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Social Class and Ethnicity/Race in the Dynamics of Indigenous Peasant Movements

The Case of the CRIC in Colombia

by
Jasmin Hristov

Examination of the experiences of one contemporary Latin American indigenous rural movement, the Indigenous Regional Council of Cauca (CRIC), demonstrates the centrality to those experiences of resource expropriation, exploitation, and military repression. At the same time, it draws attention to the ways in which the cultural history of the indigenous people of Cauca has shaped their strategies of resistance. Out of this analysis arises the argument that forms of oppression along the lines of class and ethnicity/race are inextricably linked and that an intersectional approach is required to capture the dynamics and complexities of these movements.

Keywords: *Indigenous movements, Peasants, Colombia, Race/ethnicity, Postmodernism*

*Words without actions are empty words. Actions without words are blind actions.
Words and actions without community spirit are death.*

—Nasa proverb

The neoliberal model, which has dominated economic and social policy making in Latin America since at least the 1980s, emphasizes the elimination of state activities that do not signify immediate gains for large private enterprises and seeks to facilitate corporations' access to resources, labor, and markets. The detrimental impacts of neoliberal policies¹ are clearly evident as the already precarious existence of millions of people deteriorates further, inequalities widen, labor rights are assaulted, sustainable livelihoods are destroyed, the number of landless rural residents increases, and social development declines. The discontent of those impoverished by market-oriented restructuring has found expression in diverse popular struggles that exhibit unprecedented organizational capacity.

Peasant mobilizations in particular constitute the most dynamic force for resisting neoliberalism and constructing alternatives (Veltmeyer and Petras, 2000). Frequently, a great part of the constituency of these rural movements is indigenous. In Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Mexico, and Guatemala, indigenous peoples have been at the forefront of popular organizing aimed

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at challenging the growing proletarianization of rural residents, the further impoverishment of the working majority, the increasing subordination of the national economy to foreign capitalist interests, and the assault on human rights and civil liberties that has accompanied the imposition of the neoliberal model from above.

Indigenous peoples' organizing in the context of neoliberal globalization has been treated in much of the recent academic literature in ahistorical, ideological, and objectifying ways. In particular, scholarship employing theoretical frameworks of a postmodernist orientation (such as new-social-movements theory, influenced generally by post-Marxist trends and subaltern studies) is characterized by lack of attention to the role of class inequalities, class struggle, and state power in the formation and trajectories of indigenous movements. At the same time, the work of scholars such as Petras and Veltmeyer (2001; 2002; 2003), Brass (2003a), and Mooers and Sears (1992) shows that a Marxist framework is indispensable to a more holistic understanding of the conditions under which the majority of rural residents throughout Latin America live and the prospects for social change and the building of alternatives. More important, in a number of cases it is the movements themselves that have reminded intellectuals that a consideration of concrete material reality should form an integral part of social science research that seeks to illuminate the key issues faced by many indigenous communities. This paper will analyze the relationship between social class and ethnicity/race as it manifests itself in the formation, struggles, and goals of Colombia's Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca (Indigenous Regional Council of Cauca—CRIC) and in its relationship with the state and role in national social, economic, and political transformation. It will demonstrate that social class and ethnicity/race and culture are inextricably linked and cannot be viewed in isolation from one another when examining the causes of social inequalities and the struggles against them. It will also show that concepts such as ethnicity, culture, and identity are fluid, multisided, and socially negotiated—that their meanings are to a considerable extent contingent upon the social structure and especially the economic and political interests of the groups that control official knowledge production.

The philosophy guiding the analysis in this work rests on Marx and Engels's (1968) idea that true liberation can be achieved only in the real world and by real means. "People cannot be liberated as long as they are unable to obtain food and drink, housing and clothing in adequate quality and quantity" (Marx and Engels, 1968: 56). This vision calls for a critical, active, humanizing, and accountable social research grounded in principles of social justice and aimed at transforming material conditions. Therefore the methodological approach of this paper is influenced by Paulo Freire's (1970) pedagogy of liberation, one of the pillars of which is the idea that if our research is to contribute to social transformation, the topics we study must emerge from people's concrete realities and experiences. Similarly, the scientific method developed by Marx and Engels, historical dialectical materialism, is based on the premise that the point of departure for historians and social scientists must be the material production of life itself—people and the processes that affect their daily survival. Comprehending the causes of the emergence of indigenous movements and the courses and outcomes of their resistance therefore requires an intersectional approach in which class-based and antiracist frameworks complement

each other. In addition to the existing academic literature and the materials produced by international human rights organizations, the analysis will draw on declarations, communiqués, and other documents issued by the CRIC and in-depth interviews conducted with CRIC members in Colombia in August 2004.

The paper begins with an overview of the key premises of the postmodernist framework that have guided scholars of Latin American indigenous rural movements. The following section establishes the context within which the CRIC exists by providing a brief description of economic, social, and political trends and conditions in Colombia. The next traces the historical processes that have led to the emergence of the movement and is followed by a description of its goals, strategies, values, achievements, current activities, and challenges. The rest of the paper examines themes pertaining to the CRIC's origin and functioning that reveal the interconnectedness between class and ethnicity/race. This part of the analysis serves as the foundation for a critique of the postmodernist approach. In particular, it examines the implications of many postmodernist works' disregard for unequal economic power relations, the activities of the state's coercive apparatus, and the heterogeneity and contradictions within indigenous groups and their transformation of the notion of "indigenous" into an ideological category.

POSTMODERNISM AND LATIN AMERICAN INDIGENOUS MOVEMENTS

It is hard to find a precise definition of "postmodernism." In this work I draw attention to identity-centered theories that concentrate on the processes by which social actors construct collective identities. Predominant among studies of this sort of Latin American rural mobilization is new-social-movements theory, key proponents of which have been Laclau (1985) and Melucci (1989). In addition, the subaltern studies approach, initiated by Guha (1982–1989), has influenced some of the Latin Americanist literature in this field. Both of these explicitly reject a Marxist framework and shift the analytical focus away from politics, economics, and history toward culture and literature (Brass, 2003a). Postmodernist theorists argue that in Latin America the 1980s and 1990s were characterized by the emergence of new movements and the restructuring of existing ones. The subjects participating in these movements are seen as acting in more spontaneous, democratic, decentralized, and participatory ways that allow direct interaction with the rest of civil society in the realm of everyday life (Hellman, 1995). Newly formed or reformed rural organizing along gender, ethnic, or ecological lines is thought to possess an empowering form of agency within capitalism arising primarily from its apolitical and antistate character and its goal of preserving and celebrating ethnic identity and traditional culture (Brass, 2003a): "The transformatory potential within new social movements is not political, but socio-cultural" (Evers, 1985: 49).

