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Cultural Alchemy: Hope in the Pacific Coast of Colombia

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Alquimia Cultural: La Esperanza de la Costa Pacífica Colombiana

Cultural Alchemy: Hope in the Pacific Coast of Colombia

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Table of Contents

Introduction: A Method to this Madness?

Chapter 1: Of Land, People, Culture, and History

Chapter 2: Dismantling the "Discourse of Development"

Chapter 3: A Question of Culture and Race: Resilience, Adaptation,
Creativity, and Identity

Chapter 4: El Choque: Orality and Modernity

Chapter 5: Fundación Habla/Scribe: Transition and Change

Chapter 6: From Alternatives to Alchemy: Hope and Transformation in the
Pacific Coast of Colombia

Introduction: A Method to this Madness?

I wanted a title for my thesis which would somehow capture the magic of the Pacific Coast region, the intangibles of the culture there which express the hopes and dreams, the fears and prohibitions, the realities and myths, the history and present of the Afro-Colombian people. Hence, I chose the phrase "cultural alchemy" (rather than cultural syncretism or hybridization, both of which seemed too scientific or literal for my intent). The practice of alchemy has always involved magic, a process of transformation which is of and yet beyond this world. Within such kinds of transformation it is possible to find at once the hopes and harsh realities of daily life and the beyond. This, I believe, best captures the current circumstances of life for the Afro-Colombian people of the Pacific Coast -- their struggles, aspirations, movements, and metamorphoses.

* * * * *

Early in the morning of March 5, 1993, in the midst of a freezing, blinding snowstorm, I drove to Bradley International Airport outside of Hartford, Connecticut. Leaving the warmth of my down coat in the arms of a friend, I boarded my plane bound for Miami en route to Cali, Colombia, 2,000 miles to the south and 65 degrees warmer. So began my journey to the land of coffee, salsa and cocaine.

As a co-investigator, I had the privilege of taking part in a year-long research project¹ called "Cultural Politics and the Transformation of Development: Afro-Colombian Responses to Modernization" which was headed by Arturo Escobar (then of Smith College, now of the University of Massachusetts,

¹ This research project, in one form or another, is actually still in process and shall be for some time to come.

struggles to 1) maintain and preserve⁴ local cultural traditions in spite of the encroachment of dominant cultural forms; 2) negotiate with governmental and other dominant social entities in the face of rapid modernization and its forces of assimilation; and 3) create their future with a relative degree of autonomy as well as through democratic participation in larger extra-communal and -regional socio-economic initiatives.

In a very general sense, my intent was to examine how popular communication and popular education efforts facilitated larger processes of social change. In specific, I wanted to look at how Fundación Habla/Scribe (FHS), as an organization, participated in such efforts. This meant looking at the history of the organization -- its philosophical foundations and practical endeavours -- as well as at the changes -- both theoretical/philosophical and practical -- FHS experienced over time. Furthermore, because of the focus of the larger research project, my work with FHS centered primarily around their efforts in the Afro-Colombian communities of the Pacific Coast region, all couched within the larger context of processes and politics of "development" in the region.

In order to understand the processes of social change facilitated by the work of FHS and the politics of "development" in the Pacific Coast region, it was important to first develop an understanding of the complex context in which such work and politics were occurring as well as of the different actors involved. Thus, I spent a good deal of time researching the political,

⁴ I do not mean to imply that local traditions can or must be preserved in some ideal, essential state. It is my assumption in this thesis that cultural traditions are always in a state of flux, involving the old and the new, engaged in processes of negotiation, transition, adaptation, and transformation. What is key here is how such processes take place under the particular conditions of domination and resistance. Please see chapters 1, 3, and 4 for more detailed discussions of this matter with regard to the African diaspora in general and to the specific context of Afro-Colombian history and presence in the Pacific Coast region.

economic, social, and cultural history of the region -- including international geopolitical, economic, and environmental interests -- as well as its geography, environment, and demographic patterns. Chapter 1 summarizes this research, the details of which consequently feed into all the successive chapters. Chapter 2 examines the economic history of the region, starting with the exploitation of natural resources during the colonial period and ending with a focus on the contemporary "development" initiatives. I also provide a critique of such initiatives, utilizing the analysis of Escobar (1995) in his deconstruction of the "discourse of development." In Chapter 3 I explore the dynamics of "race" in Colombian history and contemporary society: the specific history of blacks in Colombia since the Middle Passage; how certain racial ideologies have shaped national identity and racial/ethnic politics; the geography of race; the evolution of black identity and community, regionally and nationally; the development of Afro-Colombian culture; blacks and the new Constitution of 1991. This gives the foundation for understanding the particular dynamics of race in the PCR -- in relation to development, the environment, territoriality, inter-ethnic relations, community development, identity, and cultural politics.⁵

Chapter 4 explores the nature and particularities of orality vs. literacy. Given that the PCR cultures are oral-based, an understanding of orality helps delineate the dynamics of cultural production and change, and how this in turn effects and is interrelated with the regional economic, political, and social practices. Such a base of understanding also provides a framework with which to conceptualize and initiate popular communication and

⁵ One huge, regrettable hole in my thesis is the lack of an analysis of gender dynamics in the PCR, how they are played out in the culture and politics of the region, and the consequent changes within the context of "modernization" and development.

popular education efforts intended to provoke social change. This leads into Chapter 5, which includes a historical analysis of Fundación Habla/Scribe as well as a critical look at its educational materials and practices. The analysis is couched within the context of the political realities of the Pacific Coast region and the distinctiveness of the cultures of its people, revealing the particular challenges of such work. Finally, in Chapter 6, as a way to summarize the thesis, I try to provide an overall perspective on the current realities -- the challenges, obstacles, weaknesses, strengths, etc. -- confronting the Afro-Colombian communities of the region. A more general discussion about processes of social change, cultural transformation, and the dynamics of domination and resistance is invoked, as well as an exploration of viable (ideal) alternatives to "development."

The scope of my research included historical and contemporary documents and articles (academic and otherwise), specifically about the Pacific Coast -- its people, history, regional development, environment, geography, and culture -- as well as more general works about blacks and "race" in Colombia, racial ideologies and politics in Latin America, Afro-American cultures and identity in Latin America, the larger cultural and political processes and consequences of the African diaspora. I also included works about non-formal or popular education and communication, oral traditions, the dynamics of domination and resistance, cultural imperialism, social movements, and the social and historical construction of "race" and racisms. I reviewed pedagogical materials and guides developed by FHS as well as a variety of informally published newsletters and pieces written by the people of the PCR.

I drew from a broad spectrum of disciplinary/interdisciplinary sources: history, political science, education, sociology, anthropology, geography,

cultural studies, feminist studies, linguistics, literary criticism, psychology, philosophy, environmental studies, and ethnic studies. I also conducted a series of formal interviews, mostly with the staff of Fundación Habla/Scribe, but also with popular communicators from the Pacific Coast. As a participant/observer, I interacted with the staff of FHS and the people of Tumaco in a variety of settings -- interviews, site visits, conferences, and workshops. Finally, simply being present with the staff of Fundación Habla/Scribe as well as with the research team provided me with informal sources of information and understanding.

In truth, I am writing a partial history, not even a "general history" and certainly not a "total history" (Foucault 1972). There was no clear method to my madness but this was helpful in that it delimited what I could do, think, or ask, how I could view or conceptualize, what I could explore. The result is a mass which is extremely difficult to untangle in a linear fashion (such as traditional history has been done). Rather I see clear, multiple connections, and I sense a sort of paradoxical order to the chaos (not a linear, monolithic order but one which is contingent and unpredictable). In one sense this work is limited: by my knowledge or ignorance, by the region, by the particular institution I worked with, by my own self-selected analytical perspectives and tools, by the people with whom I spoke, by my own interpretations. Yet in another sense this work is the beginning of an uncovering of multiple (infinite?) possibilities: for myself, in my interpretations, for the people of the PCR, for the future of "development," for the connections to be made with other struggles.

