies of Law 70 in villages if the discourse of this legislation is not at the same time interpreted so that it can be understood by everyone in their own terms; and one must not forget that the central concerns of peasants and fishermen in the rivers are around material problems and concrete productive projects. The ethnic-territorial discourses do not bring them food, nor do they improve living conditions in the short term: hence don Ricard’s suggestion of combining the training of locals and leaders in legal issues surrounding Law 70 with specific productive projects that might benefit local communities more materially. The last two years have seen, for example, a considerable rise of local rice production against all predictions and suggestions by the planning authorities, who have always been keen on discouraging this practice for its supposed lack of economic profitability. Peasants in almost all of the rivers on the Cauca coast are thus demanding a rice hulling mill in a strategic location where they can take their rice and hull it for their own consumption, selling the surplus on the regional markets. In various discussions community leaders have supported the view that the community councils would gain in reputation with locals and thus receive greater support if they could provide such a concrete productive project for them:

What I understand, is that people work with the community council, when it has something to give to them. For example, in Chamoncito there are 25 families working in agriculture. And of these 25 families, when I began with the stuff of the community council, only ten people came along. Now there are 25, and people still arrive asking me for these plots of land, so that they too may belong to them [associated with an agricultural project initiated by the community council]. People now come along who have never been to a meeting before. [...] As long as we only go to people’s houses, talking to them and ranting on, they are not going to believe us, what a community council is for. What they have told me is that in Palmira [town in the interior of the country] there are these hulling mills. We don’t need an enormous mill, what people want is a traditional mill. A traditional mill is one where one dries one’s rice at home, brings it along already dry, hulls it there, and then leaves it in the market, this is what people need. I am sure that only when we present actions to the community, people will get involved in the community councils. As long as we tell people lies, every day tiring them with this stuff on what a community council is, that it is this and that, that’s not worth it. We should not bore people any longer, because they feel they are wasting their time; what we need are actions, real actions. And I am sure that these people who get involved, these people bring others along as well.

*(interview with Walberto Banguera, Guapi, 5 February 1999; my translation)*³⁰³

³⁰³ “Yo lo que sí entiendo es que la gente le camina al consejo comunitario cuando los consejos comunitarios tienen algo que darles a ellos. Por ejemplo, en Chamoncito hay 25 familias trabajando agricultura. Y de las 25 familias que hay allá, cuando yo empecé con esa vaina del consejo comunitario, no fueron sino acaso 10 personas. Ahora hay 25, y la gente viene a preguntar si hay parcelas para ellos también pertenecer a las parcelas. Ahora viene gente que nunca ha venido a una reunión. [...] Mientras que nosotros apenas vamos a las casas de la gente, hablarles y botarles corriente, no nos van a creer para qué sirve un consejo comunitario.

These concrete problems of mobilisation demonstrate the thin line between pragmatics and ideology. Faced with economic hardship, locals often want to see concrete and tangible results from the current organising processes in terms of specific productive projects, rather than continual ideological conscientisation over issues of ethnicity and land rights that do not seem to provide immediate effects. This attitude is criticised by leaders of PCN for reducing the goals of conscientisation and construction of a black identity to interventions of a welfare kind or ‘welfare mission’. At the same time, though, these leaders recognise that they currently have no economic strategy regarding the situation in the rivers, and that one of the immediate and urgent aims has to be developing ways of thinking the concept territory-region in economic terms.³⁰⁴ Practical experience has shown that theoretical reflections do not enter well an empty stomach. An integrated economic strategy that accompanies conscientisation is hence particularly important if, as social movement leaders declare, the community councils are to become true ‘community spaces’ that go beyond the mere negotiations of collective territories to foster an “organising body of ample participation, where people discuss and progress is made in the orientation of the social movement with the grass-roots” (OCN 1996:248).