For the purposes of this paper, it is important to identify two main premises of new-social-movements theory. The first is that the state is irrelevant to the goals and outcomes of opposition movements and to the difficulties they face (Moore and Sears, 1992). According to Escobar and Alvarez (1992), whereas

Marxism views movements as actors struggling for control of the state, the new theories see contemporary social movements as bringing about a fundamental transformation in the nature of political practice. These writers assume, however, that such a transformation can somehow occur without any systemic change in state structure and policies. Evers (cited in Slater, 1985: 5), expresses this line of thinking: "It is the continuous effort at democratization that matters, not some mythical 'D' day on which some winter palace is stormed." The second premise is that the common denominator of all new social movements is their differentiation from workers' struggles, which are considered class struggles (Slater, 1985). Instead of studying class inequality and class conflict, the focus is on acknowledging the existence of a multitude of identities, the process by which they get constructed, and their attempts to create democratic spaces outside the state in which they can be expressed: "In the new situation, a multiplicity of social actors establish their presence and spheres of autonomy in a fragmented social-political space" (Escobar and Alvarez, 1992: 3).

These two premises have guided postmodernist theorists of Latin American rural movements such as Slater (1985), Evers (1985), Findji (1992), Escobar and Alvarez (1992), Albó (1993), Beverly, Oviedo, and Aronna (1993), Assies (2000), Warren and Jackson (2002), Gow and Rappaport (2002), and Reed (2003). Their works are in general underlain by the idea that contemporary activism constitutes a break with past rebellious politics and practices in that it represents a quest for an autonomous identity out of which new forms of politics emerge. In his work on identity formation among new social movements in Latin America, Evers (1985), for instance, claims that the contribution of these movements is not enhancing the political potential of a revolutionary left but rescuing social life from it—that the essence of these movements is their capacity to generate a new social subjectivity. Indigenous organizing, in particular, is seen as an attempt to recover some specific fragments of identity and reconstitute an indigenous nation, which is regarded as an authentic "from-below" phenomenon (Brass, 2003a).

SOCIOECONOMIC AND POLITICAL TRENDS AND CONDITIONS IN COLOMBIA SINCE THE 1980s

It is impossible to comprehend the issues faced by indigenous people in Cauca without examining the social, economic, and political context in which they arise. Colombia's history since colonial times has been characterized by the concentration of resources and wealth in the hands of a minority of the population, precarious living conditions and lack of economic security for the majority, lack of autonomy of the state from the elite and foreign corporations, considerable control of national resources and sectors of the economy by foreign enterprises, and the inability or unwillingness of the state to respond to the pressing needs of the majority of its citizens. All of these processes have accelerated considerably in the past 20–25 years with the onset of neoliberalism.

The official adoption of neoliberal policies by Latin American governments was largely a response to pressure to service their external debts exerted in the late 1970s by multilateral agencies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Since 1990 the Colombian elite has actively promoted

the neoliberal model, and that model has been carried to extremes by president Álvaro Uribe Vélez.² As a result, poverty and inequality have been seriously aggravated. Almost 20 years of market-oriented restructuring have led to considerable deterioration of the living conditions of all social classes except for the top 10 percent of the population, who appropriate the economic surplus produced by the majority. In 1990 the ratio of income between the poorest and the richest 10 percent was 40:1, and by 2000 this figure had become 80:1 (Stokes, 2005). In a country of 45 million, 11 million people cannot afford even one nutritious meal a day (*Colombia Week*, February 9, 2004). According to statistics from 2000, 61.5 percent of Colombians are unable to adequately satisfy basic subsistence needs on a regular basis. In rural areas, the poverty rate is as high as 85 percent (Molano, 2005). In 2000 it was estimated that over half of the country's children suffered from malnutrition and more than 1.6 million children worked. Furthermore, there has been a notable decline in school attendance, literacy, and life expectancy (*Colombia Week*, February 9, 2004).

The political landscape of Colombia has long been characterized by violence employed by those who have the power to control land and other natural resources, recruit labor, maintain pools of low-paid labor, and eliminate or suppress dissent. In the context of the current economic model, not all those marginalized by it have been passive victims. In addition to indigenous assemblies, the country has a wide range of popular movements involving small-scale farmers, rural workers, trade unions, women, and students. During the 1990s, as poverty, inequality, and the subordination of the country to global capital interests deepened, the organizational capacity and activities of these social movements increased significantly. The response of the state has been to further neoliberal restructuring while seeking to eliminate by various means any attempt to bring about change and build alternative models of development.

In order to accomplish these two objectives, the state has transformed itself into a mechanism for the production and administration of terror. Acts of terror against the civilian population³ are carried out by the state's coercive apparatus (state army, police, and other security bodies) and its extension, the paramilitary.⁴ The operations of these two are manifested in state-sanctioned violence (arbitrary detentions, raids, intimidation, beatings, indiscriminate bombing, torture, sexual abuse, and murder) and militarization (increased control of certain areas and their inhabitants by the military, increase in the number of military bases, increased autonomy and immunity for security forces, and subordination of civil law enforcement to military security doctrines). The consolidation of this mechanism for the production and administration of terror has been disguised by the term "war on terror," which was created following September 11, 2001, when combating terrorism was declared the first priority of George W. Bush's administration.⁵

HISTORICAL CONDITIONS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

Since many of the economically valuable resources in Colombia are found in areas inhabited by indigenous populations, these territories have historically have been the object of multiple incursions, from the initial colonization

by Spanish soldiers and missionaries to those of a variety of commercial enterprises (ranching, lumber and oil exploitation, drug trafficking) and of the state itself (Hristov, 2005). Whereas at the time of the Spanish conquest the indigenous people of Colombia numbered approximately 10 million, today they amount to no more than 800,000 (ICHRDD, 2001).

The Department of Cauca,⁶ in southwestern Colombia, has one of the largest concentrations of indigenous peoples, including the Nasa, Coconucos, Guambianos, and Yanacona. The colonization of this region began in the sixteenth century, when gold and silver mines were established by the Spanish. Through coercive mechanisms such as the *encomienda*,⁷ the colonizers appropriated the labor power of the local population, since many Europeans had amassed large rural properties (haciendas) on which to raise crops and livestock. Production relations on these estates followed the pattern familiar throughout Latin America: landlords leased plots of land to smallholding tenants (*peones*) in exchange for compulsory labor service (Hristov, 2005). By the second half of the nineteenth century, as commercial agriculture in Cauca grew in importance, many latifundia evicted tenants with usufruct rights to land and replaced them with day laborers paid only a cash wage (Appelbaum, 2003).

