

# Indigenous Struggles for Land and Culture in Cauca, Colombia

JASMIN HRISTOV

*This article examines the multiple and interrelated struggles of the indigenous population – composed in the main of smallholding peasants – of Cauca in Colombia. The article discusses not only their struggles against economic exploitation, political and cultural oppression, and military violence, therefore, but their role in a revolutionary process that seeks to build a society based on social justice and respect for human rights. Through a peaceful and persistent collective action, they have recovered a large part of their ancestral territories, elevated the level of literacy and conscientization, and revived many aspects of indigenous culture. However, the intensification in militarization and repression that has accompanied neo-liberal economic policies imposed 'from above' has in effect undermined the formal recognition by the Colombian Constitution of their territorial and cultural rights. It is argued here that current mobilization undertaken by indigenous communities is characterized by two interrelated challenges: resistance that is peaceful, plus a failure to transcend locality and to ally with other non-rural anti-systemic movements.*

## INTRODUCTION

The indigenous people of Cauca in Colombia share many of the problems encountered by the rest of the indigenous populations throughout Latin America. However, they are also confronted with an additional difficulty less evident in other Latin American countries: namely, the repressive apparatus of the Colombian state – its armed forces assisted by right-wing paramilitary groups – that has a well-deserved reputation for being among the worst human rights violators in the hemisphere. This level of physical violence directed against rural communities is linked in turn to the current attempt by a Colombian government sympathetic to corporate interests to restructure agriculture along neo-liberal lines, a process that impoverishes peasant livelihoods and aggravates the misery of those already living in poverty.<sup>1</sup> The

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Jasmin Hristov, York University, Toronto, Canada, [jasminhr@yorku.ca](mailto:jasminhr@yorku.ca).

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peaceful and localized struggle against this process, conducted by peasants through the Indigenous Regional Council of Cauca (*Consejo Regional Indígena de Cauca*, or CRIC) formed in 1971, and their attempts to construct a grassroots alternative to this 'from above' imposition of neo-liberal economic policies, is the focus of the analysis which follows.<sup>2</sup>

The concept of a universal system of 'human rights' has received a bad press of late, being seen either as a series of international ordinances so broad and all-embracing as to have little or no meaning in concrete situations, or as a code of protection that – like the duties of masters towards slaves – is more honoured in the breach than in the observation.<sup>3</sup> Although true in substance, such criticism overlooks the extent to which an appeal to a supra-national concept of human rights is today – in the absence of any widely accepted political ideology – one of the few moral injunctions the legitimacy of which is still acknowledged internationally.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, it could be argued, it is perhaps the *only* framework that poor peasants at the rural grassroots can invoke in the hope of making an appeal that will be heard. Hence derives the importance of this concept to indigenous groups generally, and – as is argued here – specifically in violent contexts of 'primitive' accumulation where they are under siege from the rich and powerful (landowners, agribusiness, the military, paramilitary organizations) in capitalist nations where there find themselves.

It is impossible to comprehend the issues faced by the indigenous people of Cauca without examining both the historical background to the movement and the key elements of the larger economic, political and social context in which it takes place. For this reason, the analysis begins by considering the major economic and political processes in Colombia in relation to development and human rights over the last two decades. The next two sections examine the economic, political and social conditions which gave rise to the indigenous movement in Cauca, and the ideology, strategy and achievements of the CRIC, including its responses to the ever-increasing militarization of the region. The final section addresses the complex interrelationship between class struggle, indigenous culture/identity and social change. Also assessed is the role of the CRIC in building an alternative to the neo-liberal model, as well as its limitations in terms of bringing about systemic as distinct from local change in Colombia.

## I

### COLOMBIA: THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

Colombia is well-represented in the indices of rural impoverishment and deprivation. In a country with a population of 40 million, 4.5 million children

under 14 (half of the nation's children) suffer from hunger and 40% of the population live in absolute poverty (unable to satisfy even basic subsistence requirements). The top 3% of the landed elite own over 70% of the arable land, while 57% of the poorest farmers subsist on less than 3% of the land [Giraldo, 1996]. About 70% of all Colombian peasants are illiterate, and 2.5 million have no land to work on [Ferrer, 2002]. The official unemployment rate is 20% [ICHRDD, 2001]; however it should be noted that this figure does not include informal sector workers, such as street vendors and prostitutes, since they are counted as employed for statistical purposes.

Since Alvaro Uribe Velez became President in May 2002, the restructuring of the Colombian economy has accelerated greatly, including an implementation of all of the key components of the neo-liberal agenda – austerity, privatization, deregulation and export-led growth through trade liberalization.<sup>5</sup> The privatization of public enterprises affects negatively many rural and urban Colombians. For instance, bank privatization reduces greatly access by farmers to credit, which – when combined with the lack of price guarantees for agricultural commodities and President Uribe's plan to eliminate the few surviving national agrarian institutions – makes life very difficult indeed for small cultivators [Mondragon, 2002; Ferrer, 2002]. Moreover, privatization cuts back the access of the low-income population to basic services (such as health and education), a process compounded by the deterioration of working conditions and wages that follows de-unionization. Similarly, austerity measures have led to drastic reductions in public sector salaries, employment and social programmes.<sup>6</sup>

As has happened elsewhere in Latin America, trade liberalization – another component of the neo-liberal agenda – creates landless peasants, a consequence of the withdrawal of access to credit and other government support, the setting up of agribusiness enterprises using capital-intensive technology brought in by foreign investors, and the replacement of previously locally produced crops with imported low-priced cash-crops.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, in order to facilitate oil extraction by US corporations, peasant, indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities are being forcibly displaced from oil-rich areas through campaigns of terror and their accompanying massacres. The daily average of people being internally displaced largely in areas of untapped oil and gas reserves has been estimated as being 1,029 [Larsen, 2002].

This consolidation of neo-liberalism in Colombia has in turn been accompanied by increased repression and militarization. The term 'democratatorship' (coined by the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano), referring to the presence of dictatorial features hidden under the veneer of democratic formalities, accurately characterizes the nature of the Colombian state. According to Amnesty International, the persecution of human rights activists

has reached emergency proportions, and takes the form of threats, torture and assassinations [Kingstone, 2003]. The unofficial criminalization of grassroots oppositional organizations and activists is a tactic often used by the state in Colombia as well as in other Latin American countries, the object being to portray human rights campaigners as subversives, criminals or terrorists. Hence the tenor of the response made by President Uribe [Fernandez, 2003] when concerns were expressed to him about the safety of human rights workers in his country: 'Every time a security policy aimed at defeating terrorism appears in Colombia, every time the terrorists start to feel weak, they send their mouthpieces to talk about human rights'.<sup>8</sup>

The proposed new anti-terrorism legislation would give the armed forces even more powers, including the authority to detain suspects without warrants for up to 36 hours, search homes, and wiretap phones and interrogate suspects without the presence of a lawyer [Leech, 2004; *Colombia Week*, 2003]. As part of the 'Democratic Security' policy, a network of a million civilian informants, which could allow for malicious accusations against neighbours or foes, has been set up [Ferrer, 2002]. This has resulted in massacres and waves of mass detentions and abductions of teachers, peasants, union leaders, indigenous leaders, and members of other civil organizations. Since 1990, over 3,000 trade unionists have been killed [ICFTU, 2004]. Furthermore, according to the Association of Family Members of the Detained and Disappeared (ASFADDES), such 'disappearances' have increased dramatically – 3,593 people in a one-year period (2002–2003), compared to 3,413 over a previous seven-year period (1994–2001).<sup>9</sup> Between January 1998 and June 2003, some 11,388 people became the victims of killings, forced disappearances, and torture committed by paramilitary groups, and since Uribe became president, on average 14 people are arrested every hour in the country [ANNCOL, 2004].<sup>10</sup>

The responsibility for the murder of civilians and human rights violations lies primarily with the right-wing paramilitaries and the armed forces of the state, and only to a much lesser extent with guerrilla groups. Paramilitaries in Colombia originally emerged as organizations aimed at protecting large landowners from the guerrillas, and today these armed vigilante groups have joined forces under the umbrella of the Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, or AUC), supported financially and politically by sectors of the cattle raising, landowning and business elite. Although their stated goal is the elimination of the guerrillas, the victims of their strategies of terror in the countryside are mainly peasants and indigenous groups, invariably labelled as being suspected guerrilla sympathizers. In a country where some two million inhabitants are internally displaced, nearly half this is due to the actions and threats of the paramilitaries [ICHRDD, 2001]. They are also behind much of the violence

targeted against organized labour, as well as the selective murder of indigenous/peasant/union leaders, academics and journalists.<sup>11</sup>

