

UNIVERSITÄT LEIPZIG



Master Thesis

Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN): A Case of “Sceptical Post-Development” in the Colombian Pacific

Carolina Trevisi-Fuentes

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Advisor: Prof. Dr. Georg Grünberg

Abstract

The thesis is written from a post-developmental perspective and attempts to determine if *Proceso de Comunidades Negras* (PCN) can be considered an embodiment of post-developmental ideas, as many scholars who study and analyzed this social movement attest. The thesis has two theoretical poles. On one hand, a review of post-developmental texts giving special priority to Arturo Escobar. On the other, a strong emphasis on the description of the place where PCN was born and continues to be active (the Colombian Pacific region). Although PCN fits into the general description of post-development, a finer observation at its origins, mechanisms and functioning highlights not only points of symmetry, but of difference. Therefore, PCN can best be considered a case of “skeptical post-development”, as depicted by Aram Ziai.

Key word: post-development, *Proceso de Comunidades Negras* (PCN), Colombian Pacific, social movements, afro Colombians.

Resumen

Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN): Un Caso de “Post-desarrollo Escéptico” en el Pacífico Colombiano.

La tesis retoma una perspectiva post-desarrollista y pretende determinar si el movimiento social conocido como Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN) puede considerarse como un reflejo de las ideas y conceptos de esta escuela, tal y como lo sostienen algunos académicos. Este trabajo tiene dos vertientes principales. Por un lado presenta una revisión del post-desarrollo centrándose en la conceptualización sobre desarrollo, mostrando los puntos de convergencia y divergencia. Por otro lado, y en coherencia con el paradigma post-desarrollista, se hace un esfuerzo de recuperar el lugar en donde surgió y sigue activo PCN, es decir, el Pacífico Colombiano. Aun cuando PCN cumple con las características básicas del pensamiento post-desarrollista, una mirada a su historia y mecanismos actuales demuestra que hay puntos de simetría y algunos de diferencia. Por esta razón, PCN puede ser entendido más como un ejemplo de “post-desarrollo escéptico” (“sceptical post-development”), concepto propuesta por Aram Ziai.

Palabras clave: post-desarrollo, Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN), Pacífico Colombiano, movimientos sociales, afrocolombianos.

Zusammenfassung

Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN): „Skeptischer Post-Entwicklung“ im der Pazifikregion Kolumbiens

Diese Arbeit wurde aus einer post-Entwicklungsperspektive geschrieben und versucht zu bestimmen, ob der *Proceso de Comunidades Negras* (PCN) als Verkörperung der post-Entwicklungsidee angesehen werden kann, wie es viele Theoretiker die diese soziale Bewegung untersucht haben attestieren. Auf der einen Seite, weisen post-Entwicklungstexte besonderen Wert auf Arturo Escobar. Auf der anderen Seite, liegt ein Schwerpunkt auf der Beschreibung des Ortes in welchem der PCN geboren wurde und weiterhin aktiv ist (die kolumbianische Pazifikregion). Obwohl der PCN in die generelle Beschreibung von post-Entwicklung passt, stellt man bei genauer Analyse fest, dass Ursprung, Mechanismen und Arbeitsweise erhebliche Unterschiede aufweisen. Daher kann man den PCN als einen Fall von „skeptischer post-Entwicklung“ ansehen, wie es Aram Ziai getan hat.

Schlüsselwörter: post-Entwicklung, *Proceso de Comunidades Negras* (PCN), Kolumbianische Pazifikküste, Soziale Bewegungen, afrocolombians.

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Introduction

Today almost no one would refuse the designation that “we live in a singular, hierarchical world-system, the capitalist world-economy”¹. Most theorists and lay people would agree that the world-economy is becoming more global in economic, social and cultural terms. This condition has led to the pervasive association of place with mobility, fragmentation and migration. Although this might hold true for a multitude of spaces, regions and dimensions, place is still a relevant notion to understand modes of living and of representation in some parts of the planet Earth. Such is the case of the black and indigenous populations who live in the Colombian Pacific region, and specifically the social movement known as *Proceso de Comunidades Negras* (Process of Black Communities - PCN).

Tied to the assertion that we live in a capitalist world-system is the idea that development is desirable and that it is the mechanism to reach global progress and equality. Although development is still current in the international, national and local imaginaries and agendas, the paradigm of development faced fierce criticism during the late 1980s and 1990s by a group of scholars that have been grouped under the title of post-development. These cultural critics centered their attention on the idea of development and used post-structuralist inspired discourse analysis to describe development as a discourse². In general, this school perceived development “as a Eurocentric discourse, an at least partly imperialist project, and (often) a meaningless concept”³.