So how do you write a history of discontinuities as Foucault suggests? Linear presentation is only a partial representation of reality, biases in its

Introduction:

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Geography:¹

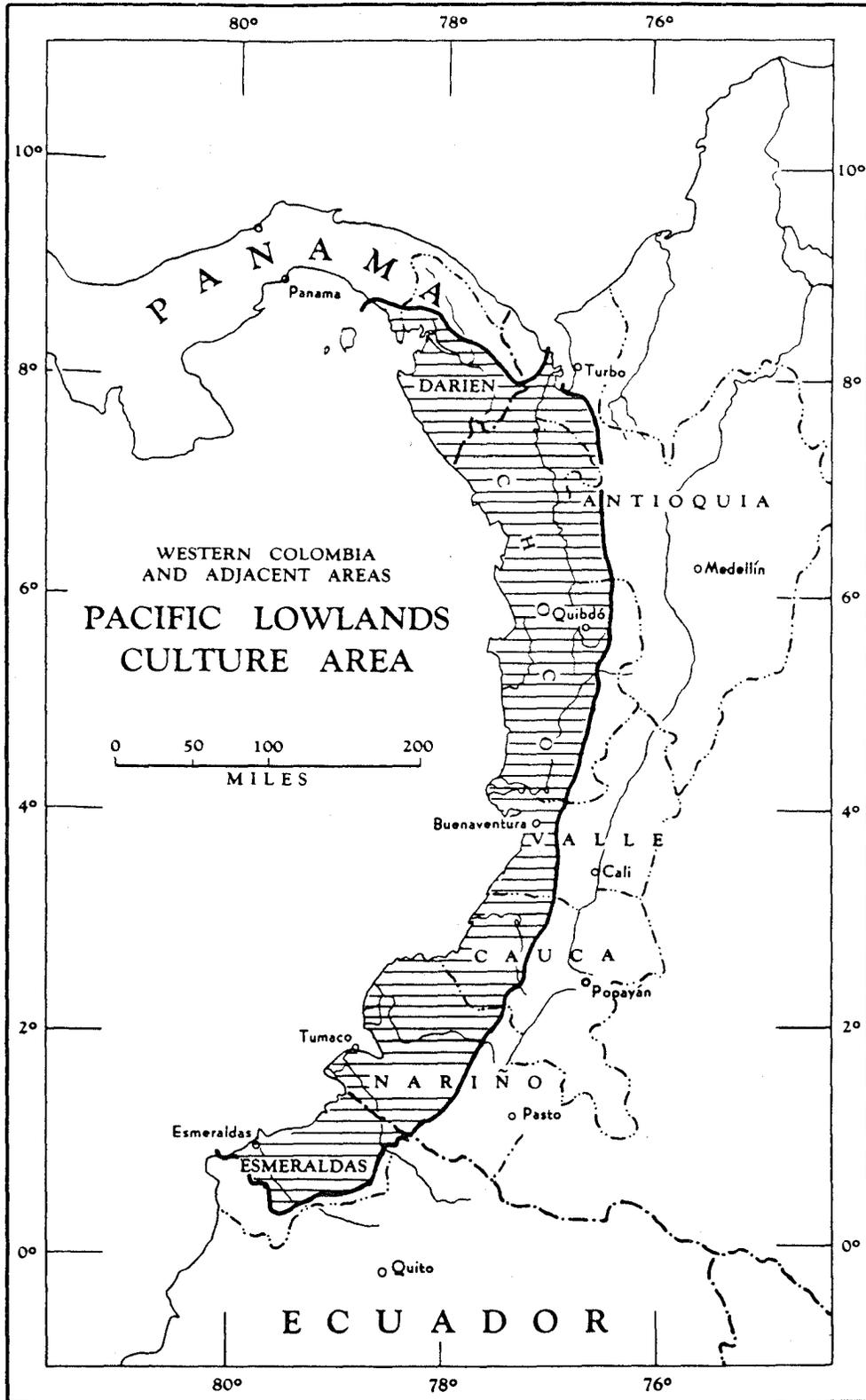
The Pacific Coast Region (PCR) of Colombia covers an area approximately 800² miles in length (from the northern border of Ecuador to the southern border of Panama) and varies from 50 to 100 miles in width (see Map 1). The western-most *cordillera* (chain) of the Andes borders the region to the east, leaving the area isolated from the rest of the country. Four *departamentos* (Colombian equivalent of a state) have territory which reaches over the mountains into the coastal region: Chocó (which actually reaches up to the Atlantic coast), Valle del Cauca (where Cali is located -- east of the Andean mountain range -- an inland city which, along with its surrounding communities, has the largest black population outside of the Pacific and Atlantic coast regions), Cauca, and Nariño.³ For the most part, the lower two-thirds of the coastal area is low in elevation (the upper third is mountainous, covered mostly with rain forest) and comprised of swampy alluvial plains and hilly rain forest. As this region is 1° to 8° north of the equator, it is very hot (80-95°F) and humid (85-95% humidity) all year round. The rainfall is phenomenal -- it is the rainiest part of the Americas (more

¹ The bulk of the information contained in this section comes from West (1957), which today still serves as one of the most important sources of geographic and demographic information about the Pacific Coast Region.

² This figure (approximately 1300 kms.) comes from DNP-CVC-UNICEF (1983) and varies considerably with the figure given by West (1957) of 600 miles in length, the latter including the lower part of Panama and the upper part of Ecuador. The former probably takes into account all the little inlets and bays along the coast which were most likely not accounted for in the 1957 figure.

³ This biogeographical region is also now known as the *Chocóbiogeográfico*, the name of the political-administrative area which encompasses these four *departamentos* as well as three others: Antioquia (which has always exerted a great deal of influence on the Chocó), Córdoba, and Risaralda. See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the importance of this extended designated region.

THE PACIFIC LOWLANDS OF COLOMBIA

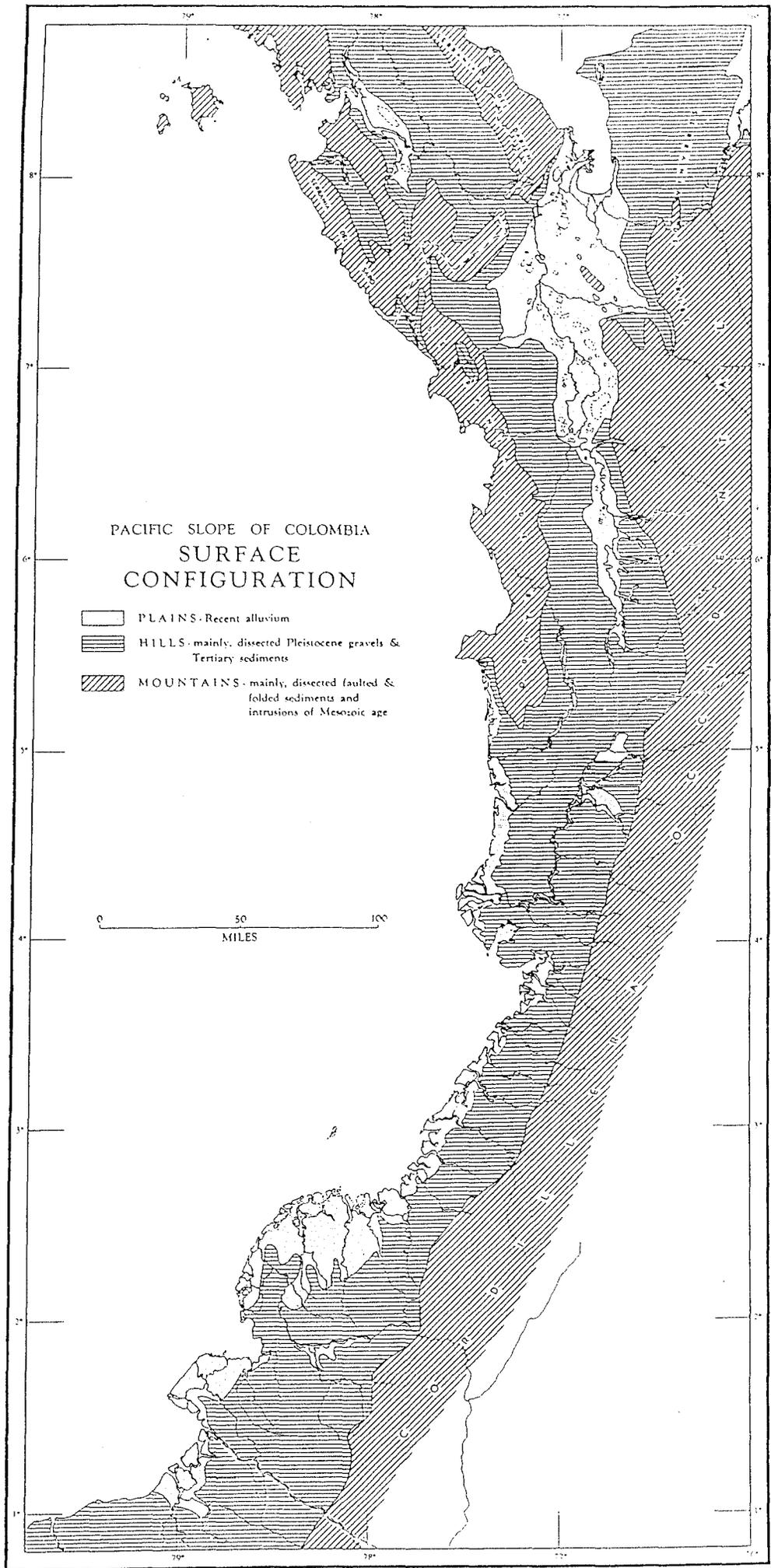


MAP 1

than in the Amazonian rain forest). On average, various parts of the region receive anywhere from 120 to 400 inches of rain annually (that's up to more than 33 feet of rain!!).