Much the same is true of the Colombian Armed Forces, which have also been accused repeatedly of systematic and gross human rights violations. Not only do links exist between individual members of paramilitary groups and units of the armed forces, but the Colombian government conceals its role in – and thus evades responsibility for – crimes by entrusting much of the ‘dirty work’ to armed civilian groups which operate under the clandestine coordination of the army and police. These acts are later attributed to ‘common criminals’, and the real perpetrators remain not only anonymous and thus escape detection, but untraced and unpunished [*Giraldo*, 1996].<sup>12</sup> This has been and remains standard practice throughout Latin America (for example, the ‘dirty war’ waged in Chile and Argentina during the 1970s and the 1980s), where armed right-wing groups have worked hand-in-glove with the military to eliminate left-wing opposition – rural and urban alike – to the State [*National Commission on Disappeared People*, 1986].<sup>13</sup>

There has also been some involvement of the main guerrilla forces – the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, or FARC) and the National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, or ELN) – in the violation of human rights and International Humanitarian Law. The FARC, for example, has evolved from a mainly peasant-armed movement in the 1960s to become a national political military force today, with about 20,000 people under arms, and it exercises control over half of the municipalities in the country.<sup>14</sup> Its political programme is wide-ranging, and includes a reform of state institutions, an expansion of the welfare state, and increasing national control over domestic markets, energy and communications [*Petras and Veltmeyer*, 2001; 2003a]. Although the FARC receive strong support from peasant and rural workers’ communities, they have nevertheless been accused of kidnappings, murdering those who refuse to pay ransom money, and attacks against the nation’s infrastructure, such as oil pipelines [*ICHRDD*, 2001].<sup>15</sup>

## II

### THE LONG MARCH OF INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Since many of the economically most valuable resources in Colombia are found in areas inhabited by indigenous populations, these territories historically have been the object of multiple and continuing incursions. This extended from the initial land colonization by Spanish soldiers and missionaries, to include latterly a variety of commercial enterprises (ranchers, lumber and oil companies, drug traffickers) and the state itself. Whereas at

the time of the Spanish Conquest the indigenous population of Colombia numbered approximately ten million, today it amounts to no more than 800,000. In order to prevent the disappearance of this source of labour-power, the Spanish Crown recognized community property rights to land, held in the form of the *resguardos*. At independence, however, most *resguardos* were expropriated and transformed into large rural estates privately owned by the white elite [McGreevey, 1971; Feder, 1972; Barraclough, 1973: 169ff.].

Over the past half-century some territories lost in this fashion have been successfully recovered, due to a combination of agency on the part of rural communities thus affected and the organizational capacity of indigenous groups. The latter have elaborated development proposals based on grassroots opinion and the self-defined needs of the communities concerned. In 1982 the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (*Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia*, or ONIC) was formed in order to coordinate the struggles of various indigenous groups, not only for the recognition/legalization of these territorial claims, but also for rights such as the administration of indigenous systems of justice, the teaching of native languages in local schools, and the provision of traditional health care. Despite this, the 1999 UN Human Development Report indicates that 80% of the indigenous population still live in conditions of extreme poverty. Indigenous municipalities have the highest rates of poverty and unmet basic human needs, and 74% of the inhabitants receive wages that are below the legal minimum. Life expectancy is 20% lower than the national average, as are other human development (or quality of life) indicators.<sup>16</sup>

### *Landlords and Peasants in Cauca*

The Department of Cauca is located in the southwestern part of Colombia and is surrounded by the departments of Valle del Cauca to the north, Tolima and Huila to the west, Nariño to the south, and the Pacific Ocean to the west.<sup>17</sup> It occupies part of the Cauca River valley flanked on either side by the Western and Central Cordillera, and has one of the largest concentrations of indigenous peoples, including the Paez, Coconucos, Guambianos and Yanacona [ICHRDD, 2001]. The colonization of the territory began in the sixteenth century, when gold and silver mines were established by the Spanish, turning the town of Popayan into the home of the gold-mining aristocracy [Safford and Palacios, 2002]. Right from the outset, therefore, through coercive mechanisms (such as the *encomienda*) the colonizers appropriated the labour-power of the indigenous population, particularly as many Spaniards had amassed large rural properties (*haciendas*) on which to raise crops and livestock.<sup>18</sup> At this juncture, production relations on these estates followed the pattern familiar throughout Latin America: landlords leased a plot of land to smallholding tenants (*peones*) in exchange for

provision by them of a stipulated number of days annually of compulsory labour-service. By the second half of the nineteenth century, as commercial agriculture (coffee, sugar cane, and tobacco) in Cauca grew in importance [Appelbaum, 2003], many *latifundia* evicted tenants with usufruct rights to land, and replaced them with day labourers paid only a cash wage.

In response to the rapid decrease in the indigenous population at the end of the sixteenth century, the Spanish Crown awarded indigenous communities titles to land known as the *resguardo*, between 200 and 20,000 hectares in size. Each *resguardo* was to be governed by a *cabildo* – a council the members of which had been elected and were recognized by the community [Pearce, 1990].<sup>19</sup> A process leading to the eventual elimination of the *resguardo* began in the 1700s and accelerated after Independence (1810), when *resguardos* came under attack both from landowners and from the Colombian state, which perceived indigenous community possession of land as incompatible with capitalist development, and hence as an obstacle to the realization of a transition into a modern market economy. Consequently, the 1780 Bourbon Reform introduced the idea of dissolving the *resguardo* by partitioning community property among its individual members.<sup>20</sup> Indigenous cultivators were able to retain their communally held lands until the mid-nineteenth century, when state legislation assigned to each province the task of regulating the partitioning of its own *resguardos*.<sup>21</sup> Eventually all *resguardos* were subject to partition, and private ownership over these lands could be obtained through inheritance claims or purchase. Individuals, both of whose parents were of indigenous descent, were entitled to 10–16 hectares of land, while those who were only partly of indigenous origin received 5–8 hectares.<sup>22</sup> Although theoretically all adults had equal rights to *resguardo* lands, in reality access to land depended on gender and other factors, and this was the case even prior to the beginning of the partitioning process. The apportioning of titles was subject to manipulation and served to differentiate indigenous communities internally in terms of economic status. There were cases when indigenous *cabildo* officers or leaders benefited from the division of their communal lands through establishing mutually beneficial alliances with neighbours in a position of power. Nevertheless, most of the gains were made not by indigenous inhabitants but by outsiders who were able to amass large holdings or multiple individual plots that totalled hundreds of hectares.

The role of immigration in the distribution of agricultural land and the break-up of the *resguardos* is significant. Since Cauca lacked the necessary infrastructure to attract large-scale foreign migration in the 1800s, local politicians and regional elites encouraged white immigration from Antioquia in an attempt to ‘improve’ the racial composition of Cauca, which was predominantly indigenous. This pattern of settlement took place regardless of the fact that there was already a shortage of fertile land in Cauca, causing an

out-migration to the Valle region [Reinhardt, 1988].<sup>23</sup> The 1873 Law, which permitted the buying and selling of *resguardo* lands, facilitated greatly the permanent settlement of Antioqueños, who engaged in agriculture as well as mining partnerships. As a result of this settlement by local whites and Antioqueño migrants, the biggest indigenous communities of the northern districts – including La Montaña, Quinchia, and Supia-Cañamomo – lost over a third of their lands [Appelbaum, 2003]. The Paez *resguardos* in the Tierradentro region of Cauca, however, proved an exception, since according to Ortiz [1973] they remained more or less unaffected by the legislation and the encroachment of white-owned *haciendas* until the early 1960s. On these *resguardos*, individual and collective forms of ownership co-existed, and each peasant family in the community had a right to a house plot, land on which to cultivate crops, as well as a share in common pasture. As Ortiz [1973] shows, the peasantry on these *resguardos* was economically heterogeneous, and differentiated in terms of access to and control over resources.<sup>24</sup> The *cabildo* responsible for maintaining a balance between communally and individually held property had a right to interfere in the transfer of land. Although it was illegal to sell parts of the *resguardo* to outsiders, nevertheless this often occurred by means of ascribing the outsider, even if they were white, the status of a *comunero* (member of the community). Often indigenous *comuneros* urged the *cabildo* to take action and redistribute land, but this almost never happened.<sup>25</sup>