Although there is a strong dialogue between post-development ideas and the recuperation of place as complex arrangement of geological, biological, physical, organic and human dimensions which configure the relationships between nature, culture and society, this thesis aims at determining if PCN can be considered an example of post-development ideas in practice, as several authors attest. The point of departure is the definition of post-development given by one of the most recognized post-developmentalists, the Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar. Post-development is concerned:

- “not in development alternatives but in alternatives to development thus a rejection of the entire paradigm;
- an interest in local cultures and knowledge

¹ Immanuel Wallerstein, “A Comment of Epistemology: What is Africa?”, In *Unthinking Social Science. The Limits of Nineteenth-Century Paradigms*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1991. p. 128.

² Arturo Escobar, “Post-development” In David Clark (ed) *The Elgar Companion to Development Studies*, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2006, p. 447 – 451.

³ Aram Ziai, “The Ambivalence of Post-development: Between Reactionary Populism and Radical Democracy”, *Third World Quarterly*, 25 (6), 1046, Carfax Publishing.

- a critical stance towards established scientific discourses;
- the defense and promotion of localized, pluralistic grassroots movements”⁴

The thesis is organized in six parts: introduction, four chapters and discussion. The first two chapters, “Post-development Theory as Alternatives to Development” and “The Discourse of Development as Corollary of the Discourse of Development” present a theoretical overview of the post-development school, giving priority Escobar’s work. Chapter 1 begins with a description of the school and introduces nine different authors which shows the points of convergence as well as the heterogeneity of post-developmental texts. This chapter ends with the core critiques to the post-development school. Chapter 2 sets the critics of development in reference to other wider discussions such as modernity and western science.

Chapter 3, titled “Approximations to the Colombian Pacific Region as a Place”, starts with a description of the geographic, demographic, historical, political and social aspects of the Colombian Pacific as a strategy to contextualize the place where PCN emerged and consolidated. The next chapter, under the heading “PCN: Enunciation of Afro-colombian Cosmivision”, contextualizes the rise of PCN in the black movements in the country and provides a brief description of PCN’s principles and strategies. The last part of Chapter 4 describes the local model of nature of the Pacific, given that this is the cultural background of PCN, its members and activism. The last part of this thesis focuses on answering the research question: Can PCN be understood as the enactment of post-development ideas?

Methodology

This thesis is a case study structured by first hand information of PCN, provided by their Internet page, and texts that deal exclusively with PCN and blacks in the Colombian Pacific region.

The theoretical backbone of this thesis is an unpublished book written by Escobar titled *Places and Regions in the Age of Globality: Social Movements and Biodiversity Conservation in the Colombian Pacific*. This text is of special interest because it narrates the history and evolution of the PCN, as well as the author’s relationship with PCN. According to the author, this on-line text can be understood as “an ethnography of the practices, strategies, and visions of this particular group of activists (in reference to PCN), including

⁴ Escobar 1995 p. 215 as cited by Aram Ziai, “The Ambivalence of Post-development: Between Reactionary Populism and Radical Democracy”, *Third World Quarterly*, 25 (6), 1046, Carfax Publishing

their own knowledge production”⁵. It is structured through six interrelated concepts: place, capital, nature, development, identity and networks; which have been developed in collaboration with scholars from the Society for International Development, the Latin American modernity/ coloniality/ decoloniality group, PCN, the Culture of economies group at University of Carolina at Chapel Hill and the World Anthropologies Network. The six core concepts evidence a multi-framed perspective of disciplines (ranging from anthropology, political ecology, political economy to theories on social movement/ network and development) and topics (identity politics, globalization, biodiversity conservation, modernity/ coloniality and politics of space and place).

The conceptual reference for development, Third World and the relationship between sustainable development and nature has been elaborated from a post-developmental perspective in *La Invención del Tercer Mundo. Construcción y Reconstrucción del Desarrollo*⁶. By applying critical discourse analysis, the author maps sustainable development, highlighting and describing the relations between power, knowledge and domination. The main focus are the social and cultural consequences of the developmental discourse, in particular the strategies that are destined towards the environment, women and peasants. In order to further understand the relationship between development and social movements⁷ and globalization⁸ two of Escobar’s texts have been chosen:

In order to analyze the material, document analysis has been used. Of great help during the writing process were the readings and discussions of the seminar titled “Post-development Theories and Practice” with Professor Aram Ziai of International Development at the University of Vienna during the summer semester 2008. The discussion with classmates Katja Neubauer and Kamashi Nanda for the final paper were fruitful and helped organize the thesis.

⁵ Arturo Escobar, *Places and Regions in the Age of Globality: Social Movements and Biodiversity Conservation in the Colombian Pacific* (without date), p. 4. <http://www.unc.edu/~aescobar/html/texts.htm> (accessed November 25, 2007).