Geographically, the region consists of three main types of land formations: low mountains (not including the Andes), hill lands, and alluvial plains (See Map 2). The mountain region lies to the north where the Serranía de Baudó runs from southern Panama down to Cabo Corrientes along the Colombian coast. The elevation of these mountains is relatively low, ranging from 2,000 to 5,000 feet. This area is covered with rain forest and forms a steep, rocky northern coast line, punctuated with beaches and bays, with deep waters right off shore. The hill lands lie between the coastal alluvial plains and the Andes in the southern two thirds of the region. This area comprises most of the Pacific Coast lowlands and is also covered with rain forest. There are many streams and rivers which traverse the hill lands, fed by the nearly daily rainfall, causing a constant process of erosion. Much of the earth which is washed away becomes the silt and mud which form the alluvial plains and sand banks along the coast. The largest alluvial plains are of course found along and at the mouths of the largest rivers which run into the Pacific Ocean. This strip which runs along the lower coast, ranges in width from 5 to 35 miles, and is composed mainly of fresh water--tidal swamp, mangrove forest, sandy beaches, and off-coast shoal waters and mud flats. Finally, the western *cordillera* of the Andes rise up to 13,000 feet in elevation, forming the eastern geographical boundary of the Pacific Coast.

The rainfall in this region is nearly constant, falling every night/early morning, and often times in the late afternoon. Rarely does a week pass without rain. Some areas of the coast do experience a brief "dry"



period in February and March or September and October, but this just usually means smaller amounts of daily rainfall. Occasionally there are drought periods, which cause considerable problems for crop cultivation and a lack in drinking water. Magnificent thunderstorms with heavy showers are the norm and once in a great while, some areas will experience tornado-like storms.

The forest which covers the region is broken down into two categories: the true rain forest and the swamp forest, the latter being composed of tidal, littoral mangrove swamp and fresh water swamp. The true rain forest⁴ (which covers the low mountain and hill land areas) contains a great mass of biodiversity while the swamp forest maintains only a few species of plant growth. In the rain forest, at least two distinct layers can be discerned. The primary "story" consists of the tall evergreen trees (which grow to 60 to 100 feet in height) and form the characteristic "canopy" which shuts out sunlight below. The second "story" consists of trees and palms which grow to 20-30 feet in height. The floor of the forest is covered with ferns, herbs, shrubs, vines, and tree seedlings which rarely exceed 5 feet in height. Many of the vines and epiphytic plants (such as orchids and pineapple plants) grow on the trunks and branches of the taller trees, eventually killing them. When the larger trees do come down, they form a hole in the forest canopy which is quickly filled by the younger evergreen growth of the second "story." The fallen trees rot quickly and, along with the leaf fall (it is estimated that anywhere from 45 to 90 tons of leaves fall annually on each acre of rain forest floor), provide a abundant source of nutrients for all the plants and

⁴ True rain forests constitute only one third of the total land mass that exists between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn (about 10% of the total land mass of the planet). Such forests can develop only where elevated temperatures (at least 68 to 77 degrees fahrenheit) and levels of precipitation (at least 80 inches of rainfall per year) occur together, consistently throughout the year. In the PCR, the year-round conditions are well above these minimal levels.

trees. The great paradox about rain forests is that for all their abundance of biodiversity in plant and animal life, the soil is of extremely poor quality, almost sterile. All of the nutrients can be found in the flora and fauna, quickly absorbed as soon as dead matter decays.

In contrast to the rain forest, the swamp forest is comprised of low vegetation, palms, and mangrove trees (these are the trees which are also seen in the south in the U.S., with their characteristic aerial root growth rising above the water in which they grow). Along the alluvial coast there are four recognizable areas which are mentioned above: the shoal waters/mud flats, sand beaches, mangrove forests, and fresh water-tidal swamp land, of which the latter two areas comprise the swamp forest area. Formed by the large quantities of silt deposited from the rivers and streams along the alluvial coast line, the shoal belt extends 3-4 miles off shore before dropping steeply into the ocean floor. At low tide, portions of these shoals, called "bajos," are exposed. The constant shifting of the shoals makes navigation along the coast unpredictable. Mud flats form along the shoal belt in areas which are protected from strong wave action, usually in bays and estuaries. These also make navigation difficult during low tides.

45% of the alluvial coast line has beaches which vary in length from a few yards to 10 miles in length. These also shift constantly due to occasional storms and constant wave action. Once in a while entire beaches are wiped out by tidal waves. For the locals, they serve as important land formations as they are used to cultivate coconut, oranges, maize, and yucca, and provide a source of fresh water. In addition, in spite of the apparent instability, they permit a slow but constant process of seaward extension of the alluvial coast.

The mangrove swamp forest is common along the tidal zones of most low, alluvial coastlines in the humid tropic areas of the world (e.g., Florida, east/west coasts of Africa, Brazil, Southeast Asia). Three conditions are necessary for its growth: tropical temperatures, fine ground alluvium, and shore area free from strong wave action; if exposed to direct wave action, the mangrove quickly dies. In addition, constant rainfall and a large tidal range facilitate the growth of mangrove. In the Pacific Coast region of Colombia, the red mangrove grows to over 100 feet in height and 3 feet in diameter. At low tide as much as 10 to 15 feet of the root systems can be exposed, making travel treacherous. Crabs live among the mangrove trees and function as earthworms do, aerating the muddy soil in which the mangrove flourishes. Oysters and clams also grow among the root systems providing calcium carbonate which is vital to the survival of red mangrove. There are a few sandy spots within the mangrove forests which are called *firmes*, where people settle and cultivate the same kinds of crops as along the beach zone. Within the swamp, many short tidal channels called *esteros* criss-cross through the trees; during high tide these form an important, extended inland waterways, an alternative to travelling by sea.

The fresh water swamp lies behind the mangrove swamp. At high tide this area provides easy transportation by boat as it is less encumbered by massive vegetation. At one time, the fresh water swamp was also used to cultivate rice; during the 60s and 70s, however, rice cultivation was discontinued in the Pacific Coast region. Unfortunately, this area is also an ideal breeding ground for the anopheles mosquito which carries malaria.⁵

⁵ Malaria is rampant in the Pacific Coast region, and along with intestinal diseases, it is a major cause of infant mortality; however, with the recent invention of a malaria vaccination by a Colombian scientist, hopefully in the near future, malaria will cease to be a mortal threat to the coastal population.

The coastal areas (mountainous and alluvial) are affected daily by great fluctuations in the tides (the tidal differences ranging between 8 and 13 feet). Along the alluvial coast the tide may reach as far as 50 miles inland, up the various rivers and tidal channels which run to the sea. The tides are constantly reshaping the coast line, forming and destroying tidal channels, sand bars, and beaches. The southwest winds create a northward flowing longshore current, making travel to the north easy. Thus, the north coast is called "costa abajo" (downcoast) and the south coast is called "costa arriba" (upcoast) by those who travel by sea. Only when El Niño is running⁶ does this current reverse and run north to south.

Biodiversity:

"We know much less about our planet and its biology than we know about the surface of the moon or even of Mars" (Gentry 1993b:56).

Colombia is one of the eight countries (including Brazil, Indonesia, Zaire, New Caledonia, Nepal, New Guinea, and Ecuador) in the world which harbor the highest concentrations of rain forest biodiversity, and stands second only to Brazil in the estimated quantity of species of flora and fauna. The biodiversity found in these tropical rain forests is truly astounding. For example, in one hectare of Amazonian rain forest it is possible to find in number as many species of trees as exist in the entire North American temperate zone, an equal number of birds, and one and a half times the number of butterflies found in the U.S. and Canada combined (Gentry 1993a:55). In the Chocó region of the PCR, in the space of one tenth of an hectare (equivalent to approximately one quarter of an acre) 265 species of plants

⁶ This is the periodic shifting of one of the huge off-shore currents which brings elevated levels of rain to the entire Pacific seaboard, from South America on up to the North American coastal areas.

were discovered (Gentry 1993a:55). All told, while rain forests cover only one tenth of the earth's total land mass, they produce at least half, and possibly three quarters of all living species on Earth.