In response to the rapid decrease in the indigenous population at the end of the sixteenth century, the Spanish crown awarded such communities titles to plots of land known as *resguardos*, 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). A process leading to the eventual elimination of the *resguardo* began in the 1700s and accelerated after the creation of the independent nation-state in 1810. At that time *resguardos* came under attack both by landowners and by the Colombian state, both of which perceived indigenous community possession of land as incompatible with capitalist development and hence an obstacle to the realization of a transition to a modern market economy. By the mid-nineteenth century, *resguardos* were subject to partition, and private ownership of these lands was obtained through inheritance claims or purchase. The apportioning of titles was subject to manipulation and differentiated indigenous communities internally in terms of economic status. There were cases in which *cabildo* officers or leaders benefited from the division of their communal lands by establishing alliances with neighbors in a position of power. Most of the gains were made, however, not by indigenous inhabitants but by outsiders, who were able to amass large holdings or multiple individual plots that totaled hundreds of hectares (Ortiz, 1973). Eventually, most *resguardos* were expropriated and transformed into large rural estates privately owned by the white elite (McGreevey, 1971; Feder, 1972; Barraclough, 1973).

The Nasa *resguardos* (the principal source of the CRIC's constituency) in the Tierradentro region of Cauca had a slightly different experience, 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 coexisted. Here the peasantry was economically heterogeneous and differentiated in terms of access to and control over resources. The *cabildo* was responsible for maintaining a balance between communally and individually held property.

By the 1970s (at the time the CRIC was created), most of the Nasa were involved in subsistence or small-scale agriculture combined with employment on haciendas and plantations. Most whites, by contrast, were either landowners/employers or intermediaries between indigenous smallholders and markets (Ortiz, 1973). In all cases, the increasing impoverishment of these rural communities was the result of the separation of peasants from their land. Even those who had managed to retain small plots of land faced poverty, since they could not produce enough to meet the needs of their families (Hristov, 2005). 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. Consequently, many were compelled to take on external jobs regardless of how low the wage was. Poor indigenous peasants could neither fully participate in the capitalist system, competing with white/mestizo landlords on equal terms, nor entirely escape it (Berglund, 1982). Consequently, their economic participation in the capitalist system served to reproduce inequality and lack of political power.

THE CRIC: VISIONS, STRATEGIES, ACCOMPLISHMENTS, AND CHALLENGES

Regarded as Colombia's most politically advanced organization for defending the collective and territorial rights of indigenous people, the CRIC was formed in 1971, when delegates from various parts of Cauca gathered in the town of Toribio to voice their common concerns (Pearce, 1990). Significantly, they came from areas where communities had been subject to the most severe attacks by landowners and the majority of the *resguardos* had been absorbed into haciendas. Thus, the main cause of the mobilization was diminishing access to cultivable land. At this assembly, the CRIC developed a program the goal of which was the realization of its people's autonomy, including recovery and extension of lands belonging to the *resguardos*, strengthening of the *cabildos*, abolition of labor-rent payments, implementation of local-level indigenous law, defense of indigenous cultural practices (history, language, customs, institutions), and incorporation into the existing educational system (CINEP, 1978). The first of these points remains the principal objective of the organization today. The structure of the CRIC is grounded in the democratic principle of leadership that is accountable to and constantly consults with the membership. Its governing body is composed of two representatives from each member *cabildo* (Berglund, 1982).

Given the centrality of land to its program, the main form of collective action undertaken by the CRIC has been land occupations in cases in which the available legal measures for obtaining land have been exhausted (Hristov, 2005). Two patterns of land tenure are practiced on the reconstituted *resguardos*. The most common one is communal property, which entails the distribution of usufruct rights by the *cabildo*. The other is the private ownership of smallholdings (CINEP, 1978). According to the CRIC, community interest must be placed before personal interests and gains. Therefore, most of the recovered lands are

worked in a communitarian way; often semicollective farms are set up by those who have participated directly in the recovery of the land. These farms, cooperatives, and collective stores provide credit to each other, since it is difficult to obtain such support from the government. The surplus from a cooperative is allocated collectively to benefit the whole community through the further education of children and adults, the financing of the travel of representatives to conferences, and payment for the judicial defense of imprisoned members (Berglund, 1982).

One of the substantial achievements of the CRIC has been the weakening of the pillars of political and ideological domination by the elite via the state and of the power of the Church. A second has been the formal recognition of indigenous rights in the 1991 Constitution (Hristov, 2005). A third has been setting an example for other indigenous populations throughout the country to follow in defending their collective interests and rights. The Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia (National Indigenous Organization of Colombia—ONIC), founded in 1982, united the struggles of various groups for the recognition and legalization of territory and aboriginal systems of justice as well as the right to teach native languages in local schools and provide traditional health care. As a result, some territories outside of the Department of Cauca have been recovered (ICHRDD, 2001).

By far the most important gain of CRIC's organized resistance has been counteracting economic exploitation and the erosion of the economic bases of rural communities. From the viewpoint of the membership and supporters of the CRIC, the principal benefit of the mobilization thus far has been its impact on their landholding status. At present, in the Department of Cauca four types of land ownership can be distinguished: large agri-businesses, small-scale farms, family farms of up to 3.5 hectares, and collective farms (the last two being the dominant forms in indigenous communities) (World Bank, 2004). According to the CRIC, the *resguardo* to some extent counteracted the process of proletarianization and helped former tenant farmers and smallholders to maintain control over their own labor power. This has been possible through the establishment of grassroots economic organizations (semicollective farms, cooperatives, and collective stores) that have increased the economic autonomy of the Nasa by enhancing their bargaining capacity vis-à-vis local landowners and providing small amounts of credit for cultivation (Hristov, 2005).

Of course, of central importance to all this has been the recovery of ancestral territories. By the late 1970s some 12,000 hectares of land had already had been recovered, there were 50 collective stores and 25 semicollective farms, and illiteracy had been greatly reduced (CINEP, 1978). By 1986 some 40 *cabildos* had been reestablished and around 30,000 hectares of land recovered (Pearce, 1990). Today, after 35 years of peaceful and persistent collective action, the accomplishments of the indigenous people of Cauca include (1) the recovery of more than 60,000 hectares of ancestral land, representing 80 percent of the land on which the indigenous people of the Department of Cauca currently reside, (2) reduced illiteracy and increased conscientization among indigenous communities, and (3) the revival of indigenous languages, culture, and medicine (group interview, CRIC leaders, Santander de Quilichao, August 16, 2004). The efforts of the movement to enhance the

social development and economic sustainability of indigenous communities through various collective grassroots projects have been internationally recognized (see ACIN-CRIC, 2004).