By the 1970s, most indigenous cultivators in Cauca were involved in subsistence or small-scale agriculture combined with employment on *haciendas* and plantations. Most whites, by contrast, were either land-owners/employers or intermediaries between indigenous smallholders and markets [Ortiz, 1973]. In all cases, the accentuating impoverishment of these rural communities was the result of the separation of indigenous peasants from their land.<sup>26</sup> Even those who had managed to retain small plots of land (*minifundio*) also faced poverty; since the latter did not produce enough to meet the needs of a family, peasants were compelled to take on an external job regardless of how low the wage was.<sup>27</sup> The high cost of living, the increase in the prices of farming inputs, the lack of technical support, the competition from large-scale commercial farms, the dependence on middlemen/intermediaries, and low agricultural commodity prices all contributed to the economic difficulties faced by inhabitants of rural communities.<sup>28</sup>

Today the Department of Cauca has a population of 1,600,000 of which 300,000 are indigenous. They occupy about 20% of the land, while the rest remains concentrated in the hands of few – 4.5% of the population own 40% of the land. Within the last 30 years 80% of the territories on which indigenous communities currently reside have been recovered. Most of the recovered land, however, has a low agricultural potential. At present, three

types of land ownership can be distinguished: large agribusinesses, small-scale farms, family size farms of up to 3.5 hectares, and collective farms – the latter two being the dominant form of indigenous agriculture [WB, 2004]. The typical crops produced by agro-industries are sugarcane, soya, sorghum, rice, corn, and beans. Cattle ranching is also present on large landholdings. The produce of small-scale farmers includes coffee, cocoa, plantain, fruit-trees, beans, corn and cassava. These farms have a low level of technology and productivity. Family farms produce mostly food for self-subsistence and occasional marketing, such as plantain, manioc and beans. On these farms there can also be found chickens, turkeys, pigs and ducks. The proletarianization of peasants has been especially accelerated since the mid-1990s as a consequence of the expansion of the agroexport sector (which is part of the neo-liberal restructuring in the country). Landless peasants are forced to work on sugarcane plantations, cattle raising *haciendas* or migrate to the nearby cities such as Popayan and Cali. Most of these jobs are often temporary, with low pay and no security [IDRC, 1998].

### III

#### A HISTORY OF INDIGENOUS MOBILIZATION

Two other grassroots rural movements in Cauca preceded the emergence of CRIC. The first was an indigenous uprising in 1912 led by Manuel Quintin Lame, and its objectives were twofold: to defend the *resguardos*, the *cabildos* and the cultural traditions of indigenous communities as well as to abolish rental payment by tenants. The second movement took place in 1930 and was led by Jose Gonzalo Sanchez. Its economic and political analysis was heavily influenced by the Communist Party, which promoted the participation of organized units of indigenous people in the national class struggle during the 1930s and 1940s. Many of the basic ideas of these two movements were later adopted by the CRIC.

Regarded as Colombia's most politically advanced organization to defend the collective and territorial rights of indigenous people, the CRIC was formed early in 1971 when indigenous delegates from North and East of Cauca gathered in Toribio to voice their common concerns [Pearce, 1990]. Significantly, they came from areas where communities had been subject to the greatest attacks by landowners, and where the majority of the *resguardos* had been absorbed into haciendas. A second Assembly took place on September that year, and was attended by delegates from other parts of Cauca as well. At this assembly, the CRIC developed a programme the goal of which was the realization of indigenous autonomy.<sup>29</sup> The main cause of the movement was diminishing access to cultivable land as a result of non-

indigenous intrusion/appropriation, and its principal objective – the recovery of lands belonging to the *resguardos*. Blaming the spread of capitalist agriculture for this separation of the indigenous population from its land, the supporters of the CRIC maintain that land has been and continues to be the central element of the indigenous struggle. In their own words, ‘land means a union, from the land comes our language, our customs; in it we work, from it we derive our education, with it we clarify our ideas’ [CINEP, 1978: 113]. Accordingly, land is seen as the basis of indigenous cultural and social institutions, way of life, identity, and therefore the object of struggle. It is, however, regarded as a public good, and as such to be shared by all rather than appropriated by a few.

One of the principal targets of this mobilization by the indigenous population of Cauca has been the temporal power of religious institutions – principally the Catholic and Protestant Churches and schools. The latter are seen as justifying the conditions of underdevelopment and exploitation that these communities have experienced (both historically and actually), an interpretation which contradicts the oft-heard claim advanced by exponents of *basismo*: namely, that in Latin America such religious institutions are upholders and champions of the rural poor, and as such are part of the political solution to oppression and underdevelopment, rather than part of the problem itself.<sup>30</sup> Not only is the role of the churches and their schools perceived as being to foster conformity in order to prevent rural communities from mobilizing and reclaiming their rights, therefore, but the wealthy and powerful politician and landowner Victor Mosquera Chau and the archbishop Monseñor Arce Vivas (representing the landed possessions of the Church) symbolize this economic, cultural and ideological oppression.<sup>31</sup>

Although the structure of the indigenous movement of Cauca is grounded in democratic principles, the executive power lies with the Junta Directiva, which is composed of two representatives from each *cabildo* (the indigenous council which can be considered as the representative body of all the domestic units within the *resguardo*). Each *cabildo* decides whether or not they want to be part of the CRIC, and so as to prevent the emergence of an elite distanced from rural communities, the CRIC policy is based on having a leadership which is accountable to and constantly consults with the grassroots membership.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, given the hostile climate, and consequently the attempts by the Colombian state and its military to eliminate the leadership of the indigenous movement, personnel elected to executive positions in the CRIC are dispersed throughout Cauca, so that the movement is neither dependent on a small group nor vulnerable to repression.<sup>33</sup>

Given the centrality of land to its membership and programme, the main form of collective action undertaken by the CRIC has been land invasions/

occupations.<sup>34</sup> Such agency, however, only took place after a long and patient wait for intervention by the land reform agency of Colombia, INCORA.<sup>35</sup> Frequently INCORA intervened and legally ascribed land to a rural community only after the latter had occupied it following a long and bloody battle with landowners and police [Berglund, 1982]. At the start of the 1980s, the CRIC participated in 32 such land recovery actions. The taking over of haciendas that were inside a *resguardo* allowed the *resguardo* to be extended, while the invasion of haciendas outside a *resguardo* allowed for new *resguardos* and *cabildos* to be established [Rojas, 1993; CINEP, 1978]. Two patterns of land tenure are practised on these reconstituted *resguardos*. The most common one is the communal property, which entails the distribution of usufruct rights by the *cabildo*. The other is the private proprietorship, comprising individually owned smallholdings. Two forms of communal work are found on land owned by the community. One is the *minga*, a traditional institution based on groups who exchange labour-power with each other, an arrangement involving relatives, friends and neighbours working together. The second one, *vuelta mano* (literally, ‘exchanging hands’), also a form of reciprocal cooperation, is in the context of Cauca also an action of *political* solidarity, occurring as it does between families whose members have been arrested or must remain underground.<sup>36</sup>

Agency beyond the confines of the rural communities themselves presents a more mixed picture. On the positive side, the indigenous people of Cauca do indeed see themselves as part of a larger popular struggle, and believe themselves to have much in common with peasants elsewhere who experience similar kinds of exploitation. To this end, they have on occasion participated in protests by others – workers, teachers and especially non-indigenous peasants – when these were aimed at those whom they regarded as their own enemies (such as big landowners, middlemen and moneylenders). Indeed, the CRIC itself has maintained that it is necessary to build alliances that transcend region, ethnicity and occupation. On the negative side, however, the practice – as distinct from the theory – has been somewhat different. Hence the CRIC is clear that it does not want trade unions or other organizations to direct the struggle of the indigenous population, as the National Association of Peasants (*Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos*, ANUC) has attempted to do (CINEP, 1978).<sup>37</sup> According to the CRIC, ANUC’s central leadership showed little sensitivity to the national and cultural specificities of the indigenous struggle [Zamosc, 1986].<sup>38</sup>

#### *What has CRIC achieved?*

One of the most important achievements for which the CRIC is responsible is that, following its formation, the indigenous people of Cauca are no longer ashamed of their ethnic/cultural identity. A second crucial feat has been the

weakening of the pillars of political and ideological domination and institutionalized repression, as well as challenging the power and temporal role of the Christian religion. Third, the organized resistance of the CRIC has helped to counteract a twofold deleterious process: on the one hand the impact of economic exploitation, and on the other the erosion of the economic base of rural communities. In this regard the record is impressive. By the late 1970s some 12,000 hectares of land had already had been recovered; there were 50 collective stores and 25 semi-collective farms; and illiteracy had been greatly reduced [CINEP, 1978]. By 1986 some 40 *cabildos* had been re-established, and around 30,000 hectares of land recovered [Pearce, 1990]. Today there are about 115 *cabildos* and 60,000 hectares of recovered land.