In spite of occupying only 6.2% of the country's land mass, the Pacific Coast Region contains one of the greatest concentrations of biodiversity in the world, mostly in the northern reaches of the coast. For the most part, the majority of its warm-blooded mammals have been named and classified. In the Katios National Park alone there are more than 600 species of birds. However, there are still great quantities of plant and reptilian life which have yet to be discovered and categorized. Greater yet are the untold numbers of unknown and unnamed fungi and insects. Scientists estimate that there are more than 10 million species of fungi and between 30 and 100 million species of insects in the world (Gentry 1993b:57), the majority yet to be identified in the rain forests (to date, only 1,400,000 insect species have been named).

Within the immense diversity, complex symbiotic and antagonistic interrelationships exist between most plant and animal species. For example, certain types of trees have evolved in a way so that they produce secretions which attract "guardian ant" populations which, in turn, repel the foliage eating insects (Gentry 1993a:57). These complex relationships, a source of unknown quantities of significant biological knowledge, are still not well understood and will continue to be so until more species and their interrelationships are discovered, classified, and studied.

In spite of all this diversity, within larger areas of forest great quantities of one particular species are not encountered. The biodiversity is well spread out; the irony is that large numbers of single species are found only when large tracts of rain forest are destroyed, "including those most

harmful and annoying to humans" (Gentry 1993a:56), a fact which underscores only one of the many dangers inherent in the destruction of rain forests and their incredible biodiversity.

History of settlement in the region and contemporary demographics:

Originally, the Pacific Coast Region was inhabited by numerous native populations. Three large language groups existed when the Spanish first arrived: the Cuna (Panamá-Colombia border region), the Chocó (or Emberá) and Waunamá (Atrato and San Juan river basins/western cordillera area now known as the Chocó), and the Cayapa, Coaiquer, Sindagua, and Chupa people (southern coast) (West 1957:88-89). With the colonization of the Americas came the destruction of these societies and the disappearance of many of these people. As throughout the "new world," colonists brought with them many diseases such as small pox, tuberculosis and measles, decimating the native populations. In addition, outright physical genocide and flight from the region (to avoid forced labor, tribute payments, and the invading colonist and slave populations) contributed to the drop in indigenous populations.

The lure of gold brought the Spanish to the Americas and the PCR was considered to be one of the best sources of gold in all of Latin America. Initially gold was simply stolen from the indigenous peoples; then they were enslaved to mine the gold. However, indigenous uprisings quickly grew, with the first serious one occurring in 1586, and continued well into the 18th century. Some groups were "pacified" through missionary work. However, due to their strong resistance and the proclamations of the Catholic church, particularly the work of Ferdinand de Las Casas, the Spanish crown was soon persuaded to grant the native people protection from direct enslavement. This

did not mean, however, that the native people stopped laboring for the Spanish colonists; they instead continued to work as indentured labor and were forced to pay tribute to the Spanish crown, to grow food for the slaves and colonists, to build huts and aqueducts, and to make canoes and furnish transport labor to and from the mines (West 1957: 90-91).

This change in policy towards the indigenous peoples led Las Casas to recommend the "massive importation of Black Africans to take over the manual tasks heretofore largely relegated to native Americans," opening "the doors of Latin America to one of the world's great horrors" (Whitten 1974:36). The African slaves were brought to Latin America starting in the early 1500s, a full century before slavery was established in the North American colonies. Most of these slaves were put to work in the mines. "Of the six bases of colonial society [in Latin America] -- mining, agriculture, cattle raising, handicrafts, commerce, and domestic work -- slaves were destined for only a few tasks beyond mining" (Whitten 1974:39).

Initially, a small number of *ladinos*, or Spanish speaking black slaves from Spain, were also brought to the Americas. But as they were found to be much more intractable than the newly arrived slaves from Africa, sometimes leading rebellions and flights from enslavement, the Spanish soon started to rely only on slaves brought directly from Africa.

Most of the Africans brought to Colombia came from West Africa and the Central Coast region of Africa: the Guinea Coast, Nigeria, Angola, French Sudan, and the Congo. These groups of African people included the Yoruba, Mina, Chamba, Carabalí, Bambara, Guaguí, Mondongo, Mandinga, and Dahomeans. Some degree of geographical origin can be drawn from historical records where newly arrived slaves were given names from their tribal language or the slave

station from which they were deported (Whitten 1974:37-38). Some of these names -- such as Mina, Carabalí, Cetre, Congo, and Mandinga -- are still common in some parts of the Pacific coast.⁷ Eventually, with emancipation, many former slaves took on the Spanish surnames of their former masters (West 1957:102).

Regardless of place of origin, "almost immediately on their arrival [the slaves brought directly from Africa] began to revolt, to fight back, to enjoin the New World in series upon series of self assertive freedom and self liberation revolts and movements" (Whitten 1974:36). Runaway slaves formed settlements called *palenques*, from which they defended their freedom and formed new communities. By the end of the 16th century, these black states grew to have considerable power over the native population and to even begin to negotiate with the Spanish Crown. Little is known about the extent to which these settlements existed before being destroyed by the colonists but what information does exist indicates the presence of strong, organized autonomous black states.

"All over the Caribbean and Latin America, runaway slaves established fortified villages (called *palenques* in Colombia)...*palenques* were relatively insulated from Hispanic society. *Palenques* [were] famed for their resistance....[they] tended to form in certain areas, and there are indications that links existed between them" (Wade 1995: 343-344).

Moreover, these black strongholds engaged in independent actions against the Spaniards:

"Not only did *cimarrones* (as escaped slaves were called) revolt and resist, they also initiated counter attacks on mines, plantations, and shipping routes, acquiring capital, goods, skills, and more manpower.

According to Jaramillo Uribe (1963:43), rebellion, "cimarronismo" and the proliferation of *palenques* constituted a major threat to non-Afro-Hispanic

⁷ Still, geographical origins are far from exact. Often times names were assigned arbitrarily by slave traders (due to sheer ignorance and inattention), regardless of the true tribal or geographical affiliations of the captured Africans.

society by the second half of the 18th century. The palenques are described as democratic, with elected leaders, and containing well-organized religious and social life based on an amalgamation of Afro-Hispanic traditions" (Whitten 1974:44).

During the colonial period, the number of free blacks continually increased throughout the mining areas in the mountains of western Colombia. Many stayed and settled in the area, along rivers and near the few commercial centers, to carve out a living, often working for the white minority. By the end of the 18th century it was estimated that 35% of the black population in Chocó were freedmen (former slaves who had bought their freedom, runaways or cimarrones, and mulattos who were freed by "compassionate masters") (West 1957:103). Many stayed in the area to mine independently or work as wage laborers in the Spanish mines. Others migrated to the Pacific Coast lowlands to become subsistence farmers and fishermen. The larger bulk of the migration to the lowland areas took place during the period of partial emancipation from 1821 to 1851, a period of great rebellion and flight from slavery; full emancipation was finally granted in 1851. Most blacks migrated to the coast and riverine areas of the lowlands. In addition, after participating in the wars of independence as members of the revolutionary forces, a considerable number of blacks migrated to the Cauca and Magdalena river valleys (West 1957:103).⁸

After the abolition of slavery in 1851, many of the newly-freed slaves chose to stay in the PCR, despite the harsh living conditions, because it provided a sanctuary from the discrimination and hostilities abundant in the post-slavery society. Few whites lived in the area and the geographical isolation prevented more from settling in the area. The mining areas in