Notwithstanding all these accomplishments, the struggle against deprivation, institutionalized injustice, and the violation of human rights by authorities is not over. Despite the CRIC's strong organizing capacity and impressive record of recovered territories, the majority of indigenous people remain impoverished, subordinated, marginalized, and terrorized.

Most of the country's legally recognized indigenous territories have limited agricultural potential. One reason is that many of them are situated in the Amazon rain forest, but even in the departments of Cauca, Nariño, Tolima, and Cordoba much of the land to which indigenous people have title is unsuitable either for agriculture or for cattle-raising (CMIC, 2005). Further, the proletarianization of peasants has accelerated since the mid-1990s as a consequence of the expansion of the agro-export sector that is part of the neoliberal restructuring of the economy. Landless peasants are forced to work on sugarcane plantations or cattle ranches or migrate to the nearby cities. Most of these jobs are temporary, with low pay and no security (IDRC, 1998). Both of these issues are directly linked to the issue of land concentration—15,000 people (among them President Uribe) own 50 percent of Colombia's cultivable land (CMIC, 2005). In the Department of Cauca, the indigenous occupy 20 percent of the territory, while the rest remains concentrated in the hands of 4.5 percent of the population (World Bank, 2004).

In addition to precarious living conditions, racist attitudes, stereotypes, and practices—a lasting legacy of colonialism—have become part of everyday life for many indigenous people. Several forms of racism are currently prevalent in Colombian society. The first one is systemic,⁸ embedded in the economic and political system that has systematically dispossessed communities of their means of subsistence and placed them in a subservient position. As a result, indigenous people perform the heavy agricultural tasks on large-scale farms, work in factories and at construction sites, clean washrooms and streets, carry people's luggage at bus and train stations, work as servants in middle- and upper-class households, and so on. The same people who engage in these manual and often physically intensive and dangerous jobs have limited access to even minimal public health care and education facilities.

Closely linked to this, institutional racism⁹ is also present in this society. It operates in two ways. First, institutional barriers prevent indigenous people from finding secure, well-paid, and skilled jobs. One such barrier is their low educational level, itself a consequence of systemic racism, and another is arbitrarily set job requirements such as speaking Spanish without an accent and wearing "non-Indian" and relatively expensive attire. Second, indigenous people have limited access to the services provided by the various institutions.¹⁰

Cultural racism¹¹ is yet another form that can be identified in this country. The devalorization of indigenous languages, cultures, dress, and music and beliefs about the superiority of colonial architecture, the Spanish (and now English) language, and Western (U.S. and European) fashion and music constitute manifestations of this version of racism. Further, there is the coexistence of a formally democratic political system with a social structure in which racism is deeply embedded, a situation identified by Henry et al. (2000) as

democratic racism.¹² Lastly, individual racism is widespread and no less harmful. From everyday informal conversations with ordinary citizens and even individuals in positions of power it is possible to recognize it in the stereotypes held, jokes told, and labels imposed on many indigenous people.

Since the formation of the CRIC, the dominant class of Cauca, supported by the state's coercive apparatus, has attempted to eliminate it through systematic repression that has been justified by portraying its political activities as a threat to public order. Members of the CRIC have been murdered, arrested, and tortured, their crops destroyed, and their cooperatives attacked. During its first 10 years 40 leaders were murdered and 60 were imprisoned and tortured, and by 2001 the number of those murdered had risen to 515 (CINEP, 1978; group interview, members of the CRIC, Santander de Quilichao, August 16, 2004). All of the initiatives and accomplishments in the areas of economic, social, and cultural development are constantly being undermined by violence. One of the main reasons for the constant targeting of the CRIC by the state's coercive apparatus is that the organization's struggles have produced concrete evidence of the viability of alternative socioeconomic models. The way in which the productive capacities of communities have been organized is consistent with a humane and inclusive vision of progress as a process that sustains equality and nurtures life. Their autonomy consists precisely of their ability to exercise control over land and resources and to ensure work opportunities, strengthening of internal markets, and, most important, an equitable distribution of benefits, all of which facilitate the advancement of self-sufficiency and human development (Hristov, 2005). The CRIC's demonstration that another Colombia is possible and necessary runs counter to the key requirements of capital—control over resources and the availability of laborers willing to work at any price in order to survive.

THE INTERRELATEDNESS OF CLASS AND ETHNICITY/RACE

In order to capture fully the dialectical relationship between class and race, I will first demonstrate the centrality of economic processes and inequalities to the experiences and collective identity formation of the Nasa by looking at the historical causes of racial and other forms of injustice, the movement's achievements in the sphere of conscientization, education, and cultural revival, and the goals and visions guiding its struggle. Second, I will identify the ways in which certain cultural-historical elements of the indigenous population in Cauca have shaped their sense of distinctiveness, advances in the area of social development, and strategies and forms of resistance.

When one looks at the various forms of oppression that many indigenous people continue to suffer today, the primacy of economic factors is undeniable. As Kearney and Varese (1995) put it, even after colonial rule was over, racism did not disappear but became part of the social structure based on class. For instance, the labeling of indigenous communities as "backward" and "uncivilized" was in reality due to their resistance to giving up their collective properties, which represented an obstacle for market forces and the individuals who would benefit from them. In the words of CRIC representatives at the National Indigenous Conference in 1980, "It is necessary to view

the indigenous problem in our country in relation to the expansion of capitalism into rural areas" (CINEP, 1978: 85).

Further, economic status is central in determining the extent to which an indigenous person will experience racism. The term *indio*—a disrespectful way of referring to someone of indigenous heritage—has acquired negative connotations such as "poor," "uneducated," "rough," or "mischievous" and has become a way of insulting someone regardless of ethnic background. At the same time, among the wealthy there are many who appear of non-European origin (in fact, much of the country's population is considered *mestizo*—of mixed indigenous and European heritage—even though some appear "white"). These wealthy individuals neither identify themselves as indigenous nor are seen by the rest of the society as such. People who can afford expensive cars, brand-name clothes of the latest fashion, up-scale restaurants and entertainment, gold jewelry, and so on, will not be normally called "indios" no matter how dark their skin or how much their features resemble those of the first inhabitants of the continent.