From the viewpoint of the membership and supporters of the CRIC, the principal benefit of the mobilization thus far, and perhaps its main socio-economic achievement, has been its impact on their landholding status. According to the CRIC, the *resguardo* to some extent counteracted the process of proletarianization, and helped former *terrajeros* and *minifundistas* to maintain control over their own labour-power. Hence the perception that establishing various grassroots economic organizations (semi-collective farms, cooperatives, and collective stores) has increased the economic autonomy of the indigenous population, not least by enhancing their bargaining capacity vis-à-vis local landowners. Rural communities in the area have also benefited in other ways. Since it is difficult to obtain such support from the state, cooperatives and collective stores provide small amounts of credit for cultivation. Any profits generated by a cooperative are allocated not individually but collectively, thereby benefiting the whole community.

These achievements notwithstanding, there have been and continue to be divisions within the indigenous communities, most of which are rooted in an ideological struggle between those who support community interest and those who do not. For instance, there have been cases where small/medium property owners who are indigenous do not wish to join the *resguardo* and feel threatened by the process of land recovery [Rojas, 1993]. This important aspect of the relations between those who are part of the movement and those who wish to remain outside it is easily overlooked by scholars who tend to present a romanticized version of indigenous communities as a homogeneous entity held together by a common ethnic identity. That the CRIC recognizes the limitations of a purely ethnic struggle conducted against white exploiters, and emphasizes clearly the economic basis of their movement, does not change the fact that – as analysed by Parsons [1968], Taussig [1977], Ortiz [1973], Reinhardt [1988] and others – over the years indigenous peasants have experienced a process of socio-economic differentiation. As in other

indigenous contexts in Latin America, therefore, the peasantry of Cauca contain within their ranks a few small-scale agrarian capitalists and a more substantial number of smallholders whose livelihood derives from the sale of their labour-power.<sup>39</sup> That they all share a common ethnicity and culture does not alter this fact. Similarly, one of the main points in CRIC's programme of 1971 – the abolition of labour-rent paid by tenants for usufruct rights to land that they did not own – has been a demand made in Latin America by rich peasants as well as poor ones.<sup>40</sup>

To the internal difficulties of the CRIC – to enter into sustained alliance with the ANUC, plus the growth of class divisions within the ranks of its supporters – have to be added the problems beyond its immediate control: namely, the impact on its achievements of external repression by the state and the military. Since the formation of the CRIC, the state and the landowning class have opposed its process of land recovery with all their strength. Supported by the army and police, the dominant class of Cauca has attempted to eliminate the organization through a systematic and official repression, which has been justified by accusing the movement of insurgency and portraying its political activities as a problem of social order. In 1979, the bourgeoisie from Valle de Cauca and the landowners from Cauca formed an alliance and in a letter to the governor of Cauca declared war on the CRIC, stating that if the government did not eliminate this organization, they would take on the task themselves. To this end, members of CRIC have been arrested and tortured, crops growing on recovered land have been destroyed, and cooperatives have been attacked. Responses to land occupations organized by the CRIC have taken the familiar form of forced evictions, murder and torture.<sup>41</sup> Despite the intensification of armed confrontation and increased military presence (including state armies, foreign armies, paramilitaries, and the FARC), however, the indigenous population of Cauca refuses to take the side of any of the armed actors involved in this conflict. Much rather, the response to violence has been one of peaceful resistance, in the belief that this refusal to take up arms enhances the legitimacy of the struggle conducted by rural communities.<sup>42</sup>

#### IV

#### CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This article has examined the socio-economic conditions that have given rise to the emergence of localized resistance in rural Colombia, the indigenous movement in Cauca, as well as its social base, objectives, strategies, accomplishments, relationship to state and rest of society, and internal contradictions. The significance of this particular case study stretches beyond

its immediate locality, however, as the conditions and events in Cauca are not unique, and are recognizably part of a regional and indeed global pattern of struggle. Accordingly, brief mention must be made of the experience of the CRIC in this wider context, together theoretical and practical questions that arise from it.

The majority of the indigenous people of Cauca have a very long history of sustained and peaceful struggle for land. Having achieved the official recognition of their right to ancestral lands in the Constitution, however, this has yet to be translated into a reality. Not only is the Colombian government not fulfilling its constitutional obligation towards indigenous communities but, much rather the contrary, it is escalating the level of repression applied to them, in open defiance both of international humanitarian legislative ordinances and of the recommendations made by the UN to the Colombian state. In spite of this, the indigenous communities have put what autonomy they have attained to good use. It has enabled them to promote human development by exercising control over land and resources, ensuring work opportunities, strengthening internal markets, and – most importantly – distributing the benefits in an equitable manner. Such practices and objectives are, of course, contrary to the requirements of national and international capital, the requirements of which include control over material resources and (consequently) the availability of rural labour willing to work at any price in order to survive. For this reason, state-sanctioned violence and repression against the indigenous communities of Cauca is aimed at hindering attempts to organize social and economic life on *resguardos* according to principles not in keeping with neo-liberalism.

The process of concentrating wealth and poverty which has characterized the history of Colombia and the rest of Latin America since the Spanish conquest [Furtado, 1976] has been accelerating dramatically over the past two decades. This rather obviously contradicts the claims made by development theory formulated by or sympathetic to neo-liberalism. In short, the rural poverty that is supposed to be alleviated through neo-liberalism's promise – the 'trickle-down' effect – has much rather been intensified.<sup>43</sup> There is now overwhelming evidence confirming what Marxists, Keynesians and others have long warned against: that market forces unchecked by regulation not only produce poverty and aggravate existing poverty and inequality, but also wastefully exploit material resources. At the local level ecologically sustainable rural livelihoods are undermined, while at the national level sovereignty is subordinated to corporate interests as agribusiness enterprises are granted unprecedented property rights and freedoms to appropriate/repatriate surplus value. As Subcomandante Marcos [EZLN, 1998] describes it, 'Neo-liberalism, the historic crime in the

concentration of privileges, wealth, and impunities, democratizes misery and hopelessness'.<sup>44</sup>

The connection between capital accumulation and violence is a historic one and remains alive under the neo-liberal economic model.<sup>45</sup> As outlined in the first section of this article, the recent intensification of armed confrontation and human rights abuses has occurred in areas with strategic military or economic importance. In such contexts, moreover, the victims of assassinations and forced disappearances committed by the army as well as paramilitaries have been overwhelmingly leaders and members of social organizations who have expressed some kind of disagreement with/concern over the economic impact of liberalization policies. To prevent collective mobilization – both against the neo-liberal project and for the construction of viable alternatives to it – campaigns of terror have been directed not only at members of popular movements but also at the low-income sectors of the rural population in general, with the object of pre-empting (or destroying) incipient grassroots organization and/or consciousness raising. In the words of the CRIC, 'they fear the awakening of the oppressed Indians', words echoed by the Zapatistas [EZZLN, 1998]: 'The power fears us. This is why it pursues us and fences us in. This is why it jails and kills us'.