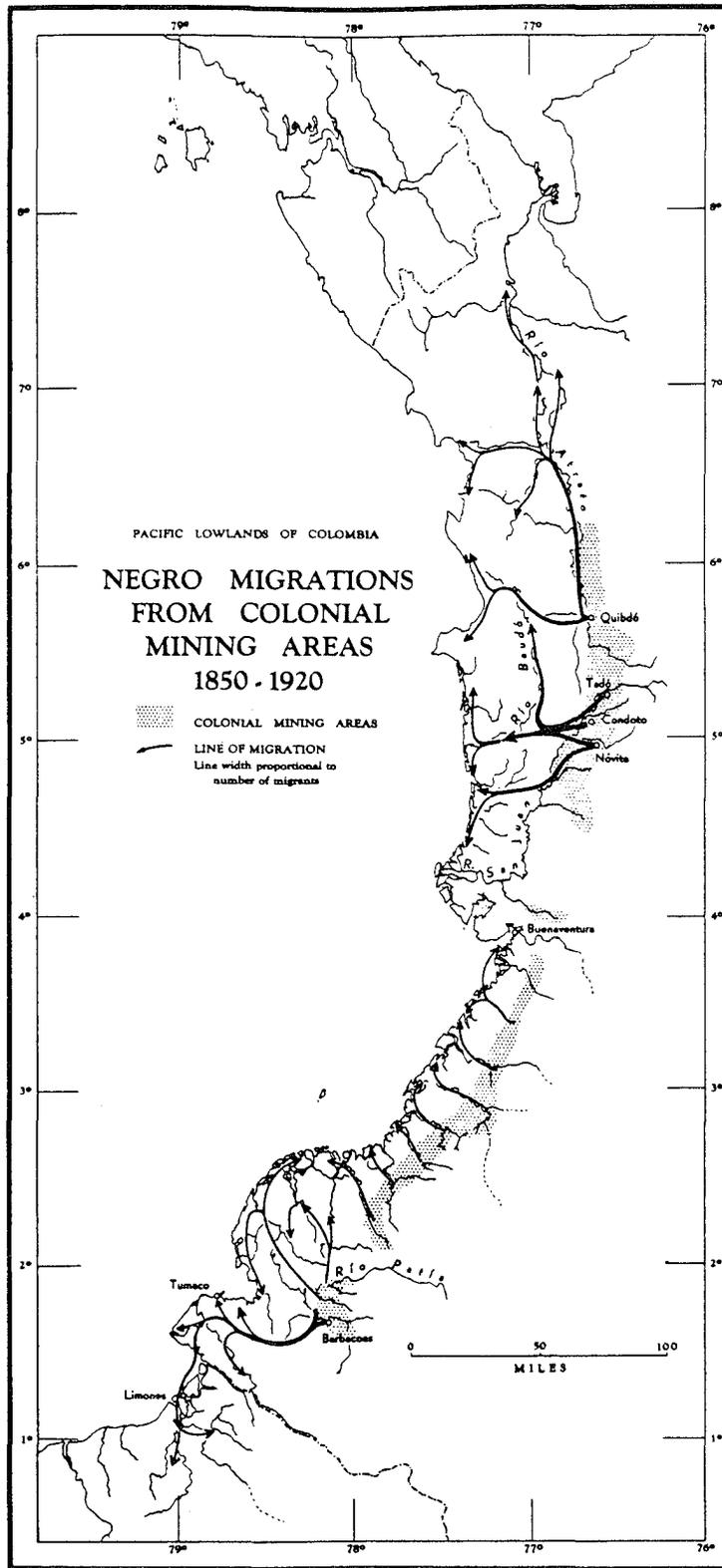
⁸ Colombian independence was declared in 1810 and gained in 1819.

Colombia have continued to have predominantly black populations in spite of the constant flows of migration to other areas along the coast and to the interior. In the Pacific lowland areas, three mining districts became centers for black populations: "(1) the eastern tributaries of the upper San Juan and Atrato drainages -- the heart of the Chocó; (2) the Barbacoas district, which included the Telembí and Magüí rivers and their tributaries; and (3) the upper and middle courses of the numerous rivers that cross the narrow coastal plain between Buenaventura and the Bay of Guapi" (West 1957:98). From those centers the black and mixed blood populations have spread to all parts of the Pacific Coast region (see Map 3), causing the native populations to retreat.

"During this period (1850-1900) the Chocó and Waunamá Indians began to retreat into the upstream areas of the Serranía de Baudó in the face of Negro penetration into the better agricultural lands of the lower stream courses. It was not that the Negro forcibly ejected the Indian from his home in downstream areas; rather the Indian retreated quite voluntarily in order to be as distant as possible from a race that he held in disrespect" (West 1957: 104).

In this century, black migrations have continued, to the two main urban areas along the Pacific Coast -- Buenaventura and Tumaco -- as well as north to parts of Panamá, south to the coast of Ecuador, and inland to the interior to Cali and the Cauca Valley (much less so to other parts of the interior). Many have migrated in search of higher paying jobs; in the Cauca Valley, most blacks work on the sugar plantations or in the industrial and construction sectors of Cali.

As stated above, the presence of blacks along with colonial violence and disease caused the indigenous populations to retreat or disappear from the region. Today the Chocó constitute the bulk of indigenous peoples now living in the PCR, a mere 4-5% of the total regional population. Some groups still live in relative isolation, others have chosen to migrate to other parts of



MAP 3

the country; within the region, most live on *resguardos* or *reservas*, territory legally claimed by the indigenous groups and recognized by the government.⁹ Historically, their relationship with blacks has been one of wary mutual respect; despite having occupied the same territories for hundreds of years, there has not been a great deal of intermingling. Now, however, due to the changing political and economic trends within the region, for political and cultural reasons as well as mere survival reasons, the native peoples have begun to have more contact and build coalitions with the Afro-Colombian communities in the PCR.¹⁰

Whites or mestizos have always constituted a very small, albeit powerful minority in the region. "During colonial days the white element consisted chiefly of owners and administrators of mines, government officials, the clergy and occasional merchants. Most of these lived in the larger administrative centers such as Nóvita, Citará (Quibdó), Iscuandé and Barbacoas" (West 1957:108). However, after independence and the abolition of slavery, most whites migrated back into the interior just over the western *cordillera* to the cities of Cali, Medellín, Pasto, and Popayán. Periodically, the government has attempted to re-colonize the region with white settlements. Virtually all, however, have failed, leaving behind very few permanent white settlers. Nonetheless, over the last 100 hundred years white/mestizo

⁹ There are a total of 77 *resguardos* or *reservas* in the PCR which constitute but a small percentage of total land area. In spite of their legal status, these territories are constantly under threat of invasion from colonists from the interior and mining or timber industry initiatives. The lack of government enforcement of laws protecting the indigenous territories only complicates the situation.

¹⁰ An example of this are the joint indigenous-Afro-Colombian efforts to gain legal title of ancestral territory. Please see below for a discussion of political and economic challenges confronting the black and indigenous groups of the PCR provoked by "development" initiatives in the region. Also, see Chapters 2, 3, and 6 for discussions about the dynamics of cultural politics and identity, issues of territoriality and political autonomy, forms of organizing, negotiation and resistance within the Afro-Colombian communities.

colonization of the region, mostly in the drier, upper valleys of the lowlands, has continued. Today, these new white/mestizo colonist populations are causing substantial environmental destruction of important rain forest areas, and are outright invasions into traditionally indigenous and black-occupied territories. In addition, along with all the new "development" initiatives in the region, many whites/mestizos are re-appearing as government officials, development experts, academics, and business entrepreneurs, and as before, they possess the capital for investments and hence exert considerable political and economic power.¹¹

* * * * *

Today, because of the difficult terrain, constant humidity and rain, poor soil conditions, prevalence of tropical disease, a lack of transportation and services, and geographical isolation, this part of the country is still sparsely populated. Many people live along the ocean or along river banks where small *rastrojos* (patches of cultivatable land) are found. However, almost 50% of the entire region alone lives in the two cities of Buenaventura (now considered the most important seaport for Colombia) and Tumaco (located in the southern most part of the Colombian coast).¹² Approximately 90% of the people are of African descent, 5% indigenous, and the rest white/mestizo. In 1993 it was estimated that between 850,000 and 1 million people live in the region (Ecológica 1993:31). In spite of the high levels of infant mortality and migration, the population is still growing in the region having tripled in

¹¹ This results in a form of internal domestic neo-colonialism, an irony given that it exists within a former colony which continues to experience neo-colonial relations with the "developed" countries to the north.

¹² This does not mean, however, that many parts of the region are urbanized. On the contrary, outside of Buenaventura and Tumaco, most areas are highly rural; Quibdó, the capital of Chocó, is perhaps the only other large urban settlement.

the last 45 years.¹³

"Modern" infrastructure is still lacking throughout the region. Recent development plans have included infrastructure-building projects, but these have moved at a very slow pace. For example, the city of Tumaco, the second largest city along the coast, acquired electricity (from the interior) only in early 1993. In spite of the great potential for hydro-electric power in the region, virtually none of this potential has been exploited. The situation is exacerbated by the problems of power line maintenance inherent in the harsh physical environment. Roads, in varying conditions, connect some province capital cities with the coastal areas; many are still in poor condition and under construction, and demand considerable resources for upkeep in the difficult terrain; Buenaventura is the only coastal city with fairly dependable transportation to the interior via highway.¹⁴ Communication services are still highly inadequate and unreliable; communication within the region is just as difficult as communication with the interior of the country.