The community councils, as one cornerstone of the social movement of black communities, illustrate the complex processes of black ethno-territorial mobilisation in the Colombian Pacific. While they are conceived as an organisational space of community representation and as territorial authority of the collective lands of black communities, they are also criss-crossed by the interests and interventions of various external actors such as capital, the state and the local political elites. Rather than approaching the already formed community councils as transparent organisations of community representation, they should be studied as the product of the interplay of these various power relations and as the outcome of all of these entanglements. This fact also accounts for the differential experience in the formation of community councils on the Pacific coast, where some

Lo que a mí sí me han dicho es que en Palmira los hay, los molinos esos. Porque nosotros no vamos a necesitar un molino gigantesco. Hombre, si lo que la gente quiere es un molino tradicional. Un molino tradicional es uno que uno seca su arroz en su casa, lo trae ya seco, va y lo pela, lo deja en su mercado, eso es lo que la gente necesita. Yo lo tengo seguro, mientras cuando aquí nosotros tengamos cómo proponerle a la comunidad hechos, la gente sólo se mete a los consejos comunitarios. Mientras que sigamos mintiendo a la gente, todos los días viniendo a cansar a las casas con cantaleta qué es lo del consejo comunitario, que este y este, no hay ninguna beneficiencia. No cansando más, con la gente viendo a perder su tiempo, sino hechos, hechos reales. Y yo estoy seguro que esa gente que se mete a eso, esa gente sigue trayendo los demás.”

³⁰⁴ Interview with Libia Grueso and Carlos Rosero, Bogotá, 10 November 1998.

councils simply work better than others “in the orientation of the social movement with the grass-roots”, as activists hope. A place perspective on these developments, as advocated in this thesis, critically charts these differences in the formation processes, for example, by showing how and explaining why and with what consequences in certain cases the ‘ideal’ form of a community council along a river basin, as shaped by the logic of the river, has not been adhered to. Such a critical approach is ultimately necessary (also for social movement leaders) to counter clientelist practices and co-optive measures and to support the construction of a differential space by rural black communities that guarantees them territorial control and ultimately improves their living conditions.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusions³⁰⁵

As far as the community councils are concerned, we are still in the early stages. This is not a process which happens over night. This will be in the long run. But we have to carry on working towards it.

Florentino Carvajal (Community Council Unicosta; my translation)³⁰⁶

This study started from the premises that issues of place and space are only rarely taken seriously in social movement research. I felt a profound discontent with the ways in which social movements are analysed in established social movement theory, where it is only in fleeting moments that some reference is made to the location out of which a given movement arises. Land rights movements, for example, are analysed in terms of their struggles over the appropriation of territories, often linked to demands over agrarian reform and over changes of other political structures in a given country. Indigenous and other ethnic minority movements are usually presented as struggles over cultural rights to difference and how they can be accommodated within the political structures of a (post)modern nation-state. Women's rights and feminist movements are mostly examined in terms of their contestations of dominant patriarchal structures in society. And so forth. The usual narrative strategy in these accounts is perhaps to give a short description of the country, maybe of the region, where these respective movements emerge, and then to concentrate 'seriously' on the more 'important' political structures in which these movements are inscribed and which they contest. I am, of course, not arguing that we should cease examining these structures; after all, changing them is what most social movements do aspire to. Yet, in most of these accounts it is not a priority to examine in more detail *where* exactly these movements come from, why they have emerged out of specific places (and not others), and how the particularities of a place (and of associated place-bound cultures and identities) impact on the specific forms and articulations of social

³⁰⁵ Since I am trying to tie together the conclusions of my thesis in this section, I will not use any sub-headings. The reader is encouraged to follow the 'flow' of the arguments presented, constantly going forwards and backwards and shifting between theoretical reflections and empirical material, in similar ways as travelling along the rivers on the Colombian Pacific coast, moving upstream and downstream in time to the tidal action.

³⁰⁶ "En cuanto a los consejos comunitarios, estamos apenas en pañales. Es un proceso que no se da de la noche a la mañana. Eso es pa'largo. Pero tenemos que seguir gestionando." Interview held in Madrid, Nariño, 8th May 1999.

movement agency. In Colombia, for example, there exist 81 different indigenous indian groups, some of which live in the Amazon forests, others in the tropical Pacific lowlands, and yet others in the Andean mountain ranges (of which there are three). Their cultures are as diverse as their habitats, and nothing could be more wrong than to think of Colombia's indigenous populations as a homogenous ethnic group. To live and to organise in the Andean highlands is hence very different from mobilising in the rivers of the Pacific coast or in the Amazon basin. Whereas these claims seem obvious, the differences of place are rarely attended to and almost never critically analysed in established social movement theory. This was the chief preoccupation that had worried me for some time.