⁶ Arturo Escobar, *La Invención del Tercer Mundo. Construcción y Reconstrucción del Desarrollo*, Bogotá: Norma, 1996.

⁷ Arturo Escobar, “Whose Knowledge, Whose Nature? Biodiversity, Conservation, and the Political Ecology of Social Movements”, *Political ecology*, 1998, Vol. 5, p. 53-82.

⁸ Arturo Escobar, “El Lugar de la Naturaleza y la Naturaleza del Lugar: Globalización”, In *Antropología del Desarrollo. Teorías y Estudios Etnográficos en América Latina*, Barcelona: Paidós, 2000.

Chapter 1

Post-development Theory as Alternatives to Development

The term post-development groups several critical theories, perspectives and practices. Nonetheless, since this dissertation is written in dialogue with this frame and aims at determining if *Proceso de Comunidades Negras* (PCN) can be considered the embodiment of post-development ideas, it is imperative to conceptualize the main concepts and arguments of this school. For this reason this chapter begins with a description of the post-development school and then introduces nine different authors. These scholars were chosen due to their acknowledgement as post-developmentalists or because their insights are helpful for the subject and question of this dissertation. The aim is not an exhaustive account of individual work, since this would exceed the objectives of the research, but rather to describe the core conceptualization about and of development, which in turn illustrate the heterogeneity within the school.

In order to facilitate reading and comprehension, the authors have been grouped into five topical groups which translate into the sections of the chapter. The first section “*Ad patres* development” presents the notion of development as elaborated by Wolfgang Sachs and Gustavo Esteva; the first is Senior Coordinator of the Wuppertal Institute on Globalization and was the former Chairman of Greenpeace Germany, the latter is a Mexican sociologist and economist who has worked for several UN agencies such as CEPAL, FAO, UNESCO and is involved with the Zapatista Movement⁹. Section two, titled “Development as AIDS-II: a Virulent Invader”, focuses on the ideas of Iranian Majid Rahnema, who also maintained strong ties to UN bodies¹⁰.

Section three “Knowledge Systems: Nature and Gender Issues in Development” illustrates other perspectives of development through the eyes of several scholars: Emmanuel Seni N’Dione, Philippe de Leener, Jean-Pierre Perier, Mamadou Ndiaye and Pierre Jacolin, Vandana Shiva and Frédérique Apffel-Marglin. The fourth section, under the heading “Development as a Game and Anti-politics Machine” describes the posture of Leonard Frank and James Ferguson, while the last section “Development as Discourse” focuses exclusively on the work of Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar. This section is broad in content and

⁹ David C. Korten, “Bio-Sketch: Gustavo Esteva”, http://gustavoesteva.com/english_site/korten_summary.htm (accessed September 14, 2008).

¹⁰ Kevin Conway, “Economy and the Riches of the Poor”, http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-5078-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html (accessed September 15, 2008).

analysis because the work of this scholar is central to this thesis given his production of an intelligible analysis of development and his academic and political links with PCN.

Section five, “Post-development Critique”, is a succinct depiction of the critiques of the post-development school by several scholars. The chapter ends with section six, titled “Orthrus: Sceptical and Neo-populist Post-development”, dedicated to Ziai’s depiction of two variants of post-development (sceptical and neo-populist).

What is Post-development?

Post-development reflections come directly from post-structuralist critique to development¹¹. By the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, social science scholars working from post-structuralist theories and methods started to question the reasons, mechanics and historical processes by which the invention of the Third World took place, its consequences and practices. Hence, the question was never directed towards an optimization of development, but rather, a fundamental critique of the paradigm¹².

The analysis led by post-structuralists concludes that development, as a historical formation that came into being after WWII, is Eurocentric: it is an invention of the West that seeks to impose modern ideals to the rest of the world. Thus, development is regarded as a stratagem of control, domination and submission that caused the subordination, discrimination and subjugation of those referred as Third World citizens, nations and regions. This argumentation echoes the rhetoric of colonization, and stresses the ideological continuity between imperialism, colonization and development. For these reasons, development was evaluated undesirable for humanity.

On the other hand, post-developmentalists understood globalization as a phenomena that evidenced a crisis of the modern project and its politics of knowledge. Hence, the death of development (diagnosed during the late 1980s and 1990s) was perceived by post-developmentalists as eminent. In consequence, a new era was to follow, one where development was not the main principle that ordered social life¹³. The construction of this reality was craved and perceived as radically different from development, and was referred as post-development. In spite of how “new” this perspective might have seemed, Escobar¹⁴

¹¹ Arturo Escobar, “El “Posdesarrollo” como Concepto y Práctica social”, *Políticas de Economía, Ambiente y Sociedad en Tiempos de Globalización*, Caracas: Facultad de Ciencias Económicas y Sociales, Universidad Central de Venezuela, p. 18.