Physical health in the harsh environment of the PCR is precarious. Life expectancy is about 55 years. Malaria is perhaps the most widespread disease in the lowlands. As mentioned before, the geography of the land (swampy areas) is ideal for the growth of the anopheles mosquito which carries malaria. Yellow fever and dengue fever, both of which are also carried by mosquitos, are also common in the area. In addition, intestinal diseases also

¹³ This is based on West's figures from 1951 when it was estimated that the region's population total was about 300,000. In addition, this rate of population increase has kept pace with the national levels. In 1951, the regional population constituted 2.5% of the total national population (West 1957:82); today, the region's population still constitutes approximately 2.5% of the national population (the 1993 national census estimated a total of 35 million people in Colombia).

¹⁴ From the perspective of many in the Afro-Colombian communities of the region this lack of roads to the interior is an actual blessing. Most do not want the roads developed because they would only bring more invasions/colonizations of their territories and greater destruction of the environment.

plague the human population, and is one of the principal causes of infant mortality; up to 30% of infant deaths are caused by intestinal disease (DNP-CVC-UNICEF 1983:37). Even now, the infant mortality rate is estimated to be about 200 per 1000 births (not much different from what West estimated in 1957), the second highest in the world (Tulio Díaz 1993:26). Malnutrition is also a persistent problem. To complicate the situation, adequate health care is still lacking for a majority of the region's population. According to PLADEICOP, there is an average of 1.4 doctors for every 10,000 inhabitants of the region. Moreover, there are only 9 hospitals, almost all of which lack adequate supplies and personnel (DNP-CVC-UNICEF 1983:39). In the rural areas, the statistics are only worse, some areas having absolutely no access to health care without having to travel long distances and at great expense.

The illiteracy rate is about 37%, about double that of the national average.¹⁵ School attendance rates in the urban areas are well below the national average and drop off increasingly as students get older. In rural areas, the circumstances are worse. Schools are inadequately equipped, teachers not adequately trained, and there is little opportunity for students to go on to higher education (there are no universities in the region). Moreover, the question of the need for ethnically and regionally specific education has now entered the debate. There are, however, a good number of non-formal education programs (literacy, health education, technical instruction, etc.) which continue to exist in the region (the actual effectiveness and appropriateness of these programs is an entirely different question).

¹⁵ This, however, must be put into regional perspective. The traditional cultures of the region are oral-based; while literacy (reading and writing) levels may be low, the oral traditions have developed into complex, vast reservoirs of local knowledge and history. See Chapter 4 for a discussion of the oral culture of the region.

In addition, the levels of unemployment are well above the national averages. According to PLADEICOP, only 26.6% of the population was working in 1982.¹⁶ Furthermore, it is estimated that 80% of the population experience a lack of basic needs, and a full 60% live in conditions of absolute poverty (Tulio Díaz 1993:26). In the urban areas, problems of housing and sanitation, and a lack of social services, health care, and employment are complicated by the density of human settlement and the economic and political problems endemic to such places.

All told, the statistics paint a grim picture of the Pacific Coast Region. However, as already mentioned, these statistics need to be carefully contextualized in relation to the peculiarities of the region. Moreover, the criteria and standards according to which these numbers are judged must also be contextualized. After all, statistics "are techno-representations endowed with complex political and cultural histories"¹⁷ many of which have become invisible, making it difficult to know the whole story. In spite of their particular biases, even government entities admit to a lack of adequate research and the kind of information necessary to make basic assessments about life in the region.

Outside of the urban seaport centers and the few inland towns of considerable size, most people still survive on a subsistence level, engaging

¹⁶ Again, the rates of unemployment do not reflect the reality of life in the PCR. Many people live and work outside of a wage-labor system and hence their real "productivity" is not taken into account in these figures. In addition, children 10 years and up are included in the total number of people able to work. Some of these children are in school, some work for wages, others work -- regardless of school or wage status -- in subsistence activities within the home and community. Hence, it is difficult to estimate or even define employment or unemployment, even more so when people are constantly moving back and forth between subsistence and wage-labor economic practices.

¹⁷ Please see Chapter 2 for a more in depth discussion of the history of such criteria and standards, how they are built into the discourse of development, how they shape the way we look at the world, and hence how they shape "development" plans and policies for regions of the world like the PCR.

in small-scale farming, fishing, and mining activities. Often times, people up river will trade with people down river and along the coast, as each area produces specific products needed by all (in the cities and towns, however, the economies have shifted almost entirely and irrevocably to a capitalist form).

Coastal settlement is usually in small pockets where fishing and farming hamlets can be found in coves, along beaches, and at river mouths. In addition to coastal settlement, *caseríos* (riverine settlements) are common throughout the littoral region. The river banks provide the highest and only truly fertile soil for agricultural cultivation. In addition, since the rivers serve as the highways throughout the region (travel through the rain forest or mangrove is very difficult), settlement along their banks is ideal for the inhabitants. The rivers also provide additional sources of sustenance in the form of fish and fresh-water shellfish, as well as a variety of aquatic mammals. In contrast, the interfluves, or forest areas are *despoblados* (uninhabited). These are used as hunting grounds but otherwise uninhabitable due to the dense vegetation and poor soil conditions.

Dwelling construction and agricultural practices within the region stem largely from the traditional practices of the indigenous peoples. Blacks have modified rural house construction somewhat (in contrast, in urban areas, buildings are often built according to European standards). A *tumba y pudre* (slash and mulch) technique is used in cultivating crops. First, seeds are distributed or cuttings are planted, then the naturally occurring vegetation is cut and left to decay into a mulch for the new crop. This type of cultivation (in contrast to the slash and burn practice common to most tropical areas in the world) seems to be limited to the PCR (and select parts

of Costa Rica) within the Americas, due greatly to the particular combination of a wet environment and a lack of a dry season in the region (West 1957:129). Crops are rotated or fields are used for a number of years and then abandoned.¹⁸ Clearly, these practices are the most compatible with the environment, assuring reproduction of natural growth and preventing environmental degradation (Arocha 1989:19).

History of Afro-Colombian culture in the region: Hybridization/syncretism

"The natural environment of the Pacific littoral with its lodes of gold and a mercantile political economy exploiting labor through concepts of biological racism coincided in the 16th and 17th centuries to place Black Africans in new settings in a new world. The massive reshuffling of cultural elements, and the subsequent adaptations, must be understood in terms of the dynamics of African maneuver in the face of European exploitation. We must understand the growth and spread of Afro-Hispanic culture in the Pacific Lowlands by first developing a sense of social adjustment and then seeing Afro-Hispanic culture as it contributes to the maintenance of dynamic adaptive strategies. I do not deny resilience and persistence of African ways in the New World. I simply give more attention to creative, adaptive aspects of such lifeways, seen as forever unfolding in response to new environmental challenges" (Whitten 1974:38-39).

In order to appreciate contemporary Afro-Colombian culture of the Pacific Coast region, it is important to first understand the complex history and dynamics of mixed cultural encounter since the "conquest" of the Americas which helped forge Afro-Colombian culture.¹⁹ Clearly, historical circumstances -- the consequence of the imperialist impulses of colonization

¹⁸ Maize, plantains, yucca, sweet potato, and *chontadura* (fruit of the peach palm) are the most commonly cultivated crops for human consumption. Various fruits and sugar cane are also grown. Bananas and coconuts tend to be cultivated as cash crops while gourds, bamboo, and tropical cedar are grown for utilitarian purposes. Ducks and chickens (and sometimes pigs) are the only domesticated animals raised for food. Other meats are obtained through hunting and fishing.

¹⁹ Here I will be focusing on the evolution of a syncretic Afro-Colombian culture. However, it is important to note that all cultures -- African, indigenous, and Spanish -- which came together in the colonial setting, while differently and unequally positioned and empowered, were nonetheless influenced and changed by each other.

and slavery that brought together African, indigenous and Spanish cultures -- together with the environment, and colonial and post-colonial society and political economy all combined to produce a very syncretic, hybrid culture. "[I]t is not an African culture that seems to endure; rather, [what] we have....[is a] 'Afro-Hispanic culture'" (Whitten 1974:13).