In addition to examining the sources of inferiorization of indigenous people and the current dynamics of this process, we can recognize the centrality of material conditions by looking at some of the features of the CRIC. First, although it has declared itself an indigenous organization, it does not in general identify with a particular indigenous group (although the majority of its members are Nasa), and this has led writers such as Jackson (2002) to argue that it is not ethnicity but social class that is its organizing principle. Similarly, Findji (1992) recognizes that no "ethnic" vision served as a frame of reference for the CRIC's creation. Secondly, as we have seen, the movement has made significant achievements in the area of cultural revival, education, health, and sustainable development and continues to do so through current projects. None of these initiatives would have been possible without first attaining a degree of control over land and resources, which has in turn made possible a reduced dependence on landowners and nonlocal markets for survival.

Thirdly, the movement's goals reflect the significance of economic inequality and the role of the movement in a wider class struggle. The principal element in its platform is the recovery and management of land and other productive resources in order to make possible a locally defined form of development. In its own words (CINEP, 1978: 86),

Many may hold the misconception that indigenous battles and claims represent merely a defensive action, trying to maintain certain beliefs and ways of the past which are inevitably going to be eliminated by progress; . . . but in our case, we look towards growth and development, and the construction of a new society with the rest of the oppressed of this country.

Since concentration of land ownership has been aggravated in the past 15 years by the acceleration of neoliberal restructuring and the increase in the power of paramilitary groups,¹³ it is not surprising that 27 years after the movement's inception access to land remains its primary goal. In a communiqué from October 18, 2005 (CMIC, 2005), the CRIC asked the government,

How many hectares per person do President Uribe, Governor Chaux, and the big landowners of Colombia possess? What proportion of the land of large-scale

landholders has been expropriated from indigenous and Afro-Colombian peasants? What is the relationship between war, economic and legal deprivation, and corporate and personal interests promoted by the state? Who can and who should carry out the agrarian reform for justice that is desperately needed in Colombia?

The continuity of the movement's focus on class and state power has been matched by the persistence of its strategy of land occupations, which have been met with brutal repression. The mobilizations in September and November 2005 illustrate the centrality of these phenomena to the CRIC's daily struggles. After waiting for the government to follow up on its numerous commitments to awarding collective land titles, between November 5 and 15, 2005, the CRIC held a peaceful occupation of the hacienda El Japio in the municipality of Caloto, northern Cauca. On November 8 it peacefully protested in front of the hacienda in order to invite the government to a dialogue about land titling. Around 2 p.m., a unit of the *Escuadrón Movil Antidisturbios* (Mobile Anti-Disturbances Squadron—ESMAD) arrived and tried to break up the protest using tear gas and shooting randomly into the air, injuring 10 persons. On November 9 at 6 a.m., some 150 members of the ESMAD violently entered the hacienda and engaged in repressive actions for six hours. At 4:30 p.m. on the same day, there was another violent attack by the ESMAD, leaving many injured. On November 10, 500 ESMAD agents equipped with tanks, tear gas, and explosives confronted 200 unarmed indigenous people. The former engaged in random shooting, causing the death of 16-year-old Belisario Camayo Guetoto and injuring 32 people. Many others were arbitrarily detained and physically abused (Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz, 2005). On November 12 the ESMAD sent at least 400 men, using tear gas, rubber bullets, explosives, and other weapons, to attack the villagers attending Camayo's funeral, and Marcelino Quitumbo and a number of children were seriously injured. Marcelino was kicked repeatedly, hit with sticks, and shot at with rubber bullets, which left his body covered with bruises and fractured his leg. On November 13 and 14 this kind of confrontation was repeated, including the detention and mistreatment of an indigenous deputy from Cauca (Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz, 2005).

The CRIC strongly believes in the importance of maintaining alliances with other oppressed groups and has repeatedly pointed to its role in a wider battle that extends beyond its immediate locality. It continues to be involved in popular mobilizations against issues that affect the working majority. For example, between September 13 and 15, 2004, more than 50,000 demonstrators (overwhelmingly indigenous) marched from Santander de Quilichao to Cali (100 km) to protest the human rights abuses of the army, the proposal of a constitutional amendment to allow Uribe to run for reelection, and the free-trade agreement that the government had been negotiating with the United States. The theme of the march was life, dignity, justice, happiness, freedom, and autonomy (Vieira, 2004).

Notwithstanding the material underpinnings of the Nasa struggles, I do not wish to play down the cultural and historical specificities that have shaped the CRIC's visions and modes of action. The Nasa believe that throughout their history since colonialism a spirit of unity has played a decisive role in their confrontations with the enemy. The movement has made it clear that cultural

and ethnic factors are of great significance to its philosophy (CINEP, 1978). One outstanding element of Nasa culture is the strong belief in the protection of life and a persistent commitment to nonviolent forms of resistance. Although the CRIC shares most of the philosophy of other social movements on the left, it does not permit trade unions or other organizations to direct its activities. Moreover, it has refused to join the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—FARC) or any other group reliant on armed force that, in its view, does not accept or respect its autonomy. For this reason, CRIC leaders and members have become military targets for the FARC.

CRITIQUE OF THE POSTMODERNIST APPROACH

Postmodernist theorists rightly point out that many current rural movements exhibit novel elements. The problem arises when they detach economic inequalities from their discussion of ethnic distinctiveness or, as in the case of subaltern studies, portray class formation, class struggle, and revolution as inherently nonindigenous (Brass, 2003b). I would like to problematize this one-sided analysis of indigenous movements along three major lines. First, it presents indigenous agency and resistance in isolation from the structural mechanisms of marginalization and the need for systemic social change. Secondly, it conceals the differentiation in terms of economic status and gender within a given indigenous group and, as a result, disregards the way in which the heterogeneity of a movement's constituency and its internal contradictions shape the outcomes of popular organizing. Thirdly, it ignores the way in which a discourse of ethnic communities and rights helps reproduce power inequalities.

As this paper has demonstrated, the relationship between economic impoverishment and racism and between material conditions and collective identity formation has been one of mutual reinforcement. Disregard for unequal economic power relations diverts attention from the roots of oppression and the possibilities for overcoming them. Postmodernist scholarship such as that of Albó (1993) and Beverley (1993) seems to suggest that economic and social development is no longer a prerequisite for the empowerment of indigenous peoples. On the contrary, it is argued that social movements are increasingly engaged in "cultural struggle in search for different identities" (Escobar and Alvarez, 1992). This representation is quite untrue not only of the Colombian case but also of others (see Hellman [1995] on Mexico, Kearney and Varese [1995] on Ecuador, and Nugent [2003] on Brazil). The proponents of this theory, with the best of intentions, suggest that peasants and rural workers do not need economic improvements in their living conditions—that a renewal of their cultural forms will suffice. As Plant (2000) points out, however, the exoticization of "indigenous culture" by outsiders is often perceived by the subjects themselves as a glorification of their precarious situation. Unquestionably, the exclusive focus on the cultural dimension of collective identity and its consequent exaggeration result in the abandonment of the question of social injustice and the disappearance of its protagonists—a leitmotif of the postmodernists' anti-Marxist offensive.