¹² Ibid. p. 18.

¹³ Ibid. p. 19-20.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 22.

recognizes that post-development grows on the ground paved by dependency theorists and the cultural critiques of Ivan Illich, Paulo Freire and Orlando Fals Borda, among others. Since then, the school has also made use and is in dialogue with cultural studies, feminist theory, ethnic and environmental studies.

The diverse disciplines that nurture post-development also give rise to a multiplicity of conceptualizations. The sociologist and political scientist Aram Ziai¹⁵ observes that there are two explicit attempts at defining post-development from within the school. The first one, although hazy and inexact, is proposed by Rahnema in the introduction to *The Post-development Reader*¹⁶. Post-development is described as “subversive”, “people-centred” and “radical”¹⁷ without further descriptions or clarifications.

A second and more convincing attempt is made by Escobar in *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*¹⁸. Post-development is characterized by its rejection of development, its metaphors, images, practices and objectives. The path to defeat development is given by the creation and invention of alternatives to development as opposed to development alternatives. This not only places post-development in opposition to development but to modernity. A dismissal of the options that proceed from this frame lead to re-think modernity, especially Western science and technology.

The hope for alternatives to development is located on local cultures and knowledges, which in turn has been translated into a recuperation of place and the vibrancy of the local. Within this framework, grassroots and social movements are regarded as pioneers in constructing and implementing logics that promote plurality, diversity and difference¹⁹ and that are seen as having the potential to subvert the orders imposed by modernity and capitalism.

As Ziai²⁰ observes, taking this definition seriously implies widening the scope of authors that are generally recognized as post-developmentalists such as Arturo Escobar, Gustavo Esteva, Majid Rahnema and Wolfgang Sachs. This author suggests including Ashis Nandy, Claude Alvares and the studies of the United Nations University which have been

¹⁵ Aram Ziai, “The Ambivalence of Post-Development: Between Reactionary Populism and Radical Democracy”, *Third World Quarterly*, 25 (6), 1045 – 1060, Carfax Publishing.

¹⁶ Majid Rahnema and Victoria Bawtree, *The Post-development Reader*, London: Zed Books, 1997.

¹⁷ Aram Ziai, “The Ambivalence of Post-development: Between Reactionary Populism and Radical Democracy”, *Third World Quarterly*, 25 (6), p. 1046, Carfax Publishing.

Majid Rahnema and Victoria Bawtree. *The Post-development Reader*, London: Zed Books, 1997, p. xif.

¹⁸ Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: the Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, Princeton University Press, 1994.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Aram Ziai, “The Ambivalence of Post-development: Between Reactionary Populism and Radical Democracy”, *Third World Quarterly*, 25 (6), 1046, Carfax Publishing.

²⁰ Ibid.

edited by Frederique Appfel-Marglin and Stephen Marglin. Nonetheless, Ziai seems hesitant to include Marc DuBois and James Ferguson. In the case of this dissertation, the suggestion of Ziam has been accepted. For this reason, the reader will encounter the perspective of the “classic” post-developmentalists, as well as other scholars that deal with the problem of development.

Ad patres Development

Two books are regarded as the bibles of post-development. The first is a collection of essays published in 1992 under the title *The Development Dictionary. A Guide to Knowledge as Power*²¹ and the second is a collective title published five years later as *The Post-development reader*²². In the first book, Wolfgang Sachs and Gustavo Esteva coincide in the assertion that development is dead. As the aim of this section is to illustrate the understanding that each of these scholars has of development, the individual contributions will be described first, followed by a discussion of the similarities and differences.

The main argument offered by Sachs²³ is that development and its ideals are moribund. He explains the defunct state of development by using two metaphors: as a lighthouse and as a cast of mind. The first refers to the evolution and status of development and the second one illustrates its functioning mechanisms and its effects. The “towering lighthouse” metaphor proposes an understanding of development as “an idea which oriented emerging nations in their journey through post-war history”²⁴. The visibility from sea of the lighthouse is given, during the day by its height and during night by the potency of the projected light. This image can be associated to the *Siècle des Lumières* where reason, considered the main source for knowledge production and scientific thought, is associated with light in opposition and contrast to the darkness of the Middle Ages (and the darkness of the uncivilized and savage). Following this interpretation, it is possible to affirm that as reason was to guide the new emerging Nation-States during the 18th Century so was development the horizon and beacon of safety for the Western world after WWII. Specifically, development aimed at assuring that the new states (former colonies) and the Southern countries were committed to

²¹ Wolfgang Sachs, *The Development Dictionary. A Guide to Knowledge as Power*, London: Zed Books, 1992.