Blacks have lived in the PCR for over 400 years now, initially brought to the region as slave labor, later populating the region as runaway and then freed slaves. For the most part, despite the harsh living conditions of the region, the Afro-Colombian population has successfully adapted to life in the wet littoral. In many ways, the natural environment has helped shape the culture of the region. The oral traditions are full of *cuentos* (tales) which teach children how to respect the environment, how to live within it. These fulfill a socio-ecological function, "myths which delineate the limits of humans with respect to nature so that nature is not intentionally provoked or destroyed through overuse." (Pedrosa and Vanín 1994:75). Moreover, subsistence agriculture, transportation and settlement patterns, heavily influenced by indigenous practices, also conform to environment conditions (rain forest and wetlands, variable waterways, etc.).

In the rural areas, the geography directly shapes settlement patterns which in turn are reflected in social and political practices:

"People living on a given river consider themselves as a single community, apart from the inhabitants of an adjacent stream system separated by a *despoblado* difficult to traverse. Negroes and mixed blood speak of "*nuestro río*," or mention for example, that "*somos del Río Guapí* (we are from the Guapí River)," or "*somos Guapiseños* (we are from Guapí)," indicating their social attachment to a given river. The relative ease of travel by water; the common problems involved in the exploitation of the soil, fish, game, and mineral resource along the river; the inter-marriage of families on the same stream system -- such factors underlie communal interest along hydrographic lines. Moreover, the minor civil divisions or the lowlands often correspond to river systems, with the largest village on the river as the administrative center" (West 1957:87-88).

The same could be said of coastal settlements. It is only in urban areas that these patterns are partially if not completely disrupted. Still, kinship ties along with regional place of origin still play an important role when people migrate to urban areas. In addition, social structures, such as the *minga* (co-operative labor group), are also transplanted and adapted to new living and working circumstances.²⁰

However, "to suggest mere subsistence [or geography] as a primary referent for ideas about exploitation of relevant environments and the adaptation of a population is to reason fallaciously. We must consider black adaptation not only to natural features in the environment, but also to social and political features." (Whitten 1974:8) As for socio-cultural influences, blacks have integrated indigenous and Spanish cultural practices with the African cultural traditions they brought with them. Initially during the colonial period, the indigenous peoples were responsible for resetting many cultural patterns (housing, fishing, agricultural practices, etc.) for newly arrived slaves through their extended contact (as indentured labor for the Spanish colonists) with the Afro-Colombians. Through this process of population encounters, much was shared between the indigenous and black populations. Over time, "the continuation of expansion of mining activity near the beginning of the 18th century mark[ed] the near total obliteration of native cultures in this area and the rapid expansion of Afro-Hispanic culture" (Whitten 1974:43). Nonetheless, indigenous patterns can still be seen in many

²⁰ West (1957) claimed that this social practice was disappearing. Whitten, however, argues that this practice is still common, having been adapted to new socio-economic conditions (1985 preface in Whitten 1974:xvi).

of the contemporary Afro-Colombian socio-cultural practices.²¹

[section missing on the influence of Spanish culture]

The political economy, which has influenced the cultures of the region, has been shaped not only directly by the environment (subsistence living) and by the history of slavery and colonization, but also by the post-colonial economic patterns, the sporadic influxes of "boom-bust" capitalist exploitation of the region's natural resources. While economic "booms" have lead to temporary use and inclusion in a market economy, during "bust" periods, the locals would revert back to a subsistence economy. Whitten has called this pattern one of attempting to "balance between a *proletarian strategy* and a *peasant strategy* in the boom-bust political economy." (Whitten 1974:8-9)²²

In spite of these sporadic influxes of capitalist exploitation, the people and their cultural practices have survived, creating a unique cultural identity, a product of hundreds of years of syncretism and adaptation of African, Spanish, and indigenous cultural forms. In fact, this "cultural identity has become a strategy for survival: it has been a source of resistance as well as of a capacity for adaptation, all of which has be recounted through oral tradition" (Pedrosa and Vanín 1993:69). Moreover, despite the fact that the region has been geographically, socially,

²¹ And vice versa, within the indigenous groups who have persisted in the region. Drawing from the work of de Friedemann (1977) Bermudez tells us that "[t]he Embera groups of [the] region display a very interesting ritual paraphernalia of mixed African and Amerindian origin. For instance, the ritual sticks carved out of hardwood, representing one of the most important elements of the *jaibanaá* (Embera shaman) have the same features of similar sticks made in Angola and Zaire. This confluence of cultures is also present in their music" (Bermudez 1994:230).

²² Whitten also talks about the way race relations and racism effect these patterns of adaptation and survival. This issue is discussed in more detail in the section of this thesis on racial ideology and black identity and community development.

politically, and economically marginalized, "the concepts of geographic and economic marginality do not imply cultural, psychological, or social inadequacy. Rather, they imply a relatively autonomous position *vis-à-vis* centralizing forces of state sponsored development....We must not confuse the marginality of a zone with the richness of the culture of people in the area" (Whitten 1974:5-6).

* * * * *

Today, there is a new, great influx of outside culture, particularly that of the western, industrialized world -- economic, political, cultural, social -- succinctly captured in the "development" (modernization) initiatives which appear to be permanent rather than temporary. What is not clear is how the Afro-Colombian population will adapt to this new onslaught of cultural invasion from the outside.

"The urban-industrial modernization of the region and the increasing commercial trade with Pacific Rim countries may have an homogenizing effect on the cultures of the region. The andino [interior] cultures closest to the PCR are those of Antioquia and Cauca [two *departamentos*; Antioquia is not a part of the region proper but Cauca is]. These external cultures are representations of nationality and modernization. They compete and cooperate in their models of urbanization and industrialization of the PCR, ignoring, excluding, and eroding the afrolatino and indigenous cultures" (Pedrosa 1994:2-3).

In addition to the dominant popular culture forms which are invading the region, these dominant ideologies and practices of "development" are making their mark on local cultural practices. For example, PLADEICOP and Plan Pacifico both call for increased building of the infrastructure. This has been happening, albeit slowly due to bureaucratic inefficiency. The extent and magnitude of these recent mega-plans for development distinguish them from past capitalist influxes into the region. This means that the "adaptive strategies" will have to shift significantly -- will involve preserving oral

traditions, new ethnic mobilizations, alternative development projects, protection of the environment, securing land rights, dealing with the problems of increased urbanization, etc. Some older adaptive strategies, such as kinship ties, may not be as relevant as before. Nonetheless, many strategies will need to adapt to these new conditions.

This encroachment on the region presents perhaps the greatest challenge ever to the adaptive abilities of the Afro-Colombian people. While some may argue that regional cultural traditions will disappear, others maintain that they will survive, in some form or another, through adaptation and syncretic processes. In fact, in speaking about how African cultures have persisted in some form or another in the "new world," Simpson asserts that "in the acculturative situation...philosophical principles and psychological attitudes are frequently more persistent and tenacious [than cultural forms] because they [may] exist below the level of consciousness" (Simpson 1972:12, quoted in Mintz and Price 1976:6). In the same way, we could surmise that Afro-Colombian culture, which has been evolving for hundreds of years, will survive, perhaps in less tangible ways, as the region encounters "modernity." The forms may not be the same, but the deeper, sub-conscious aspects of Afro-Colombian culture shall persist at the level of interpersonal relationships and expressive behavior.²³

This does not mean to say, however, that the sub-conscious aspects of culture do not change either. This is inevitable in any major shift of

²³ This phenomena is evident in my own life. As a third generation Japanese American, after having studied Japanese culture and lived in Japan, I can now see where and how intangible elements (nuanced sentiments, manners of expression, etc.) of Japanese culture have permeated my life. Prior to studying the culture and living in Japan, however, such elements remained sub-conscious, outside of the realm of conscious recognition and yet at the same time integral to my sense of self, manners of relating to others and self expression, and ways of understanding life around me.

location (e.g., movement out of whole communities in Africa to heterogeneous mixtures of African peoples in the "new world") or modes of expression (e.g., the shift from oral-based traditions to literate and technological forms of communication). The point is more that complex shifts do occur; it is neither a wholesale erasure of culture nor an contained preservation of traditions intact. What is key is the degree to which cultural forms are empowered or dominated and how those positions consequently effect the changes that occur.