The choice of writers such as Evers (1985), Albó (1993), Assies (2000), Gow and Rappaport (2002), and Reed (2003) not to deal with the uncomfortable question of class inevitably contributes to a racist treatment of indigenous issues. The representation of indigenous identity as a single static and homogeneous entity is one element of the creation of an "Other" through a discourse employed by the groups that control knowledge production. As the CRIC has made clear, it is incorrect to refer to the various indigenous groups as a "nation," since they vary in the degree of destruction, assimilation, and acculturation (CINEP, 1978). Another substantial element of the construction of the "Other," evident in Reed's (2003) work, is the portrayal of indigenous people as backward-looking, nostalgic for a lost cultural past and uninterested in their material conditions. Here, their romanticization and exoticization is made possible by a complete disregard for the history, needs, and aspirations of these people, an act of objectification and dehumanization. Moreover, Reed's claim overlooks the mounting evidence of hunger, disease, and lack of education, basic infrastructure, and health care throughout Latin America. His work exemplifies a trend sweeping across academia, where scholars have the luxury to ponder indefinitely on selected aspects of human experience that appear attractive or exotic, a pattern common to nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonial narratives.

The in-depth interviews I conducted while in Cauca in August 2004 with four youths who were active members of the CRIC demonstrate not only a high level of awareness and understanding of current socioeconomic and political issues in the country but also a commitment to bringing about change. In response to my question regarding the role of young people in the movement, one person began by explaining to me that there are three types of youth. "Traditional" youth believe that their lives can be improved only when all indigenous people unite against whites, sequester themselves in their own space, and manage to revive their lost culture. "Modern" youth do not identify themselves as indigenous, are not interested in learning or preserving their ancestral culture and language, and do not reside in indigenous communities; they aim to move up on the economic ladder individually so that their physical appearance can become irrelevant. The CRIC is made up of "progressive" youth, who identify themselves as indigenous and Colombian citizens at the same time. They fight against large-scale landowners, urban capitalists, foreign enterprises, and the state and its coercive apparatus: "We are conscious that we cannot re-create the past, and our goals lie not behind us but ahead of us, for the future. We have to respond adequately to the present problems that our communities face." When I asked, "What is the greatest challenge faced by your movement at this moment?" another person answered, "The government's neoliberal policies and the violence." One of the interviewees added that one of their immediate objectives was to prevent the government from signing the free-trade agreement with the United States (interview, CRIC youth, Santander de Quilichao, August 18, 2004).

During the interviews with these four individuals as well as during the various CRIC gatherings that I observed, there was no mention of original culture, nation, or going back to "traditional roots." CRIC leaders were dedicated at the time to organizing the march to Cali. Almost two years later, in May 2006, the CRIC once again occupied a leading position in the spectrum of

Colombian social movements. It was one of the main initiators of the National Itinerant Summit of Social Organizations, during which the Colombian people voiced their demands for a dignified life for all citizens and an end to militarization, state violence, and impunity. In the Department of Cauca, some of the major points raised were rejection of the free-trade agreement, the demand that the government fulfill its promised award of 14,000 hectares of land and 20 billion pesos to indigenous communities as compensation for the El Nilo massacre in 1991, and protest against the Salvajina dam, largely owned by the Spanish multinational FENOSA (*Turbi3n*, 2006).

The current activities of the CRIC, motivated by the concrete social reality of most of the rural Nasa population, call into question the validity of post-modernist scholarship such as that of Gow and Rappaport (2002), who have argued that the new indigenous leadership in Cauca is no longer oriented toward the struggle for land. The words of Alfredo Quiguanas, an indigenous participant in the summit from Cauca, clearly confirm the primacy of class and economic issues for the Nasa (ACIN-CRIC, 2006):

My father was a land tenant. He had to work on the hacienda of a landowner up to six days per month and also give him part of his own harvest. I tell you something: today the hacienda has grown, it is called Colombia, and you know who the landowner is. If this is how things are today, imagine how they would be if the free-trade agreement is signed. We would all have to pay a much higher rent. I don't want this for my children.

There is clearly no single category that can capture the multiplicity of indigenous identities found among the various groups. Furthermore, not all of the indigenous inhabitants of the Department of Cauca are part of the CRIC. As my interviews with CRIC youth demonstrated, the local indigenous population is characterized by heterogeneity and complex internal dynamics. Conscious and coordinated class action cannot be generalized beyond the CRIC. An important shortcoming of the postmodernist approach is that it confuses indigenous organizations with the indigenous population at large. The lack of differentiation between these two entities illustrates the other way in which "indigenous" as a homogeneous category is reinforced. The neglect of the processes that have led to the development of tremendous disparities in wealth is matched by a disregard for the economic differentiation within the indigenous population. These internal inequalities have led to contradictions that must be recognized in any nuanced and comprehensive picture of what many scholars (e.g., Assies, 2000; Assies, van der Haar, and Hoekema, 2000; Warren and Jackson, 2002; Reed, 2003) vaguely call "indigenous resistance."

Since the second half of the nineteenth century, the Nasa have become differentiated internally in terms of economic status. In fact, Ortiz's (1973) findings point to the existence of individuals in the Tierradentro region who had considerable wealth and 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. These individuals not only sublet to tenants but also enjoyed a position of prestige and influence in white society as well as the indigenous community. Among the indigenous population of Cauca there continue to be divisions between those who support community interests and those who do not wish to belong to *resguardos*

and fear the process of land recovery. Naturally, even among the Nasa who are part of the movement there are constant debates about priorities, strategies, and relations with other regional indigenous organizations (which have been less than ideal).

This important aspect of the relationship between members of the movement and those who wish to remain outside is easily overlooked by scholars such as Assies (2000) and Assies, van der Haar, and Hoekema (2000), who argue that the neoliberal project has presented a political opportunity for indigenous uniqueness to be articulated and transformed into a political resource. Along the same lines, Reed (2003: 153) claims that neoliberal restructuring in Latin America has created space for newer and smaller nationalisms and “given indigenous people in Latin America both a reason for reasserting their cultural otherness and also an opportunity to do this.” The twisted logic and racist implications of this apologia for a version of capitalism that has thrown millions into poverty are probably not hard to discern. It may be true that identity-based indigenous discourse has surfaced throughout Latin America in the past two decades, but this is not necessarily an indication of the empowerment of the indigenous population as a whole precisely because of the socioeconomic heterogeneity within it. In fact, Brass (2003a) observes that traditional backward-looking identities are not always supportive of progressive agrarian class uprisings. While no studies have been done on whether a rhetoric appealing to cultural unity obscures class differences and eventually benefits more powerful Nasa individuals, this has been precisely the case in Bolivia.¹⁴ Findji’s (1992) work reveals that the CRIC has experienced tension with the *Movimiento de Autoridades Indígenas de Colombia* (Indigenous Authorities Movement of Colombia—MAIC), which took as its point of departure the cultural difference between indigenous people and the rest of Colombian society and differed consistently from the CRIC in its strategies.