That violence has always accompanied the advancement of capitalism in Colombia, from the time of colonial rule up to the current era of neo-liberal restructuring, is reflected in the continuous nature of the struggles undertaken by the indigenous people of Cauca: first against the Spanish colonists, and subsequently the local elites and a state apparatus that has always promoted the interests of the latter. The long duration and violent character of these struggles raises an important issue concerning the nature of capitalist development generally. It underlines the primacy allocated by Marx [1976: 873ff.] to the *forcible* dispossession of the rural producer from their means of labour. The point is strongly made: 'In actual history, it is a notorious fact that conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in short, force, plays the greatest part. ... [t]he methods of primitive accumulation are anything but idyllic' [Marx, 1976: 874]. There is, nevertheless, a theoretical difficulty. As Marx [1976: 875] himself points out, the designation 'primitive' attached to the process of accumulation is conjuncturally specific: 'It appears as "primitive" because it forms the pre-history of capital, and of the mode of production corresponding to capital'. In other words, the violence, which Marx rightly identifies with capitalism, is nonetheless linked by him to the early stages of the accumulation process. What the evidence from Cauca suggests, by contrast, is that such violence is by no means restricted to the historical genesis of capitalism: much rather, it is an ongoing aspect of accumulation, particularly in rural areas of the so-called Third World already absorbed into what is now a global economic system.

In short, violence/force are as much a part of twenty-first century Latin America – what Mandel [1975] called ‘late capitalism’ (a term that might apply especially to its neo-liberal manifestation) – as they were of the dispossession/enclosure occurring in sixteenth century Europe. As has frequently been noted, because Marx was dealing with the conditions structuring the early process of capitalist development within Britain, the first industrial nation, he did not consider sufficiently the impact of an external and expanding global capitalism on rural areas where peasant economy was the dominant form. That confrontation, and the role in it of violence and force, was central to the analysis of Luxemburg [1951], who argued that imperialism necessarily results from the need on the part of international corporations to outperform their rivals, by keeping down production costs in order to maintain or increase profitability. This, she indicated, they achieved by seeking out and securing control over new material resources and workers who were cheaper to employ. Hence the ongoing nature of violence and force, since indigenous communities in the so-called Third World – where such workers and material resources are usually located – struggle against dispossession and declining living standards.

This in turn raises another important issue: what, precisely, is the role of land in the struggle undertaken by CRIC? In this case as well as other movements throughout Latin America, cultural identity has been used in order to claim (or reclaim) ownership or access to economic resources (land, water, pastures) that may have been historically theirs by custom or law. As has been argued with respect to the CRIC, the sub-text to this kind of mobilizing discourse is that the economic resources in question are central to their cultural identity and thus to their continuing specificity as an indigenous group. The loss of one is linked discursively to the loss of the other (‘As group x, we enjoyed access to/control of these lands in the past, a right that has always been recognized by the colonial, post-colonial authorities in question. We are *still* group x, but our right to this land is now denied. As group x, therefore, we reassert that right, which has always been an integral part of our cultural identity’). This is particularly the case where land is invested with sacred attributes, and thus features centrally in important ritual practice (‘without our land, we are no longer the people we have been and want to continue being’). It is crucial to bear in mind, however, that what is being talked about by an indigenous group lamenting the negation of selfhood is not so much cultural (ritual or religion) as economic (land for agricultural production). The fact that the group no longer owns the land in question affects not just its sense of selfhood but – centrally – its capacity to reproduce itself economically. In other words, conflict is mainly economic, about property rights, and only secondarily about culture. The latter becomes in effect a proxy in what is actually a discourse about the former, not least

because it is frequently the only way in which a claim to land can be made by indigenous poor peasants against current owners (foreign/domestic landlords, agribusiness enterprises) who are politically and economically powerful. This kind of mobilizing strategy has long been practised by indigenous groups in Latin America, and used by them from colonial times onwards in their petitions to what they perceived as an impartial higher authority (such as the King of Spain and the President of the Republic).

The important role that culture has played in the mobilizing discourse of the CRIC and other similar movements has been recognized by Reed [2003] who argues that neo-liberalism has given indigenous people in Latin America a reason for reasserting their cultural 'otherness'. At this point, however, it is necessary to establish a clear distinction between the analysis presented here and that of post-modern theorists who often create the false impression that indigenous groups are engaged in a struggle merely to retain their cultural identity (dress, language, rituals and religion).<sup>46</sup> Although the CRIC differs from the peasant uprisings of the 1960s and 1970s in a number of ways, such as the lack of affiliation with any political party, the Cauca case cannot adequately be explained by new social movement theorists.<sup>47</sup> Using a postmodern framework, the latter have interpreted the struggles of similar rural grassroots mobilizations throughout Latin America – such as the Zapatistas in the state of Chiapas [*Holloway and Pelaez*, 1998] – as a play of diverse actors where each is searching for and constructing their own individual social identity (on which, see Veltmeyer [2000]). On the other hand, the analysis presented here has argued that the CRIC is an indigenous class-based movement that struggles against economic oppression and for access to productive resources. It is concrete achievements in the economic sphere that have made possible changes in their political status as well as developments in the areas of culture and education to take place.

The effect of the penetration of indigenous society in Colombia by market forces has been twofold: on one hand it has placed most of the population in a subordinate and marginalized position in relation to the rest of the white-dominated society, and on the other hand it has created inequalities within the communities themselves. Studies conducted in the early 1960s suggest that the social composition of what was to become the CRIC was not economically homogeneous. Such differentiation is evident from the presence even then of on the one hand a few wealthy individuals who controlled considerable amounts of land and enjoyed high status in the community, and on the other those with smallholdings – *minifundistas* who were wage-earners – and landless workers. This, of course, does not imply that the CRIC embraced and promoted the existing inequalities; many of its initiatives have been based on the vision that it is community, and not individual interests, that should be given priority. Moreover, the recovery of

*resguardo* lands has to some extent helped to counteract the process of proletarianization. Nonetheless, the individual property rights to *resguardo* land still remains. Hence the centrality of the following question: to what extent has mobilization aimed at the realization of indigenous autonomy served the interests of small capitalist producers, and thus been at the expense of poor peasants and agricultural workers?<sup>48</sup> This question awaits further study.

In terms of objectives, both the CRIC and its counterpart at the national level, the ONIC, stipulate principles of unity, land, culture and autonomy. The basic goal is to recover, defend and advance indigenous economic, political and cultural autonomy by having control over the land and resources in their territories, ensuring the proper application of laws concerning the indigenous population, and promoting their culture, education, traditional medicine and collective forms of economic activity. If we measure the achievements of the CRIC against its self-defined goals, it is clear that – despite continuous repression and an ever-intensifying military conflict – it has managed to advance the overall well-being of its communities. If, however, we move beyond the issue of local-level achievements/improvements within the very specific context of indigenous communities, and examine its wider role in the construction of a Colombian society based on social justice and respect for human rights, a different answer is called for, hence the need to look at two things in particular: the role of the movement in large-scale social transformation, and the effectiveness of peaceful resistance as a political strategy.

In order to assess the programme of the CRIC, and its limitations with respect to bringing about systemic change, it is necessary to compare its platform to that of the FARC and the ELN, both in the 1960s and currently. The main goals proclaimed by the FARC during 1964 included the following: changing the social structure of the Colombian countryside through a revolutionary agrarian reform premised on the expropriation of large rural properties; providing land titles to settlers, tenants and sharecroppers on large estates; returning to indigenous communities the land that had been taken from them, and promoting respect for their assemblies, life, culture, language and internal organization; and the formation of political alliances between workers and peasants. The declaration made by ELN in 1965 was more or less the same as that of the FARC, but included additional objectives: industrial development, housing and urban reform plan, national and public health plan, and education reform. Today the FARC remains a powerful, radicalized and well-organized anti-imperialist movement, and one which aims to capture state power so as to carry out its programme of social and economic reforms [Petras and Veltmeyer, 2003a]. The contrast between the latter approach and that of the CRIC is obvious: while the CRIC is concerned

merely with enhancing the well-being of the indigenous population living in communities under its administration, the FARC had – and has – a much wider programme that involved social, economic and political transformation at the national level.

This narrow focus is itself compounded by the limitations confronting CRIC at the local level. First of all, problems such as a shortage of cultivable land in Cauca, a general lack of food security (and consequently malnutrition), and lack of basic economic infrastructure (medical facilities, teachers) still persist. Moreover, it has been mostly those living on *resguardo* territories that have benefited from the movement's accomplishments, while the impoverished indigenous population resident and working in the cities have not shared the gains. Second, regardless of the collective economic organizations on *resguardos*, indigenous communities still operate within the capitalist economy and ultimately their livelihood for now continues to depend on the wider market. As Marx [1869] observed, smallholding peasants as an economic category are ultimately not viable under capitalism, and – as Kautsky [1899] pointed out – their participation in the capitalist economy only serves to reproduce their enslavement. Third and most importantly, the peasants of Cauca continue to suffer violence and repression in the hands of the armed forces. True empowerment of the indigenous population there is accordingly impossible without first confronting – and then dismantling – the national class structure which controls the state and thus drives the policies of violence and force inflicted on them locally. In short, and rather obviously, eliminating grassroots poverty and violence requires changing the system as a whole, and the failure of CRIC to address this can be considered a major weakness.