At the same time, I realised that spatial theories and a critical place perspective could provide useful tools for thinking about these differences and for approaching a social movement not primarily through its organisational structures, strategies and political discourses (although all of these should be considered as well), but starting from the situated physical, social and cultural contexts of everyday life as framing the subjectivities of ordinary people which subsequently may be articulated as social movement agency. Within human geography these subjectivities of place have been captured and analysed in the notion of 'sense of place', a key concept in phenomenological approaches to humanistic geography that emerged in the 1970s (Buttimer 1976, Tuan 1976, Ley & Samuels 1978) and was subsequently developed in political-economic geography (Agnew 1994, Massey 1994). To 'unearth' the sense of place on the Colombian Pacific coast and to analyse its impact on social movement agency, I have advocated an 'ethnographic cultural geography' in social movement research that also attempts to find answers to the question of how local epistemologies, natures and histories can be mobilised and used by social movements in the articulations of their strategies and aims. Following this emphasis on the 'pre-geographies' of social movement activity, I have organised the 'flow' of the empirical materials in this thesis starting with an exploration of what I term the 'aquatic sense of place' amongst black communities on Colombia's Pacific coast as conveyed in the oral tradition (Chapter 5), and then tracing the region's location and locale as the physical contexts for social interactions in general and for social movement agency in particular which are constituted by and bound up within the 'aquatic space' of the Pacific lowlands (Chapter 6). The local ordering principle of the spatialised social relationships that have evolved along the river basins is conceptualised as the 'logic of the river', which is still of pertinence to local communities today, in spite of the increasing penetration of agents and

interests of modernity in this region. Having approached the ‘place’ that is the Colombian Pacific coast in this way with an integral place perspective that highlights both the subjective and the more objective aspects, as well as the interactions between them, I then show how the aquatic space has functioned as the underlying spatial ordering logic in local contexts of political mobilisation, and how this logic is being reflected in the constitution of community councils along the river basins of the Pacific (Chapters 7 and 8). The logic of the river and the aquatic space must therefore be understood as resources - materially in terms of the physical embodiment of the rivers in space, but also socially, symbolically and emotionally in terms of people’s ‘fluvial identities’ - out of which the political organising processes of black communities emerge. Rather than being transparent and homogenous in their development, however, these processes are often mediated by external actors such as the state and capital who have their own interests in the region and in the people. This argument was illustrated with the case of the Community Council Unicosta and the interests of *naidi* exploiting capital and the government institution INCORA (Chapter 7). The community councils are thus shown to be both important ‘spaces of dialogue’ for the social movement internally and critical ‘spaces of negotiation’ and conflict with external actors.

The focus of this thesis on the ‘pre-histories’ and the ‘pre-geographies’ of social movement agency must be considered as a significant new input to social movement theorising and research, as it takes seriously the specific geographies of social movements and their embeddedness in the material, cultural, symbolic and emotional specifics of the places and spaces out of which they emerge. In other words, social movement theory is ‘grounded’ in such a geographical focus that attends to the temporally and spatially specific constitutive contingencies of social movement activity. I have arrived at such a ‘grounding’ through sustained theoretical reflections and the construction of a genealogy of spatial theorising (Chapter 3), which enables us to view social movements through a spatial lens that both emphasises a movement’s local particularity (the place, culture and subjectivities) and its more wide-ranging political message that can be interpreted in a globally orientated framework. These considerations significantly alter the ways in which we approach social movements, and they cannot be ‘brushed aside’ in such vague terms as ‘cultural framings’ (McAdam *et al.* 1996). An analysis of the spatiality of social movements should also avoid the trap of applying spatial metaphors uncritically, as so

often happens in the social sciences today. Instead, our understanding of spatiality has to be problematised:

[Spatiality] is the sphere of the meeting up (or not) of multiple trajectories, the sphere where they co-exist, affect each other, maybe come into conflict. [...] And precisely because it is the product of relations, relations which are active practices, material and embedded, practices which have to be carried out, space is always in a process of becoming. It is always being made. It is always, therefore, also in a sense unfinished. There are always connections yet to be made, juxtapositions yet to flower into interaction (or not), potential links which may never be established. 'Space', then, can never be that completed simultaneity in which all interconnections have been established, in which everywhere is already (and at that moment unchangingly) linked to everywhere else. (Massey 1999:283-284)

Space, as the arena of all of these interactions and multiple trajectories, is therefore of fundamental concern for the understanding of social movements who, precisely and unavoidably in space, interact and come into conflict with other trajectories and with dominant power structures of exploitation and domination. And if 'space is always in a process of becoming', then the actions of social movements, their contestations of the meanings of space and of dominant representations of space, become in themselves constitutive of space. In other words, social movement practice and space are mutually constitutive and cannot be regarded as separate one from another. That is why 'space matters' in social movement research and why it makes a difference to the ways in which we understand these movements, but also to the ways in which we approach space and form an understanding of representations of space.³⁰⁷