Another factor that may explain the occasional instances of identity-centered discourse coming from indigenous organizations is well elucidated by Brass (2003b) in his critique of subaltern studies. Brass explains that the rise of what sometimes appears to be a rhetoric of cultural/ethnic belonging or revival can be traced to the fact that economic need is for capitalism a nonnegotiable political demand. Alternatively, a cultural affirmation is a more acceptable political expression, and therefore it is safe for dominant groups to respond to it in a positive way and even consider it authentic and empowering.

The problem with the postmodernist literature on Latin American indigenous rural movements is not only inadequate representation. New theories and claims about peasant agency and empowerment have obscured the unequal distribution of land that is at the root of most structural social problems throughout the region (Brass, 2003a). One of the main dangers is that the disregard for material deprivation and economic demands will divert attention from the need for systemic change to eradicate them. In the words of the CRIC leadership, “The proposal for self-determination for indigenous nations seems to us unrealistic and even dangerous if we do not consider the need for transformation of Colombian society” (CINEP, 1978: 89). According to Brass (2003a), the postmodernist and in particular the new-social-movements paradigm suggest the political abandonment of mass mobilization and revolution aimed at the capture of state power by challenging the possibility and desirability of

systemic transcendence. For instance, Melucci (1989) sees the net effect of these new social movements as rendering power visible but not challenging it. Similarly, Evers (1985) maintains that one of the central features of the new social movements is creating social practice in which power is not central. As Mooers and Sears (1992) explain, this approach offers no strategy for defying state power and accepts capitalist social relations as eternal.

CONCLUSION

By examining the relationship between economic and racial inequality, we have seen that the racial oppression of a particular ethnic group is inevitably linked to class formation and class struggle. The attempt of new-social-movements theorists to grasp the contemporary landscape of social movements in Latin America is understandable; the novelty of indigenous peasant resistance may have been inadequately captured by reductionist approaches in which class was the only organizing principle. While the goal of postmodernist scholars such as Warren and Jackson (2002) has been to challenge discourses that oppose culture to political economy and to broaden the definition of culture and identity with regard to their material aspects, such efforts have been undermined by a general tendency to portray indigenous mobilizing as concerned solely with the construction of autonomous cultural identities.

This paper has offered two main reasons for contesting postmodernist essentialization of Third World indigenous peasants as cultural subjects. First, writers such as Gow and Rappaport (2002), who argue that the CRIC's demands have moved from a class-based discourse to a cultural one, overlook the importance to these people of economic impoverishment and exploitation. Moreover, they render invisible their struggle for social development (for example, guaranteeing free and easy access to health care, medicines, and schools, constructing appropriate housing, providing clean water, sewerage, electricity, and adequate roads, conducting vaccination campaigns) as well as access to and control over productive resources such as land, vegetation, water, and minerals.

As I have shown, certain mobilizations and demands may indeed be couched in ethnicity-centered rhetoric, but one needs to look beyond the rhetoric to the power structure in which it is employed. This paper has shown that the repression of social forces challenging the economic power of dominant groups, coupled with the state's tolerance for cultural affirmations, may induce movements to frame their (often material) demands in reference to a need to preserve or revive their cultures. Indeed, certain practices underlain by a distinct cultural logic inevitably depend on the availability of particular resources (mainly land). Another possible explanation may be the discrepancy between the interests of the popular base of the movement and those of some of its leaders or between those of two indigenous movements stemming from the heterogeneity of the local population in terms of economic and social status. In either case, the concrete everyday reality of the indigenous population characterized by precarious living conditions and deprivation and the collective organizing aimed at addressing their root structural causes are clearly evident.

A second reason that it is problematic to construct indigenous rural movements as a cultural category is that it prevents us from seeing that the liberation of oppressed groups is impossible without recognizing the centrality of the state in defending certain class interests. Massacres, torture, and other human rights violations continue to be faced by indigenous people across the region. There is, however, no room for such unpleasant details in the imagination of those who proclaim that class struggle no longer exists and the idea of revolution can be buried forever. What these scholars may need to be reminded of is that revolution is not an ambiguous concept floating in the minds of Marxists but a constantly changing social process whereby people organize to take control of the conditions that affect their survival.

The anti-Marxist literature on Latin American social movements must be understood as arising out of a specific set of social relations. Interestingly, despite the profoundly uneven socioeconomic landscapes and the racism that still mark them, most Latin American countries are formally democratic and pluralistic. For example, through the new constitution of 1991, Colombia became a culturally and ethnically plural and diverse country in which the indigenous acquired all the rights of Colombian citizens in addition to having their special collective rights fully recognized. Thus, one can say that the Colombian state has invited its people to assert their distinct ethnic identities (Ramírez, 2002). Still, the recognition of a variety of cultural identities by the state does not upset the existing social structure, and as soon as an indigenous group mobilizes to occupy a territory belonging to a rich landowner or interferes in a corporation's appropriation of its land such assertion is no longer welcomed. Instead of being recognized as the assertion of indigenous rights, these actions are treated as a matter of public order and security and immediately subjected to repression.

My conclusions coincide with those of Ramos (2002), who argues that the state's formal agenda of the preservation of cultural authenticity among indigenous groups is compromised as soon as it runs contrary to the interests of the upper classes. It is not illogical, then, to ask whether the glorification by the postmodernist literature of (real or imagined) indigenous identities and resistance, as long as these do not aim for any transformation of concrete reality, in fact reflects the considerations of economically and politically powerful groups. Indeed, is it a mere coincidence that the rise in popularity of postmodernist discourses corresponds with the consolidation of the neoliberal project in Latin America? Could these discourses perhaps be understood as some of its intellectual counterparts?