²² Majid Rahnema and Victoria Bawtree, *The Post-development Reader*, London: Zed Books, 1997.

²³ Wolfgang Sachs, *The Development Dictionary. A Guide to Knowledge as Power*, London: Zed Books, 1992, p. 1-5.

²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 1.

Capitalism, preventing them from crashing into the “dangerous” and “ragged” rocks/ cliffs of Communism.

Continuing with this metaphor, the author sustains that since the mid 1980s the lighthouse has undergone a progressive deterioration. This decay portrays the failures of development: not only has it floundered in delivering its promises but it has lost its lustre, it is no longer a model of admiration but rather a creator of economic, social and environmental imbalance and inequality in the Third World. Additionally, without the threat of Communism to Capitalism, development has become obsolete. These are the arguments offered by Sachs to support the idea that the death of the era of development is not only imminent but desirable. It is not by chance that the inaugural phrases of *The Development Dictionary. A Guide to Knowledge as Power* read solemnly yet with satisfaction: “The last 40 years can be called the age of development. This epoch is coming to an end. The time is ripe to write its obituary”²⁵.

The second metaphor used to describe development is that of a “cast of mind”²⁶, a mental structure that models the perception of reality and regulates the relationships between Southern and Northern Nation-States. The cognitive character of development generates and reinforces the idea that the “Westernization” of the world is not only natural, but a moral imperative, even if it implies a homogeneity in the range of alternatives and mechanism by which humans become subjects, knowledge is produced and life is produced and reproduced.

Esteva²⁷ on the other hand starts with a brief historical recount of the term development. Its origin is found in the biological sciences and refers to the process by which a living organism grows and reaches its genetic potential. The failure to meet such potential is considered pathology, a deviation from the norm. This idea of development in the “hard” sciences was transferred to social sciences by Moser, Herder and Marx during the end of the 18th Century. Although the connotations of the term had become popular during the 19th Century, it is during the 20th Century that it “suffered the most dramatic and grotesque metamorphosis”²⁸. The Mexican writer argues that this transformation has had four distinct moments: the First Decade (1950 – 1960s), the Second Decade (1970s), the Lost Decade for Development (1980s) and the 1990s.

The “metamorphosis” started with the reduction of development to economic growth in underdeveloped areas, prevalent and widely accepted idea during the 1950s and 1960s.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 1.

²⁶ Ibid, p.1.

²⁷ Gustavo Esteva, “Development”, In *The Development Dictionary. A Guide to Knowledge as Power*, London: Zed Books, 1992, p. 6 – 25.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 12.

Although development started to consider cultural and social variables in relation to economic growth, it wasn't until the 1970s that these concepts were integrated into the term. Consequently the Second Decade was marked by a failed attempt to consolidate a unified approach to development analysis, planning and execution. As a result, the 1970s witnessed a dispersion of the problems that development undertook which in turn generated inflation in the meaning of the word as well as in the strategies implemented.

During the 1980s the adjustment processes invoked and justified by development seemed to come short in outcome, therefore countries were urged to abandon or dismantle the previous plans. It was a decade tainted with an air of pessimism that seemed to be opening space for a post-development era. It was also the time for the marginalized to disengage themselves from the logic of economics, to pursue a space where they could live on their own terms, as the indigenous movement in Latin America attests. The uneasiness of this decade, in conjunction with the growing demands of the environmentalist movement and the relation between degradation of nature and the capitalist modes of production and consumption, also led to a re-packaging of development into sustainable development, which was presented in the Brundtland Report in 1987. Since then, sustainable development along with the Human Development Index (HDI) have become the horizon for development work and aid. This author is sharp to point out that sustainable development is not a strategy for supporting the diversity of natural and social life, but rather a mechanism to support development.

With regards to the status of development in the early 1990s, Esteva sustains that development was an unburied corpse. Development was dead not only because the myth of development failed to materialize its promises, but because in different parts of the planet “common men on the margins have been able to keep alive another logic, another set of rules”²⁹. In other words, development was unable to transform all men into *Homo economicus*. For the era of development to pass completely, the author advocates political support to those groups and social movements that from the grassroots struggle for their own way to live life, such as *Proceso de Comunidades Negras* (PCN).

In conclusion, Esteva³⁰ conceives development as an amoeba that even without a definite form is firmly rooted in the intellectual and popular mind, and instructs perception and construction of reality. Not only does development operate in reality, having material effects and consequences, but it portrays itself as necessary and inevitable for all peoples and nations of the planet. Development is then a violent strategy of domination; colonization in disguise. Yet, development does not operate by itself; it is at the centre of “an incredibly

²⁹ Ibid. p. 22.