Spatialising resistance, then, means to examine these interactions, these multiple trajectories between social movement activity and space; it means to problematise and question dominant representations of space and to understand social movement practice as embedded in material space, as a contestation of dominant power structures in a search for a counter-space, a differential space, where representational space is meaningfully enacted. The utility of Lefebvre's reflections on the production of space, as discussed in Chapter 3, are evident here, and it is not surprising that Anglo-American geographers have increasingly turned to Lefebvre's insights for socio-spatial theorisations.³⁰⁸ Lefebvre's

³⁰⁷ Although fieldwork data was collected which highlights the specific geographies, or more analytically the spatialities, of the social movement of black communities *per se*, for example its articulations at different scales ranging from the local to the national and global, these geographies were not the central theme of this thesis. They do nevertheless provide a rich base material for future research and publications.

³⁰⁸ This relatively recent 'trend' among Anglo-American geographers, who have 'discovered' Lefebvre some twenty years after his *Production of Space* was originally published in France, has much to do with this delay in translation. It is interesting that in France, where Lefebvre wrote and was active in the 1970s, reference is

terminology may at times be confusing to some, but their empirical application on the Colombian Pacific coast provides an excellent case study for a ‘grounding’ of Lefebvre’s spatial triad; one might almost be tempted to say, for seeing Lefebvrian socio-spatial thought ‘in action’.

Dominant representations of space have historically produced the Pacific coast as a rich natural resource base; it was gold that attracted the Spanish conquistadors to the region in colonial times. Subsequently the region became the focus for a number of boom-and-bust cycles, based on the exploitation of the ‘ivory nut’ *tagua* (prior to World War Two), wild rubber (mid-19th century through World War Two), timber (since World War Two through to today), and more recently, the *naidí* palm hearts, African palm oil and shrimp farming. The extractive function of the Pacific coast was still the predominant focus in the regional development plan PLADEICOP (DNP 1983). Dominant representations of space then became slightly ‘tilted’ with Plan Pacífico (DNP 1992) which incorporated more sustainable strategies of development, before the conservationist function of the region was placed on the top of the agenda with Proyecto Biopacífico (GEF-PNUD 1993, Proyecto Biopacífico 1998). I have explained this gradual shift in dominant representations of space with the concept of the ‘discursive fix’, a strategy employed by global capitalism to confront an ecological crisis that has resulted in the large-scale deterioration of nature and that threatens to destroy this production condition (Chapter 3). Following Harvey’s (1982) notion of the ‘spatial fix’ as capitalism’s capacity to respond to the crises of overaccumulation of capital through geographical expansion, I argue that with the ecological crisis, also occurring as a result of capitalism’s tendency towards overaccumulation, new relations to nature have to be constructed that guarantee the survival of nature as a production condition. These changes are necessarily effected at the global level, and they are reflected in the changing ways in which we increasingly refer to nature as ‘environment’, thus creating a ‘naturalised’ concern for nature which (ideally) functions as a discursive pre-condition for less destructive human-nature relations. The role of discourse in these new socio-ecological processes is pivotal, as it creates both a global *consciousness* about nature’s bad ‘state of affairs’, and a global *conscience* about our responsibility to stop or at least to change these destructive production relations. How far the discursive fix is really going to ‘fix’ this problem remains to be seen. Ironically, the

rarely made to his socio-spatial theories these days; this maybe also being a reflection of how the respective academic traditions are affected by and (re)produce their own ‘intellectual fashions’.

rain forests are still disappearing at ever greater rates, oil tankers are still leaking or breaking up on the open sea, and consumer society still produces millions of disposable plastic bottles every day, the labels of which are adorned with small octagons that advise us of our responsibility to recycle this valuable resource, but which ultimately leave us wondering about how exactly this should be done and ‘where on earth’ the little bottle in our hands could be taken to.

What the discursive fix *has* set off, however, is an unprecedented explosion of programmes on ‘sustainable development’ in general, as well as ones on ‘biodiversity conservation’ with particular regard to fragile environments. The latter is certainly of much interest to the pharmaceutical industry that constantly develops new products based on the genetic compositions of certain plants. Access to the ‘secrets’ of this still unknown realm of biodiversity, given that, for example, in the Colombian Pacific only 50 per cent of its estimated plant species have been identified to date by scientists, is supposed to be achieved through dominant appropriations of local knowledges of nature. As I have explained extensively in Chapter 3, local communities in fragile ecosystems are frequently empowered territorially, while at the same time they are held responsible as the guardians of these environments to protect them for future exploitation. Or, in other words, dominant representations of space recognise the worth of representational space (local knowledges of nature) in the project of re-thinking and conserving nature as a viable production condition.