History of economic practices and "development" in the region

"The mines of the wet Pacific littoral seem to have been instrumental in stimulating the economies of New Granada. Critical in the mining complex were the black men and women, slave and free." (Whitten 1974:43)

As in the U.S., the economic well-being of the nation, as well as the rise of global capitalism, was in great part due to the slave labor of Africans in Colombia (and throughout Latin America), without which national and global economic growth would not have been possible.

Historically, the economy of the PCR has been characterized as having two systems: a subsistence/barter economy and a capitalist economy. Because of the shifting national and international demands for various products in the PCR, starting with gold during the colonial period, the pattern of capital economic presence in the region can be best described as boom-bust. Since the colonial period national and international interests have come into the region to exploit the mineral and precious metals resources. Gold, platinum, and silver have been extracted, at first with slave (blacks) and indentured (indians) labor, and after the abolition of slavery, cheap paid labor. In this century, prior to World War II, demands for tagua, rubber, timber, rice, shellfish, tannic acid, coconut, and dried fish continued to cause

fluctuations in the basic rhythms of the local economies. Today, the timber industry is still going strong and shellfish cultivation has blossomed into a full blown international industry in the last few decades. Such uneven and exploitative extraction has often left in its wake a mass of environmental destruction and disrupted local subsistence economies/ways of life. For the most part, in the past, the Afro-Colombian populations survived and adjusted to these patterns of boom-bust economies, returning to their subsistence practices once a boom was over (Whitten 1974).

The boom-bust pattern was common, subjecting the population to at times drastic changes in their lifestyles. During boom periods, "the means by which inputs of money [were] made [were] generally the same: 1. a center of operations is established where access to supply and access to the shipping lanes [was] advantageous; 2. white and mestizo outsiders [took] up residence at the center, and purchase[d] the desired product which [was] gathered by blacks, zambos, mulattoes, and indians." (Whitten 1974:76) This pattern is still present today in the sense that it is outsiders who control the capital and reap the profits. The local population provides an increasing amount of cheap wage labor (especially in the timber, aquaculture, and mining industries) as the region moves more and more into a seemingly permanent cash economy. "The manner by which man exploits man in the Pacific littoral is in itself dependent on external exploitation strategies, and on the degree of penetration of national infrastructure which creates a series of niches within which adaptive strategies take place." (Whitten 1974:77)

Prior to 1980, the Pacific Coast region (PCR) of Colombia was rarely viewed as having any significance for the rest of the country. Geographically, politically, economically, socially and culturally isolated,

this region and its inhabitants might as well have been on another continent.²⁴ As mentioned, since the colonial period, the PCR has experienced periods of economic boom and bust, mostly due to private mining enterprises. However, these periodic invasions never resulted in significant settlement by non-Afro-Colombians,²⁵ nor has it provoked sustained contact with the interior. For the most part, the development of Colombian nationhood, culture, politics and identity has not significantly included the geographic region of the PCR nor its inhabitants. Thus, it would not be unfair to say that prior to the early 1980s, Colombia assumed the PCR was unessential for national development.

Today, however, the PCR is viewed as a valuable source of vast quantities of material resources (timber, rain forest biodiversity, aquaculture products, and minerals and precious metals) and of significant geo-political importance, namely, as a link to the Pacific Rim countries and their economies. The doctrine of "apertura economica"²⁶ now dominates all official discussion about the PCR and its importance for Colombia. Now that the region is economically and politically indispensable, grandiose plans for "development" have been invoked (and to a lesser degree, carried out in practice). There is too much at stake, from the government's point of view,

²⁴ Historically, the Cauca Valley is the only part of the interior which has had significant and extended contact with the PCR, not just via the "carretera al mar" (the highway between Cali in the Cauca Valley and Buenaventura on the Pacific Coast) through which almost all trade was passed, but also through the constant migration of a post-slavery Afro-Colombian labor force. Without these black laborers, the agricultural (sugar cane), and more recently, industrial and construction businesses in the Cauca Valley would not be what they are today.

²⁵ Obviously, before colonization, the indigenous peoples populated this area. However, due to the tremendous impact of colonization, the indigenous population was decimated.

²⁶ This translates as "economic opening" and in general, refers to world markets. However, the Colombian government is specifically interested in the integration of the Colombian economy into the Pacific Basin economic system.

to continue to ignore this region of the country. However, socially and culturally, the region remains marginalized; the rest of the country does not need, recognize, or value its majority black population (except as a source of cheap labor) or its unique socio-cultural reality.

Since 1982, with the presidency of Belasario Betancur, the PCR has become the focus of concerted attention with the object in mind to "develop" the region. Under Betancur's administration, the "Plan de Desarrollo Integral para la Costa Pacífica," or PLADEICOP, was drawn up and, under the auspices of UNICEF and the Departamento Nacional de Planeación (DNP), the Corporación Autónoma Regional del Cauca (CVC)²⁷ was granted authority to coordinate, direct, and execute the objectives of PLADEICOP. More recently, under the administration of the current president César Gaviria Trujillo, another new plan for developing the PCR has been initiated, otherwise known as Plan Pacífico para el Desarrollo Sostenible de la Costa Pacífica.

This larger economic and geo-political focus of development for the PCR is reflected in the other initiatives now in various stages of planning, by different governmental entities. These projects include a new Atlantic-Pacific canal, proposed to run from the Gulf of Urabá (in the Atlantic Coast), through the Atrato river to the Pacific Ocean. There is also the possibility of exploitation of mineral deposits in the floor of the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Chocó. This would include the construction of a plant to process magnesium, nickel, copper and cobalt. The government also wants to create a master plan for maritime development under the auspices of the Center for

²⁷ The CVC was created in the early 1950s by local capitalists and was patterned after the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), with funding from the World Bank. One of the technical advisors for the creation of the CVC was David Lilienthal, the creator of the TVA. The purpose of the CVC was to rationalize regional development through the management of water in the Cauca Valley River Basin. This became the motor for consequent capitalist development in the valley.

Oceanographic and Hydrographic Research of the Navy. The Center's basic purpose would be to oversee the "optimal but rational" use of marine resources in both the Pacific and Atlantic Coasts. In addition, there is a plan to construct a massive aluminum processing plant in Buenaventura. A new naval base in the Bay of Málaga has already been approved by CONPES (Council on Economic and Social Policy/Consejo de Política Económica y Social) which will require major dredging of the bay, the construction of a large wharf and various other infrastructure to handle the large ships which will dock at the base. Finally, a program to generate hydroelectric power is in the works. Given the hydrodynamic capacity within the region, the government hopes to exploit this resource and well the energy to the rest of the country. Many of these projects will require a great deal of international cooperation and financing.

With the recent advent of organized regional development, namely, PLADEICOP, Plan Pacífico, and Proyecto Biopacífico (the three major government initiatives for development of the region), significant and fundamental changes are occurring in the PCR, not only in the economy but in the entire socio-cultural milieu. The economy has shifted almost entirely to a money based economy. This has created new dependencies on wage labor; people need buying power to purchase products which they had previously produced themselves or acquired through a barter economy. Workers are at the mercy of employers, most often outside "whites" or foreigners who have the capital to set up and run the growing number of exploitative industries and businesses in the PCR (timber, mining, fishing, tourism, limited agriculture and livestock). Increasing urbanization has created a slew of new dilemmas -- housing, health, education, energy, transportation, and social service needs. The environment

has suffered greatly (over fishing, destruction of mangroves and the rain forest, erosion, destruction of the biodiversity, contamination, etc.). Socially and culturally the region is now exposed to an onslaught of dominant cultural forms and their accompanying practices of social organization (e.g., bureaucracies replace the older social networks of organization). Whereas past patterns of capital infiltrations into the region were sporadic and temporary, the current patterns are permanent and continually expanding. What remains to be seen is how the Afro-Colombian communities will respond -- socially, culturally, economically, and politically -- to these new hegemonic forms of cultural and capitalist influx. Historically, black and indigenous peoples have adjusted or at least survived in the PCR. However, this new era marks a significant change in the type of struggle confronting the Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities. Development has come to play in the PCR and shows no signs of leaving any time soon. What will be the response of the people? The events of the next 10-20 years will be very telling indeed.

If the rest of the Third World serves as any example, these projects could lead to increased dependence and debt on the part of Colombia, massive environmental destruction and pollution, and general continued upheaval and degradation of the lives and livelihoods of the people of the region. These projects are clearly ultimately geared toward national and international economic and political interests, the least concerns of which are the environment and the socio-cultural milieu of the PCR. To continue development in the region on such a massive scale does not bode well for the Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities nor for the environment.

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