³⁰ Ibid.

powerful semantic constellation”³¹, a network founded on the repertoire of images generated by growth, evolution, maturation and modernization. Development is then in direct relationship to the ideals of Modernity, specially the myth of lineal progress.

In terms of similarities, both scholars point out the multiplicity of development definitions, alluding to the amoeba like quality of the term. They also question the feasibility and desirability of development, as well as the political and ideological dimension of this endeavour.

Development as AIDS-II: a Virulent Invader

In the *The Post-development reader*³² Majid Rahnema conceptualizes development as a socio-cultural trespasser that works in similar ways to the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). In order to argue that development is a virulent invader that has permeated the socio-cultural membrane of vernacular societies³³, the author first legitimizes the historical construction and use of the category “enemy”. This word has been used by societies, communities or towns as a mechanism to preserve and protect their material, environmental, economic, social and economic well-being. The idea of an “enemy” that enters uninvited also appears in the medical scene and is used to describe infectious processes and diseases. Laying this foundation, the author states that there are two types of AIDS: AIDS as a medical disease and AIDS II which refers to a social-cultural malady, that is, development.

AIDS is acquired by infection of the HIV virus, which triggers a disorder of the human immune system. It enters the body by successfully bypassing the immunological defences. Once inside, and playing on the functioning mechanics of the human body, HIV is able to penetrate the process of molecule formation and creation to reproduce itself. Once the alien virus (HIV) is reproduced systematically, it becomes successful in high jacking the immune system, becoming part of the system. Collapse is not only imminent, but is orchestrated from within, it is no longer foreign. The main hypothesis of Rahnema is that AIDS II operates “roughly” the same way as AIDS: their effectiveness lies in their capacity to internalize

³¹ Ibid. p. 8.

³² Majid Rahnema & Victoria Bawtree, *The Post-development Reader*, London: Zed Books, 1997.

³³ Although the term vernacular society is comparable to traditional or subsistence society, the reasons why the author chose it or its connotation remain unknown. Nonetheless, the appearance of protective membrane in vernacular societies, and its distinguishing and stabilizing functions become relevant in the analogy between AIDS and AIDS II. However there seems to be a contradiction in the use of vernacular immune systems because on the one side these are considered as a natural and evolutionary social product, but social products are not considered man made: “the vernacular immune systems... which living creatures have created for themselves throughout the ages, continue to show that they cannot so easily be destroyed by man-made institutions” (p. 125).

within the host, becoming a crucial part of the functions and mechanisms of the human body or vernacular society. In this case, the invader of societies is malignant development, which is part of a wider family of viruses called *Homo oeconomicus*.

Homo oeconomicus depicts an economic white European male, born and bred with early capitalism. This idea of human being is in direct relation with the progressive and aggressive instalment of capitalism as the preponderant economic system. This system denies being embedded in any social relations and models itself after its own needs. It also implies the separation between economics and social relations and life activities, while it emphasizes wealth accumulation. In other words, *Homo oeconomicus* breaks with the ideas, values and practices of vernacular societies to implement those of capitalism through development. The author highlights three successful strategies of development: the school system, the production of addictive needs and the dis-valuation of indigenous know-how.

The first two strategies are explained using an economic repertoire: scarcity, markets, commodity, consumers. In these terms, schooling is regarded as the institution that controls education, understood as a highly valued scarcity. The production of addictive needs is another way of referring to the creation and expansion of markets necessary for the survival of capitalism. This strategy carries a strong psychological dimension related to the “compulsive sense of scarcity”³⁴ of goods and services that are created and “needed”. The third strategy refers to devaluation of traditional knowledge, know-how, world-views and practices, as a way to prevent resistance to the logic and order intrinsic in *Homo oeconomicus*.

In historical terms, *Homo oeconomicus* first infiltrated itself among the European population and then came to be rooted in the colonies. In the peripheries of the world capitalist system, the economic man, his attitudes and practices could only be established after independence, when other forms of otherness were disgregated. According to this author, the fundamental difference between political colonialism and development is that the first “subjugates through a traditional master-slave relationship, where the otherness is maintained. By contrast, development aims at colonizing from within”³⁵. In this sense, development can be considered an extension of capitalist ideals. Although this parallel portrays successfully the image of development as an intimate enemy that attempts to install the *Homo oeconomicus* rational into every human being, the arguments that links colonization directly to development seems more an exercise of academic violence. In the subsection “*Homo oeconomicus* and the economization of colonialism” the author uses the word development by

³⁴ Majid Rahnema & Victoria Bawtree, “Development and the People’s Immune System: the Story of Another Variety of AID”, In *The Post-development Reader*, London: Zed Books, 1997, p. 120.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 119.

itself (as was used in the previous sections) and with parenthesis. Somehow “development” wants to indicate practices and ideas prior to the development era (post WWII) that could be considered as developmental, such as building infrastructure. This not only seems to be misleading, but oversimplifies the historical and context of emergence of development as a phenomena that was thoroughly displayed during the 20th Century.