There exists a growing body of literature that analyses these changing discourses on nature and environment in both Marxist-materialist and post-structural terms. Harvey (1996) points to the new role of discourse in socio-ecological processes, but does not conceptualise these discursive changes in terms of a ‘discursive fix’. Escobar (1999) too has contributed significantly to this debate over what he terms ‘flexible nature’; in effect, he distinguishes between ‘organic nature’ (connected to local knowledges and cultures), techno-nature (expressed in the pharmaceutical desires to appropriate the technological resource base of nature and its genetic structure), and a capitalist nature (modern forms of production and exploitation). Watts and Peet (1996:268) refer to the liberatory potential of ‘environmental imaginaries’ as “prime sites of contestation between normative visions”. It was not possible for me to elaborate further on the discursive fix at this point, given the limited space in this thesis; it is my intention, though, to develop these ideas in future publications.

Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that these global discursive trends are reflected in the Colombian Pacific region, where dominant representations of space have started to recognise local knowledges of nature and to incorporate representational space into new development strategies towards the region. This first became evident with Plan Pacífico that attempted to ‘integrate’, even if only half-heartedly, local communities’ desires and perceptions into the development planning process. Proyecto Biopacífico then created further mechanisms by which the representational spaces of the indian and the black communities were accommodated as a strategy of development; the latter being clearly visible in the ninth volume of the programme’s final report entitled ‘The Colombian Pacific from an Afro-Colombian and an indigenous perspective’ (Proyecto Biopacífico 1998). Black communities in effect had to struggle to open up a space for their participation in this development programme, where they could highlight their ways of knowing and living in the Pacific and give a voice to their perspectives on what kind of development they wanted for this region. They therefore made sure that their representational space, their life forms organised around the aquatic space in the Pacific, was indeed being considered in the development programme, and they thereby also began, if only marginally and slowly, to change dominant representations of space. As repeatedly pointed out in this thesis, these changes are not homogenous nor transparent but shot through with a whole range of different and at times conflictual interests. It remains to be seen if and how far black communities can turn the transformative potential of their environmental imaginaries and their representational space into a quest for a counter-space, and perhaps ultimately into a true differential space that allows them to construct an alternative life project.

Lefebvre’s socio-spatial theories provide an illuminating frame for these kinds of inquiries, and they also enable me to make the ‘concrete abstractions’ that are necessary to place the social movement of black communities into the wider conceptual context of spatialising resistance. Yet, if I wanted to chart the concrete significance of place in the emergence and subsequent development of this movement, then I had to approach the region of the Colombian Pacific coast via an integral place perspective that would bring together both the objective and the subjective aspects of place and the manner in which both interact. Agnew’s (1987) take on the concept of place has provided a useful framework for my inquiries into this direction and a certain ordering logic in the ‘flow’ of the thesis as outlined above. In particular, the notion of locale as the physical context for

social interaction amongst rural black communities offers useful ways in thinking about the aquatic space in the Colombian Pacific and about how the latter is embedded in both the material geographies of a riverine environment and the imaginary geographies of the rural river dwellers of the Pacific lowlands.

On the one hand, this study has attempted to ground social movement theories in space and place, and on the other, it has applied insights from both IOP and RMT to the specific case of the social movement of black communities on Colombia's Pacific coast. This has not been done through some grand theoretical resolution or synthesis of RMT and IOP, but through demonstrating in an empirically rich fashion that questions posed by both bodies of theorising always co-mingle in the details of how and why specific places and peoples give rise to social movement activity. My attention to resources such as leadership and previous organisational experiences, but also financial funds for the organisation of meetings, clearly reflect some of the concerns of RMT for the availability of resources in social movements (Chapter 8). Moreover, the particular political opportunity structures found in Colombia with the official state discourse on multiculturalism and pluriethnicity contained in the new Constitution of 1991, and more specifically expressed in Law 70 of 1993 which considers collective land titles for rural black communities in the Colombian Pacific, clearly functioned as a stepping board for black mobilisation in the country (Chapter 8). Likewise, insights from IOP found their way into this thesis via my discussion of the local aquatic epistemologies and the fluvial identities of rural black populations in the Pacific (Chapter 5), and how these specific identity references are embedded quite materially in the river banks of the Pacific. Insights of both RMT and IOP *together* therefore enable us to think about the rivers and the river-based identities themselves as important resources for the organising processes. Whereas it is true that the political opportunity structure of Law 70 is mainly responsible for the boom in black organisations from 1993 onwards, and that the rivers and the surrounding lands were the material resources around which social movement agency has been built, it is the riverine-*identity* contexts that have shaped the specific organisational forms of the community councils along river basins. These place-specific cultural identitarian contexts also account for the ways in which social movement agency affirms itself in different ways in different places in the same region. Drawing freely on IOP and RMT in my analysis, shamelessly borrowing from both, I stress the relevance of *both* theoretical strands to social movement theory without privileging one over the other, and without constraining my own thinking in