This is an issue that cannot in the end be avoided, and it is one that a human rights framework *per se* has difficulty in addressing. As Petras and Veltmeyer [2002] point out, the main strength of neo-liberalism in Latin America derives from the inability of its rural opponents to form a united anti-systemic movement with political alliances in the cities. Not only does the CRIC not aim to bring about change at the national level, but it has also not joined the force that strives for this end, evident in the continuous tensions between it and the FARC. The construction of a new political space where many voices can bring forward their proposals, a process described by Subcomandante Marcos [2001] as 'One No Many Yes(es)', is itself premised not just on a unified – not disunited – opposition to neo-liberalism, but also in a willingness to fight back against it. Such a profound transition is unlikely to happen without the capture of state power not merely by all those engaged in an anti-systemic struggle, therefore, but on the basis of plans for social, economic and political transformation at the national level. It is a truism, verified by history

everywhere, that this kind of transformation is rarely – if ever – either piecemeal (= local in scope) or peaceful (= passive in form).<sup>49</sup>

## ACRONYMS

ANNCOL	New Colombia News Agency
ANTHOC	National Association of Colombian Hospital Workers
ANUC	National Association of Peasants
ASFADDES	Association of Family Members of the Detained and Disappeared
AUC	Self-Defence Forces of Colombia
CINEP	Centre for Research and Popular Education
CODHES	Human Rights and Displacement Consultancy
CONAIE	Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador
CRIC	Indigenous Regional Council of Cauca
CUT	Colombia Federation of Labour
ELN	National Liberation Army
EZLN	Zapatista Army of National Liberation
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
FTAA	Free Trade Area of the Americas
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unionists
ICHRDD	International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
INCORA	Colombian Institute of Agrarian Reform
MNC	Multinational Corporation
OPF	Popular Women's Organization
ONIC	National Indigenous Organization of Colombia
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
USO	Union of Oil Workers
WNU	Weekly News Update on the Americas

## GLOSSARY

<i>balδιο</i>	untilled land which may be cultivated by anyone, the cultivator acquiring a right to it (prior to 1970s)
<i>cabildo</i>	indigenous council which can be considered as the representative body of all the domestic units within the <i>resguardo</i>
<i>comunero</i>	a member of an indigenous community
<i>ejido</i>	land owned communally by indigenous groups in Mexico, now privatized by Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution with the implementation of NAFTA in January, 1994

<i>encomienda</i>	a system introduced by the Spanish colonizers by which the Crown had given certain Spaniards the privilege to receive labour services (which entailed forced labour) and other tribute from indigenous communities
<i>hacienda</i>	a large estate which contains subsistence and commercial agriculture (origin can be traced back to the 1600s)
<i>indios racionales</i>	literally translated as ‘rational indians’; used in the indigenous communities in Tierradentro to refer to those members of the community who have capitalist aspirations
<i>minga</i>	an institution of communal work found on <i>resguardos</i> , which involves relatives, friends and neighbours working together
<i>minifundio</i>	land which is of poor quality, badly situated, and/or too small to occupy the owner fully or to provide sufficient income to meet the family’s needs
<i>resguardo</i>	a territory owned collectively by indigenous communities on which communal as well as individual forms of ownership are currently present
<i>terraje</i>	labour-rent paid to landowners by tenants
<i>vuelta mano</i>	an institution of communal work found on <i>resguardos</i> , which as the <i>minga</i> , involves a form of community cooperation

## NOTES

- 1 Neo-liberalism seeks to abolish any remaining barriers to the ability of capital both to have access to material resources (including, importantly, land and labour-power) and to commodify them all in market exchanges. According to Halebsky and Harris [1995], the shift to a policy combination of trade liberalization, privatization, and deregulation began in the late 1970s in response to the increasing debts faced by Third World countries, and the pressure to pay them. Trade liberalization refers to free trade or the removal of any trade barriers, such as tariffs and quotas. Privatization requires the sale of public enterprises and assets to private owners. Deregulation constitutes the removal of government restrictions and interventions on capital to allow market forces to act as a ‘self-regulating’ mechanism. This process takes the now-familiar form of labour-market and/or financial deregulation [Weaver, 2000].
- 2 Throughout the 1990s, and in the context of democratically elected regimes, neo-liberal restructuring in countries such as Ecuador and Mexico has been accompanied by an intensification of repression, violence and militarization, which although not yet on the same scale as that effected in Colombia, are – it is argued here – politically essential components where the imposition and reproduction of such an economic project is concerned. As in the time of the military dictatorships, the main object under these civilian democratic regimes continues to be the ‘elimination of the internal enemy’. Billions of dollars have been devoted to ‘counterinsurgency operations’ which Chomsky [2003] describes as a term used by states to justify state-sponsored terrorism (‘The Internal Security Doctrine with its seemingly unquestionable legitimacy, serves as the ideological support required to convince the public that the bloodshed, abductions, torture, rapes, forced displacements. . .are inevitable and even necessary.’)
- 3 Marxists have long argued that the search for – let alone the discovery and enforcement of – a benign moral code informing the accumulation process is a chimera, and that consequently

- mobilization against capitalism by workers at the rural grassroots should be based on their class identity and interests. For non-Marxist attempts either to identify a non-self-serving moral code informing capitalism, or to elaborate the possibility of such a connection based on human rights, see Moore [1998: 1–53], Ignatieff [2003] and Owen [2003].
- 4 This is not to say that enormous difficulties exist with certain aspects of ‘human rights’ law. For example, who is to enforce this (not, surely, the state breaking its own undertakings in this regard), and how (as the travails of UN ‘peace-keeping’ underline)? The only successful instance of human rights law thus far is the case of the European Union, where it overrides the attempt by individual nation states to legislate unproblematically in the interests of their own ruling classes.
  - 5 For a similar process in Brazil under Lula, see Petras and Veltmeyer [2003].
  - 6 For example, on 30 January 2004 the Colombian government adopted a resolution where through the liquidation of large public companies it plans to eliminate around 40,000 jobs in the next four years.
  - 7 For a similar process of ‘depeasantization’ in Peru and Chile, see the contributions by Crabtree and Murray to the collection edited by Brass [2003].
  - 8 As will be made clear below, the issue of who is or is not a ‘terrorist’, and why, has become politically central after 2001, as the post-9/11 climate of fear has facilitated the labelling of radical political opposition of all kinds as ‘terrors’, and thus *ipso facto* illegitimate and meriting repression. In this climate, governments from Putin in Russia and Sharon in Israel have invoked the discourse about ‘war on terror’ to justify what are in effect campaigns of State terror aimed at neighbouring populations (Chechens, Palestinians). The waging of such conflict has been characterized by the familiar actions and discourse of ‘disappearances’, ‘encounters’, etc.
  - 9 There has been an increase in forced displacements as well. According to the Human Rights and Displacement Consultancy (CODHES), in 2002 some 412,553 people were forcibly displaced. This figure represents a 20% increase over the previous year [Leech, 2004].
  - 10 The following are just some examples of the thousands of cases of human rights violations. On 26 November 2002 Cristobal Hinestroza Paz, a member of the Afro-Colombian community of Jiguamiando, was abducted by paramilitaries. He was then found murdered and decapitated. On 10 January 2003 agents from the Colombian Administrative Security Department and the Attorney General’s office raided the Unitary Workers Federation offices in Cali [Interchurch Commission of Justice and Peace, 2002]. On 16 October 2003 the human rights worker Esperanza Amaris Miranda, who had been threatened for her community work, was dragged from her home in Barrancabermeja by paramilitaries and five minutes later was shot and killed in front of a school. Although the authorities had been informed of previous threats, they failed to protect her from this attack [Vivanco, 2003]. According to a report produced by ICTUR [2004], from 3 December to 17 December 2003 four individuals – members of various unions – were murdered by paramilitaries. On 28 January 2004 members of the paramilitary abducted and tortured human rights activist and journalist Ines Peña, member of the Popular Women’s Organization (OFP) in Barrancabermeja [Colombia Week, 2004]. On 18 April 2004 paramilitaries raided an indigenous community in the Department of La Guajira where they killed 12 people, kidnapped 30, raped young girls, interrogated children by using torture, murdered children and elders, and destroyed the community’s cemetery [WNU, 2004]. The anti-privatization activism of the National Association of Colombian Hospital Workers (ANTHOC) has also been a target of state-directed and paramilitary violence. Since 1998, 300 ANTHOC members have been displaced from their homes, 30 unjustly imprisoned, 15 ‘disappeared’, and 84 murdered [Colombia Week, 2003]. Furthermore, according to the Colombian labour federation CUT (*Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Colombia*), between 28 March and 14 April 2004 five individuals from various teachers unions were killed. In addition, thousands of peasants have been massacred because of an alleged connection to guerrillas. Union leaders say the growing number of arrests, abductions and killings of unionists and peasants, are part of a plan by the government of Uribe to destroy the labour movement and all opposition to his authoritarian neo-liberal policies [Interchurch Commission of Justice and Peace, 2002].