Many postmodernist studies of Latin American rural movements seek to valorize the culture(s) of indigenous groups by recognizing the potential for empowerment that lies in ethnic distinctiveness and revival. This is a legitimate and respectable undertaking. At the same time, within the new-social-movements field there have been some attempts at self-criticism. For instance, Escobar and Alvarez (1992) recognize that the euphoria about the so-called new identities has been premature and so has the dismissal of the importance of old ones. Yet, for the most part, the literature in this field is too quick to reject paradigms that problematize the ways in which the social and political structures of much of Latin America, exhibiting patterns of profoundly uneven wealth and power distribution, limit the free development and expression of identities. The postmodernist approach does not offer a framework for dealing with the causes

of the various forms of dehumanization (such as racism), does not conceive of the interconnections between these, and does not recognize the necessity to challenge power and domination in any concrete way. On the contrary, it has a tendency to suggest answers to the question “What do Latin American indigenous movements fight for?” that ignore the voices of the movements’ popular bases, which inevitably point to the concrete deprivations suffered as a result of alienating, exclusionary, unequal, and exploitative relations of production. These answers all directly or indirectly embrace the same thesis: that the rebellion against existing society expressed by these movements is not against capitalism (see Evers, 1985). A discourse of this kind can be deceptive and damaging; it appears progressive because its focus on resistance from below masks its contribution to reproducing the status quo. As Petras and Veltmeyer (2003: 22) have put it, “Post-modern analyses of acts of resistance privilege the element of identity-based particularities which, when ethnicity replaces class, brings them into the orbit of conservatism and even the political right.”

Whether such academics are willfully or unintentionally complicit in the maintenance of social injustice is beyond the scope of this paper. My intention is rather to raise awareness of the potential dangers and of the need to question the interests that guide certain trends in the academic literature. As I have attempted to demonstrate, scholarship that is detached from people’s concrete reality is not likely to contribute to any liberatory social transformation. And if we do not recognize the necessity for transformation, then any analysis that separates a particular element of oppression from the system will remain only an intellectual exercise.

I do not wish to discard the body of knowledge created by the postmodernist literature on indigenous movements, nor do I prioritize class as a determinant of collective identity over all other factors. Rather, I have shown that those who ignore the mechanisms generating economic inequalities are in a very weak position to capture the forces that have kept most indigenous people in a subordinate position. It is undeniable that ethnicity/race is of significance in the organization of the CRIC. I hope to have made clear that an intersectional approach sensitive to both economic inequalities and cultural specificities represents a more humane way of conceiving of these social forces—one that renders indigenous people’s struggles and needs visible, listens to their voices, and contributes to the construction of societies based on social justice and respect for human rights and dignity.

NOTES

1. The essential components of neoliberalism are trade liberalization, privatization, deregulation, and austerity.

2. For detailed accounts of neoliberal restructuring in Colombia see Larsen (2002), Mondragon (2002), Ferrer (2002), and *Colombia Week* (December 24, 2003; February 9, 2004).

3. According to the Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (Center for Popular Research and Education—CINEP), between July 1, 2002, and June 30, 2003, 4,351 people were victims of human rights violations—arbitrary arrests (2,546), extrajudicial executions (792), and threats (573). The paramilitary is overwhelmingly responsible for the latter two (Molano, 2005). Forced disappearances, which are usually not counted as deaths, have increased dramatically. The Asociación de Familiares de Detenidos y Desaparecidos (Association of Family Members of the Detained and Disappeared—ASFADDES) indicates that between 2000 and 2004 5,075 people became victims of

forced disappearances, compared with 527 in the figure a decade earlier (1990–1994) (ASFADDES, 2005). The issue of forced displacements is equally grave. Statistics produced by the Consultora para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento (Human Rights and Displacement Consultancy—CODHES) show that 412,553 people were forcibly displaced in 2002, representing a 20 percent increase over the previous year. The figures for subsequent years are 207,607 for 2003, 287,581 for 2004, 310,387 for 2005, 221,638 for 2006, and 305,966 for 2007 (CODHES, 2008). Currently there are more than 3 million internal refugees, 75 percent of whom are women and children. Uribe's government has claimed that the human rights situation has improved in the past three years, but in reality there has been no improvement. While there has been a slight increase in homicides against trade unionists, the latter have faced a great increase in death threats, hate crimes, and arbitrary arrests. Similarly, paramilitary groups have switched to carrying out fewer massacres and more selective assassinations (Vásquez, 2006).

4. On the connections between the state and the paramilitary, see Contreras (2002), Molano (2005), and Stokes (2005).

5. Prior to September 11, 2001, state-sanctioned violence and repression had been packaged under different ideological labels, with "counterinsurgency warfare" giving way in the second half of the 1990s to the "war on drugs."

6. Cauca is surrounded by the departments of Valle del Cauca to the north, Tolima and Huila to the west, and Nariño to the south and by the Pacific Ocean to the west. It occupies part of the Cauca River valley, flanked on either side by the Western and the Central Cordillera.

7. The *encomienda* was a system under which the Spanish crown granted certain Spaniards the privilege of receiving labor services (which entailed forced labor) and other tribute from indigenous communities.

8. Laws, rules, and norms woven into the social system that result in an unequal distribution of economic, political, and social resources among various racial groups (Henry et al., 2000).

9. Policies, practices, and procedures that directly or indirectly promote, sustain, or entrench differential advantage or privilege for people of certain races (Henry et al., 2000).

10. During my visit to Cauca in August 2004 I interviewed members of 34 families that had been displaced from their home communities by a massacre in April 2001 in the area known as the Alto Naya. Despite the fact that some individuals among these families (living on government land in shanties made from poles and black plastic bags) were suffering from serious illnesses, they were denied health care at the nearest public clinic. In addition, in rural indigenous communities public schools are scarce and access to them is limited. The disrespectful way in which the police and the armed forces treat poor indigenous people is yet another manifestation of institutional racism.

11. Myths and stereotypes about the inferiority of certain groups of people that are embedded in the society's value system (Henry et al., 2000).

12. Under "democratic" racism, commitments to democratic principles such as justice, equality, and fairness coexist with negative feelings about minority groups and differential treatment of and discrimination against them (Henry et al., 2000).

13. In what has been essentially a huge agrarian counterreform, paramilitary operations have made possible the transfer of 11 million hectares of land to the upper class (interview, Gustavo Petro, Bogotá, August 19, 2004).

14. McNeish (2003) has found that the reassertion of ethnic identity in the municipality of Santuario de Quillacas, Bolivia, during the 1990s enabled better-off peasants to avoid sharing economic resources with poor rural communities in the vicinity. Moreover, through what he calls a politically conservative process of "reinventing Andean tradition," certain traditional indigenous authorities and discourses were given the opportunity to reassert their political power by undermining rural trade unions (also predominantly indigenous) as well as left-wing politics. Gelles (2002) points to the case of the Bolivian Katarista indigenous leader who, to everyone's surprise, formed alliances with proponents of neoliberalism.

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