a tight conceptual framework. It is the very focus on the spatiality - “the sphere of the meeting up (or not) of multiple trajectories” (Massey 1999:283) - that allows me to do so.

The concept of the aquatic space as developed in this thesis is arguably not restricted to the region of the Colombian Pacific coast, but can be a useful tool in approaching other regions and places as well, not just with regard to social movement theory. We could certainly develop this concept in the context of Amazon cultures, for example, or indeed in relation to other water-based cultures around the globe. The utility of the concept of the aquatic space provides us with an integrated perspective on place and cultures enabling us to draw out the connections that exist between them. Many place-based identities in similar aquatic settings of river or sea environments could be conceptualised in this way. In the particular case of social movement research, these conceptualisations can be used by activists who wish to stress the cultural (and place) specificity of certain peoples and their demands for a respect of their difference. The theoretical reflections outlined here thereby acquire very practical meanings and application in the struggles of many movements that organise around the defence of their cultural rights and their constructions of place. More so, the analytical spatial sensitivity towards the organising processes can also provide movement leaders with a tool to examine their own movement more critically, maybe to detect damaging internal fragmentations and to address the resulting conflicts.

In the case of the black communities in Colombia, my focus on the spatial constitution of community councils along river basins has allowed me to detect formations that differ from this ‘idealised’ form, as the case of the Community Council Unicosta has shown (Chapter 7). While this council is generally accepted to be ‘well-functioning’, its spatial constitution comprising the lands of *naidí* exploitation reflect particular capitalist interests in the region rather than the local logic of the river. As I have argued, locals were effectively co-opted by external capital in the formation processes of Unicosta. Of course, before the organising processes associated with Law 70, this area was already exploited by capital, and local social relations had already begun to be changed under the pressures of capital penetration. Yet the critical question to ask is: what is going to happen in this part of the Pacific, once the *naidí* production boom busts, as has been typical of most extractive economies in the region? Has the intervention of external capital changed social relations and the logic of the river so much that they cannot be meaningfully re-enacted to construct an alternative life project as aspired to by movement activists? These are precisely the kind

of questions that the community councils are meant to address, and so too should social movement leaders. While the latter have criticised the co-option of locals in the Community Council Unicosta, they have not responded with an alternative formation proposal, or clearly outlined the future consequences for the current constitution on *naidí* lands. Thinking about these questions in terms of the aquatic space can help to address these issues and develop an alternative strategy to capital's co-options of locals, although I do acknowledge the tremendous difficulties that movement activists encounter in this respect, as they are faced with both the powerful interests of capital, which do not shy back from using violent means to 'have it their way', and also local people's desires for an income that they hope will improve their living conditions.

I have also repeatedly pointed to the significance of Colombia's escalating internal armed conflict, now further extending into areas of the Pacific coast, and have reflected upon its impact on local organising processes. Cynics would say that many of my above considerations are in effect mere theoretical and methodological speculations or 'mind games', given the painful 'reality' of everyday massacres and forceful displacements of peasants in the region. Most recently in June 2001, 4,369 peasants and fishermen are reported to have fled from their communities on the banks of the river Baudó in the Chocó department, after having received repeated threats by paramilitaries.³⁰⁹ Nevertheless, as one activist pointed out, "we cannot just run away", at least not always and not everyone does, and we have to keep thinking about the local organising processes and the formation of community councils as real attempts at a territorial appropriation by black communities, even if the current bleak scenario may lead us to desperation and hopelessness at times. It is therefore also the academic's responsibility to use his/her position and denounce these atrocities and human rights violations committed by the various armed actors in Colombia, and to keep insisting - in front of the Colombian government, NGOs and the international community - that the processes of territorial appropriation, initiated with Law 70 of 1993, must be respected by everyone, must be continued and must receive the full support of the Colombian government.³¹⁰

³⁰⁹ Urgent Action appeal drawn up and distributed over the internet by the General Community Council of the River Baudó and its tributaries ACABA, 8th June 2001.