- 11 For example, on 6 May 2003 the leader of AUC declared all leaders of the oil workers union (USO) and their children to be military targets [*ICTUR*, 2003].
- 12 The proportion of political crimes in Colombia that remain unsolved is a staggering – but unsurprising – 98% [*ICHRDD*, 2001].
- 13 The involvement of the US government and US-based corporations in Colombia (as well as in most other Latin American countries) has contributed to the violence of the past, and continues to underwrite current repressive activity. Following September 11, 2001, Bush allocated US\$93 million of ‘counter-revolutionary’ aid to Colombia. Despite the fact that the Colombian Armed Forces have one of the worst human rights record in the world and the government has not yet implemented any of the 27 recommendations made by UN, early in 2004 the US Secretary of State Colin Powell nevertheless asserted that Colombia had complied with human rights ordinances, and released an additional US\$34 million in aid to its armed forces. US and Colombian intelligence personnel and security troops involved in counternarcotics/counterinsurgency operations operate at military bases equipped with radar installations at San Jose del Guaviare, Marandua, Leticia, Riohacha, San Andres Island, Miraflores, Ariquita, Santa Marta and Puerto Asis. Even though the last five bases officially belong to the Colombian military, they are used by US personnel for the same purposes as the rest [*Castro*, 2002]. The latest plan announced in May 2004 – Plan Patriota – is a joint initiative put forward by the Colombian and US government that will consist of massive military offensive, including the deployment of 15,000 troops into the FARC stronghold.
- 14 For more information on agrarian struggles and the emergence of the major guerrilla movements in Colombia, see Gott [1970], Gilhodès [1970] and Hobsbawm [1976].
- 15 For more on the armed conflict in Colombia, the FARC and the paramilitaries, see Richani [2002].
- 16 The major problems confronting the indigenous population of Colombia [*ICHRDD*, 2001; *Saavedra*, 2003] include the following: (1) the extraction of natural resources, leading to environmental damage, negative impacts on health, violation of territorial rights, and displacement; (2) draft agrarian reform legislation, which undermines indigenous claims to particular areas, since any attempts by community members to purchase land would be subject to the approval of national business plans regarding production; (3) Plan Colombia, which not only entails the provision by the US of military aid to the Colombian armed forces, but guarantees private sector control over natural resources, even if this means the forcible removal of the existing population from certain areas of the countryside so as to allow unrestricted access to multinational corporations; (4) the new mining code, which permits international capital to enter indigenous territory containing mineral deposits; and (5) aerial fumigation aimed at eradicating ‘illegal’ crops (coca), but which results in destroying food crops, contaminating water supply, and poisoning livestock and peasants. In March 2004, UN officials expressed concern for many indigenous rural communities that have been targeted for displacement and worse. ‘If no emergency humanitarian action is taken, they run the risk of disappearance’, stated the UN representative for indigenous rights [*Hunt*, 2004].
- 17 Colombia is divided into 32 administrative units called ‘departments’ and one capital district. The Province of Cauca was created in 1835 out of the Cauca Valley land that had been part of the Province of Popayan. In 1851 the Department of Cauca was created incorporating the lands of Choco, Buenaventura, Popayan and Cauca provinces. Just before the 1912 population census the Department of Cauca was split into the Department of Valle del Cauca, Department of Choco and Department of Cauca. Because of these territorial boundary shifts it is impossible to provide accurate demographic statistics for the 1700–1900s on what is today known as the Department of Cauca. However, from the existing evidence it is possible to conclude that between 1843 and 1864 the population of the southwest region as a whole grew at an average annual rate of 2.1%, just slightly above the national average of 1.9%. Between 1870 and 1905, the growth rate of this region dropped to 0.7%, thus below the national average of 1.5% [*Reinhardt*, 1988].
- 18 Between 1575 and the 1600s, indigenous workers were employed in the mines alongside African slaves [*Rout*, 1976: 236ff.]. When the use of an indigenous workforce was prohibited in the early 1700s, a division of labour developed whereby the native population was engaged in the production of food for the African slaves who composed the mining workforce.

- Although slavery was abolished in 1852, coercive and semi-coercive labour systems remained in place.
- 19 These rights over the territory to which each indigenous community was entitled were not absolute, since the lands were ultimately the property of the Crown [Safford and Palacios, 2002].
  - 20 In 1810 the first republican government in Bogota called for the division of the *resguardos* based on the claim that as long as indigenous peasants held their land in common and were not permitted to sell it, they could not participate in the free market and thus constrained the development of the national economy [Ortiz, 1973].
  - 21 The indigenous population did not universally oppose the dissolution of *resguardos*. For example, the leader of the community of La Montaña participated in the petitioning process in 1857. Nevertheless, 'For every document in which indigenous appeared to favour privatization, other documents showed indigenous leaders forcefully defending the integrity of their *resguardos*' [Appelbaum, 2003: 80].
  - 22 It should be noted that these amounts varied throughout the region.
  - 23 Although Antioqueño migration into northern Cauca had started in the 1700s, it was only in the 1840s that this pattern became pronounced. At this juncture Antioqueños began to receive the support of intermediaries with legal expertise and political connections, assistance that enabled them to gain official recognition for their settlements on public lands or territories belonging to indigenous communities. Local authorities identified such migrants as 'deserving' settlers who should replace the 'Indians'.
  - 24 According to Ortiz [1973], individuals in the Tierradentro who had a considerable amount of wealth were known as '*indios racionales*' (= 'modern Indians'). Their interests ran counter to those of the community, in that they supported the idea of subdividing any remaining communal land. The elimination of the *resguardo* would enable them to have freehold titles to their property, increase their holdings, and also permit mortgaging. These individuals not only subtle to tenants (mostly the landless) but also enjoyed a position of prestige and influence, among white society as well as the indigenous community.
  - 25 A study of a couple of Paez communities in the Tierradentro region of Cauca conducted by Ortiz [1973] in 1960–61 indicates that the *cabildos* did not interfere in the cases of indigenous landowners who controlled large areas of land. *Cabildo* elections were not free from the interference of government officials on behalf of landlords. It was common for officers elected by the indigenous communities not to be recognized as legitimate and to be replaced by government-appointed ones [CINEP, 1978].
  - 26 One way in which the proletarianization of indigenous peasants occurred was when a piece of *resguardo* land occupied by an indigenous family was declared *balδιο* (meaning untilled land which may be cultivated by anyone, the cultivator acquiring a right to it). By declaring it *balδιο*, the land was automatically available for sale on the market, it was bought by white settlers, and the indigenous people living on it were transformed into full-time tenants [Ortiz, 1973].
  - 27 See Hobsbawm [1967] for the political impact within Colombia of rural outmigration.
  - 28 The livelihoods of many small-scale primary producers in Colombia and the rest of Latin America continues to be endangered by the extremely low prices at which intermediaries/middlemen buy their products. In the case of coffee, for example, in recent years the amount paid is lower than the production cost. For more on this issue in Mexico and Central America see Capdevila [2002] and Vargas [2002].
  - 29 The programme included the following points [CINEP, 1978]: the recovery and extension of lands belonging to the *resguardos*; the strengthening the *cabildos*; the abolition of labour-rent payments; the implementation of local-level indigenous law; the defence of indigenous cultural practices (history, language, customs, institutions), and their incorporation into the existing educational curriculum.
  - 30 Exponents of *basismo* include Lehmann [1990; 1997].
  - 31 To understand better the potential impact of church-peasant relations on indigenous agency, it is worth looking at Bonilla's [1972] account of the conflict between Capuchin missionaries in rural Colombia and the Inga and Sibundoy indigenous population. In the course of about 30 years, the former managed successfully to consolidate their domination through the