In conclusion, for Rahnema development is a man-made virus that spreads the vicious logics of capitalism and the *Homo Oeconomicus* through various strategies. Development is also a form of colonization of the mind as in Sachs, but also of intitutions, practices and orders. The implementation of development leads, in most cases to a loss of society’s socio-cultural immune system. Therefore, it can be stated that AIDS is to HVI as AIDS II is to development. On the other hand, development is also envisioned as a modern giant that “has at its disposal the most sophisticated means and resources requiered to manipulate, to lure, to addict, to buy, or actually to conquer or destory the minds and bodies of its opponents”³⁶. As the idea and effects development are negative, and the end of this era is proclaimed, the search for new possibilities of change is rekindled. In Rahnema’s words, “if the the post-development era is to be free of the illusions, ideological perversions, hypocresy and falsehoods that pervaded the development world, the search for signposts and trails leading to a flow of “good life”... should be informed by an entirely new rationale and set of assumptions”³⁷.

In comparison to Sachs and Esteva, Rahnema agrees that development carries the promess of progress and modernity, as well as its failure to deliver. He also gives language a relevant role in the creation and implementation of development. The pseudo-scientific, technocratic and expert-based language highlights the links between development and its profesionalization, institutions and academic counterpart. Another meeting point is the believe that the key in changing or subverting the order of development involves the comprehension of the nature and strategies of development. However, while the the first two authors place their “hope” for change in the mechanisms of discourse and power, Rahnema appeals for “self-exploration, which requieres faith in one’s own truth and strength”³⁸. This sort of mystical sentiment not only comes by surprise but is left unexplained.

Knowledge Systems: Nature and Gender Issues in Development

³⁶ Ibid. p. 128.

³⁷ Ibid. p. 391.

³⁸ Ibid. p. 128.

Emmanuel Seni N’Dione, Philippe de Leener, Jean-Pierre Perier, Mamadou Ndiaye and Pierre Jacolin³⁹, Vandana Shiva⁴⁰ and Frédérique Apffel-Marglin⁴¹ coincide with the above mentioned authors in the perception that development presents itself as autonomous and universal, a guide towards progress and well being of humanity. Although having failed in this quest and rather increasing poverty and control of underdeveloped regions and peoples, development still structures thought and action of organizations, communities and individuals. As development is perceived in close dialogue and interaction with capitalism, the ideas and practices that emerge from economic terms such as scarcity, market and wealth are questioned in terms of their political and ideological dimensions. However these authors introduce innovative elements into the critique of development by analyzing it through the lenses of belief and knowledge systems, nature and gender issues.

N’Dione et al.⁴² recounts the Chodak experience in Senegal in order to illustrate that there are “very “small” yet highly inspiring, exercises of regenerative co-action” which resist the logic of development. The assumption is that it is possible to have “regenerative co-action” (to avoid the use and weight of the term development) outside of the development paradigm. In other words, the universality of the capitalist model is being questioned. By focusing on the methodological and practical dimensions of the Chodak experience, the authors illustrate some of the practical, ideological and political dimensions involved in development work and aid, the difficulties it generates as well as some strategies to overcome these constraints. Chodak recuperates the relevance of place and the vibrancy of the local, that is, of the people at the grassroots level who are perceived as pioneers of a post-development era. This assumption echoes the perspective of Esteva and Escobar which highlight the possibilities of creative social, economic and political reconstitution at the margins, which maintain another logic and set of rules from development.

Development is understood as a capitalist ideology which promised liberation and progress to the less developed world but continues to deliver and generate impoverishment, exclusion and loneliness. Therefore it is a fraud. Development refers to a “whole host of

³⁹ Emmanuel Seni N’Dione, Philippe de Leener, Jean-Pierre Perier, Mamadou Ndiaye and Pierre Jacolin, “Reinventing the Present: the Chodak Experience in Senegal”, In *The Post-development Reader*, London: Zed Books, 1997, p. 364-376.

⁴⁰ Vandana Shiva, “Resources”, In *The Development Dictionary. A Guide to Knowledge as Power*, London: Zed Books, 1992, p. 206-218.

⁴¹ Frédérique Apffel-Marglin, “Small Pox in Two Systems of Knowledge”, In *Dominating Knowledge. Development, Culture and Resistance*, Oxford: Clarendon, p. 102 – 144.