³¹⁰ This was also the gist of a communique signed by over 80 academics who have worked with black communities in Colombia and which was sent to the Colombian President Andrés Pastrana on 15 May 2001 and widely distributed since.

My own involvement with the social movement of black communities in Colombia, particularly with the various groups and community councils in Guapi and the surrounding rivers, has ranged from my active participation in meetings and discussions, to proposals for leading workshops on social cartography, to accompanying several women on a 'vaccination trip' distributing preventive medicine against stomach parasites to children, to giving a talk at a youth forum in San Antonio de Guajuí, to dancing and singing during the *arrullos* of the patron saint festivities, to accompanying locals in the numerous death wakes. At no point did I feel a 'distanced academic'. Ideologically, I think it important that these processes of territorial appropriation by black communities and the issuing of collective land rights take firm hold and are advanced. These are important steps towards a greater self-determination of black people in the Colombian Pacific, no matter how entangled these processes are with other power structures. But more than the objective appreciation of social mobilisation in Guapi, and paraphrasing don Ricard, the president of the Community Council Guajuí, 'I liked it, I liked it'. I thoroughly enjoyed being in Guapi, sharing all of the above mentioned activities with locals, while acquiring an understanding of the place and its people. I quite simply *feel* strongly about these organising processes of black communities in Colombia, and that is as transparent as I can be in my positionality as a researcher. Why? Well, that would be another thesis, maybe in psychoanalysis.

Appendix 1: Glossary

alabao - ritual yearning chant, interpreted mainly by women during the wake for a deceased adult

angelito - 'little angel'; soul-spirit of a deceased child

anillo rojo - 'red ring'; a beetle pest that attacks the coconut palms on the Pacific coast

arrullo - spiritual sung during patron saint festivities and during wakes for deceased children

azotea - a raised platform garden, usually placed behind or next to the main house

baldíos - terrains of national domain

batea - wide shallow bowl carved out of wood; used in traditional placer gold mining to wash the auriferous sands and gravels; possibly of Carib indian origin

bateadora - girls and women who wash the auriferous sands in placer gold mining

bombo - large double-headed membrane base drum, made from a tree trunk; beaten with a cloth-covered stick

bozal - black slave directly brought to the Americas from Africa

cabecera - head waters

cantadora - female singer

cantina - a social context usually set in a small drinking room

chigualo - wake for a deceased child, usually under seven years of age

chontaduro - peach palm

cimarrón - runaway slave

concha - mussel, shellfish

conchera - woman who gathers mussels in the mangrove swamps

cuadrilla - relatively small and mobile slave gang used in gold mining during colonial era

cununo - hollowed single-head membrane tubular drum; resembling conga drum

curandera - traditional healer

currulao - marimba dance typical of the southern part of the Pacific coast

décima - poem with a given rhyme structure

decimero - man who recites *décimas*

estero - tidal estuary in the mangrove swamp

guandal - backswamp of palm thickets of largely inundated lands found mainly in the southern part of the department of Nariño; a similar ecosystem in the Chocó department is referred to as *palmar*

guapireño - person from Guapi

guarapo - beer made from sugar cane juice

guasá - tubular rattle, made of a piece of carved bamboo stem filled with small black seeds, maize or pebbles; shaken by women in *arrullos* and in the *currulao*

invierno - period of heavy rains

jagua - black concentrate consisting of a mixture of tiny flakes of heavy magnetic iron oxide, ilmenite, and gold dust, which is washed in the *batea* in placer mining to retain the gold

libre - 'free'; self-liberated former black slave; still used as self-denomination of black people on the Pacific coast

maravelí - a visionary vessel on sea with a crew of satanic spirits that calls on those who have made a pact with the devil

marimba - xylophone, central instrument in the *currulao*

mazamorreo - stream placering

minga - co-operative labour group that works for the benefit of the community; a quechua word which originally meant compulsory labour imposed on the common workers by the Inca governors. It retained that meaning in colonial times under Spanish rule, but since independence has been applied to the system of co-operative work groups