- appropriation of land and surplus labour belonging to the latter. An unconditional obedience to God was demanded of the population in order to deprive them of access to economic resources and force them to work on *haciendas* without any remuneration. It was these kinds of conditions that radicalized some priests in Colombia, the prime example being Father Camilo Torres who joined the guerrillas and was murdered by the military in 1966 [Gerassi, 1973]. His view informed the liberation theology, the emphasis of which was on the achievement of temporal justice in areas such as national politics, income redistribution and land reform, as a precursor of religious faith. Torres insisted that celestial harmony was itself conditional on earthly well-being which meant that salvation of the souls of the rural poor would in all cases have to be preceded by the salvation of their bodies. However, the conservative theology, such as that propagated by the Capuchins, has not disappeared in Colombia and the rest of Latin America. For example, it has gained dominance once again in Brazil, where liberation theology previously played an important role in the struggles of the rural poor. As a result, church-sponsored grassroots organizations have been demobilized and the focus has been shifted to a struggle about religion and no longer about social inequalities [Burdick, 1993; Hewitt, 1998; Sousa Martins, 2002].
- 32 For similar features present in the structure and organization of the Zapatista movement, see [www.fzln.org](http://www.fzln.org).
- 33 On these points, see Berglund [1982] and CINEP [1978].
- 34 Many of the activities undertaken by the CRIC also involved educational work, in the form of neighbourhood meetings and study groups. The goal of these activities, according to the CRIC, was consciousness raising among communities – comprehending more clearly the sources of oppression, the causes and goals of the struggle, and the role of the indigenous people in the revolutionary process. In addition to such events, information was also broadcast by means of the CRIC's newspaper Indigenous Unity (*Unidad Indígena*). The CRIC also organized courses to spread knowledge about healthcare (where traditional and modern medicine are integrated), nutrition and literacy.
- 35 The purpose of the Colombian Institute of Agrarian Reform (INCORA) was to participate in the implementation of the Agrarian Social Reform Law approved in 1961, the key objectives of which included: land redistribution, reconstruction of the peasantry in *minifundio* areas, technical assistance, and marketing programmes. It envisaged giving land titles to 54,000 families up till 1967, while the total number of landless was 400,000, increasing by 10% annually. Land redistribution projects were started only in areas that had been affected by the civil war (the period 1948–57 known as 'La Violencia') and thus had a high potential for conflict over land. Zamosc [1986: 36] argues that INCORA 'was acting more as a fire-fighter than as an active agent in the general abolition of latifundia'.
- 36 It is important not to idealize this kind of work arrangement. Although these practices may be seen by some as serving to enhance solidarity within the community, research from other parts of Latin America – as well as by Ortiz [1973] in the tierradentro region of Cauca itself – point out that these arrangements can often involve an exchange not of personal labour-power by smallholding peasants but rather of the labour-power of landless workers by better-off cultivators who do not themselves engage in manual work.
- 37 President Lleras Restrepo created ANUC in 1967 by Presidential decree as an instrument of a state-conducted project that would enable peasants to participate in the provision of state agricultural services and in the implementation of agrarian reform. For more on the rural struggles waged by ANUC during the 1970s, see Zamosc [1986].
- 38 At first glance there appear to be two possible explanations for this. One is the lack of understanding on behalf of ANUC's Executive Committee of the specific concerns of the indigenous in Cauca (as stated by the CRIC). The second may be CRIC's perception of ANUC, in the words of Zamosc [1986: 51], as 'an agrarian project of bourgeois reformism'. According to this author, the Restrepo Administration recognized the need of an organization that would promote the interests of the peasantry as a class, which was in accordance with the US Alliance for Progress policy. On the other hand, the government was not willing to allow such an organization to be based upon complete autonomy, since it would be difficult for the dominant classes to control it. Nevertheless, in 1971 ANUC created a new platform that proclaimed its ideological, political and organizational autonomy vis-à-vis the state and

- traditional political parties and in many parts of the country it had strong radical leadership highly representative of the real needs of peasants. Yet, the CRIC continued to maintain a distance between itself and ANUC.
- 39 Evidence for the presence of such division is difficult to miss. Hence not only does private landownership exist currently on *resguardos* but it has done so since the nineteenth century, a situation that is in many ways similar to the Mexican *ejidal* system. In fact, the latter is a parallel case to the *resguardo* system in Colombia. What is ostensibly a non-differentiated and traditional system of community landholding in Mexico has over time become divided between those who have property titles and in many cases no longer work the land personally, and those who are landless and are consequently employed on privately-owned *ejidal* land as hired workers.
  - 40 The experience of other countries, such as Peru during the 1960s, illustrates that demands for the abolition of labour-rent have been made generally by wealthier peasants where it had been a common practice for the latter to send landless sub-tenants or migrant labourers to work for the landlord on their behalf. The fulfilment of the demand for an end to the labour-rent payment, has enabled these better-off peasants to increase capital accumulation on what became their own holdings.
  - 41 During the first ten years of the existence of the CRIC, 40 leaders were murdered and 60 were imprisoned and tortured, and by 2001, the number of those murdered had risen to 515.
  - 42 One outcome has been that false accusations of insurgency and collaboration with the guerrillas against entire communities have been used to silence their demands and justify actions aimed at preventing the realization of indigenous autonomy.
  - 43 There is a vast body of literature on the impacts of neo-liberal economic restructuring on Latin America which includes Bello, Cunningham, and Rau [1994], Green [1995], Halebsky and Harris [1995], Veltmeyer [1997], Close [1999], Castro [1999], Weaver [2000], North and Cameron [2003], and Robinson [2003]
  - 44 Galtung's [1996] 'structural violence' is useful in understanding the link between neo-liberal policies (with their disastrous economic consequences for the working majority) and the absence of peace. It is a term used to describe any constraint on human potential due to economic and political structures. While direct violence is about inflicting traumas on the body, structural violence operates through needs deprivation. It can often manifest itself in poverty and exploitation. Galtung argues that structural violence often leads to direct violence, the aim of which is to maintain the oppressive structure. Therefore, in the absence of conditions under which everyone's basic human needs are adequately met, structural and direct violence would always prevail, eliminating the possibility for peace.
  - 45 For more on the links between state-sanctioned violence, repression, militarization and economic liberalization, see Robinson [1996], Kirk and Okazawa-Rey [2000], Aiyer [2001], Chomsky [2003], and Petras [2002, 2004]. Not the least of the ironies is that the rhetoric of neo-liberalism preaches freedom of 'choice', and when those such as the indigenous communities of Cauca exercise this, the state then proceeds violently to oppose this very process (= the exercise of freedom of choice).
  - 46 For a critique of the post-modernist approach to the study of Latin American rural movements, see Veltmeyer and Petras [2000] and Brass [2003]. For a comparison between current rural movements in Latin America and older ones, see Petras [1997].
  - 47 On new social movements theory generally, see Hellman [1995] and Oommen [2004], and for a critique see Barry [1992].
  - 48 A similar situation, where the struggle of one group/nation vis-à-vis a larger hierarchy of power overshadows inequalities or contradictions that are internal to the group/nation, is found in Brazil with respect to Lula's position on agriculture in the FTAA negotiations (on which see Petras and Veltmeyer [2003]). Brazil has been pressuring developed countries to remove their agricultural subsidies in order to ensure fair competition. However, it is necessary to consider that such concessions on behalf of northern countries would benefit only the agribusiness sector of Brazil, and thus would avoid the issue of rural inequality and the concerns of small-scale farmers and landless workers.
  - 49 It was not Gandhi's campaign of passive resistance which hastened the end of British colonial rule in India but rather the combined effect of far from passive struggles (among them the

Tebhaga and the Telengana peasant movements, the 1946 Indian naval revolt, and the impact on Indian domestic opinion of the 1943 Bengal famine).

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