molino - sugar cane press

monte - fluid category used to refer to the non-inhabited forest, jungle, and backlands

naidí - (euterpe cuatrecasana); palm tree that grows in clusters

(el) ojo - the 'evil eye'; a 'cultural illness' from which small children frequently suffer and which can result in the child's death; treated by the *curandera* with a variety of magic-religious rituals including the application of specially prepared balsamic oils and prayers

palenque - fortified village of free blacks during slavery times

pie de monte - foothill section

politiquería - term used to refer to political corruption, favouritism and clientelism

potrillo - dugout canoe

puja - spring tide; in the Pacific littoral the weeks of the lunar cycle during which high tides reach their highest level

quiebra - neap tide; the period during which low tides are at their lowest level

quilombo - the Brazilian equivalent of *palenque*, a fortified settlement of runaway slaves

real de minas - mining camp and administrative center founded in the 18th century

riviél - a dangerous spirit, vision on sea

tagua - ivory nut

tapao - a traditional dish consisting of fish and plantain which are boiled together

trapiche - hand-operated sugar mill

troncos - "consanguineal kinship groups whose members trace their descent to a common ancestor" (Friedemann 1985:207)

tsunami - giant sea wave caused by earthquake shocks, the epicenters of which are located along faults in the sea bottom a few miles off-shore

tunda - malign spirit creature inhabiting the forests

velorio - wake for a deceased adult

verano - less rainy period

viche - unrefined sugarcane spirit

Appendix 2: List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACABA - Asociación Campesina del río Baudó (Peasant Association of the river Baudó)

ACADESAN - Asociación Campesina del Río San Juan (Peasant Association of the river San Juan)

ACIA - Asociación Campesina Integral del Río Atrato (Peasant Association of the River Atrato)

ALENPAC - Alimentos Enlatados del Pacífico ('Canned products of the Pacific'; company exploiting the naidí palm hearts in Nariño)

ANCN - Asamblea Nacional de Comunidades Negras (National Conference of Black Communities)

ANUC - Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos (National Peasant Association)

ASODERGUA - Asociación para el Desarrollo del Río Guajuí (grass-roots organisation in the river Guajuí)

ASOPEZ - Asociación de Pescadores (Association of fishermen that aimed at improving living and working conditions for the fishermen of the lower part of the river Guapi)

ASOPRODESA - Asociación Prodesarrollo del río Saija (grass-roots organisation of the river Saija on the Cauca coast)

AT-55 - Artículo Transitorio 55 (Transitory Article 55 of the Constitution of 1991)

AUC - Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (United Self-Defence Groups of Colombia; right-wing paramilitary organisation)

CAP - Cooperativa Agrícola del Pacífico (Agricultural Co-operative of the Pacific; a state programme established by INCORA in the mid-1960s on the Pacific coast mainly to promote the commercialisation of coconut)

CSM - Contemporary Social Movements

DNPAD - Departamento Nacional de Prevención y Atención de Desastres (National Department of the Prevention and Attention of Disasters)

EPL - Ejército Popular de Liberación (People's Liberation Army)

FARC - Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)

GEF - Global Environment Facility

- ICA - Instituto Colombiano Agropecuario (Colombian Agrarian Institute)
- ICAN - Instituto Colombiano de Antropología (Colombian Institute of Anthropology)
- ICANH - Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia (Colombian Institute of Anthropology and History)
- IGAC - Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi (Colombia's National Geographic Institute)
- IIAP - Instituto de Investigaciones Ambientales del Pacífico (Institute of Environmental Research for the Pacific coast)
- INCORA - Instituto Colombiano de Reforma Agraria (Colombian Institute of Agrarian Reform)
- INDERENA - Instituto Nacional de Recursos Naturales Renovables (National Institute of Renewable Natural Resources)
- IOP - Identity-Oriented Perspective
- JAC - Junta de Acción Comunal (Committee of Communal Action)
- MST - Movimento Sem Terra (Movement of Landless Peasants in Brazil)
- OCABA - Organización Campesina del Bajo Atrato (Peasant Association of the lower Atrato river)
- PAR - Participatory Action-Research
- PCN - Proceso de Comunidades Negras (Process of Black Communities)
- PGA - People's Global Action
- PT - Partido Trabalhador (Worker's Party in Brazil)
- RMT - Resource-Mobilisation Theory
- UMATA - Unidad Municipal de Asistencia Técnica Agraria (Municipal Unit of Agrarian Assistance)
- UP - Unión Popular (Communist People's Union party)

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