⁴² Emmanuel Seni N’Dione, Philippe de Leener, Jean-Pierre Perier, Mamadou Ndiaye and Pierre Jacolin, “Reinventing the Present: the Chodak Experience in Senegal”, In *The Post-development Reader*, London: Zed Books, 1997, p. 364.

references, practices and ways of reasoning”⁴³ that permeates and constructs cultural values, compartmentalizes life and orders the concepts of time, space and productivity. The authors advocate a rejection of economic indicators, specially of the idea of wealth as the accumulation of goods or purchasing power. They propose a re-creation of the concepts of wealth and value in order to foment reciprocity, recreate a capital of relationships and a sense of collectivity and a rediscovery of ways to signify and give meaning to everyday life. In other words, the aim of development work should be to stimulate the values and knowledge systems of grassroot communities, not only within those groups but on the “belief market”. Three questions arise from this suggestion: is it really the aim of development work to promote the local knowledge systems in a global scale? Given the fact that there are multiple and contrasting knowledge and value systems, how does development agencies/workers decide which one to promote? Is it possible to establish ethno-political categories that are applicable to contrasting knowledge systems?

As opposed to the cultural relativism proposed by N’Dione et al., Shiva⁴⁴ presents an insightful analysis of (sustainable)development through the issues of nature as a dimension of knowledge production. The main argument is that the ways through which modern thought, knowledge and science are structured have caused an illusion of neutrality, objectiveness and scientificity which has been applied to nature. Within modern thought, nature is conquered and dominated by white rational men through science. This caused the dilution of the traditional image of nature as Mother Earth, a nurturing, caring and living woman. Nonetheless, there are still communities/ regions in non-westernized areas of the world that maintain such an idea. Within the modern ontological construction of the world, it is a moral imperative that Science should govern and rule over nature, as men over women. In consequence, the traditional idea of nature as creative and self-regenerating as well as the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature was altered to fit the needs of the emerging capitalist-world system.

Capitalism needed nature to be stripped from its organic and regenerative qualities in order to be conceptualized as inputs for the production of commodities through economic exploitation. This idea of nature as dead and manipulable matter reinforced the idea that nature was dependent on humans. Therefore the development of nature became subdued to and by human development. Additionally, the relationship between humans and nature was

⁴³ Emmanuel Seni N’Dione, Philippe de Leener, Jean-Pierre Perier, Mamadou Ndiaye and Pierre Jacolin, “Reinventing the Present: the Chodak Experience in Senegal”, In *The Post-development Reader*, London: Zed Books, 1997, p. 370.

⁴⁴ Vandana Shiva, “Resources”, In *The Development Dictionary. A Guide to Knowledge as Power*, London: Zed Books, 1992, p. 206-218.

transformed from the principles and actions guided by reciprocity and responsibility, to “unrestrained exploitation”. As the “desacralization of nature”⁴⁵ was central to legitimize the manipulation of nature, destroying the communal access to nature and the sense of responsibility to Mother Earth was relevant to re-create nature as raw materials apt for industrialization processes.

Both capitalism and development share this idea of nature as a strategy to obtain economic growth and reduces the relationship between humans and nature to a commercial transaction. The rapacious quality of development has led to environmental degradation and scarcity, which in turn created the need to “manage” natural resources. According to Shiva⁴⁶, even if this impact can be evidenced since colonial times, the 1970s witnessed a crisis of non-renewable resources that was managed by the illusion that technology could contain such scarcity. By the 1980s, technology had failed to fix the problem and the pace and consequences of development was becoming evident: the modes of production and consumption were not only depleting non-renewable resources but turning renewable resources into non-renewable ones⁴⁷. An ecological crisis was confirmed and caused a shift in development; it now integrated the idea of sustainability, first introduced in the Brundtland report in 1987. In this context, sustainable development refers not to the sustainability of nature but of development itself, understood as an ideology that brings “all of nature’s products into the market economy as raw materials for commodity production”⁴⁸.

Apffel-Marglin sets out to challenge “the entire project of modernization”⁴⁹ by exploring Modern and traditional knowledge systems. The main aim is to discredit the belief that Western science is superior to other forms of knowledge, not only because it is a fallacy but because it is morally arrogant. This objective is grounded on the post-structuralist assumption that knowledge systems “underlie and frame the very possibility of discourse; they ground thinking in the very reality of things”⁵⁰. In order to illustrate the argument, the author describes two knowledge systems for the eradication of smallpox in reference to development programs: one logocentric, represented by World Health Organization (WHO) and India’s vaccination policy and program, and the other traditional, represented by Indian *variolation/ inoculation* method.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 208.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 216.

⁴⁹ Frédérique Apffel-Marglin, “Small Pox in Two Systems of Knowledge”, In *Dominating Knowledge. Development, Culture and Resistance*, Oxford: Claredon, p. 102.

⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 103.

A logocentric knowledge system, a term taken from Derrida, characterizes the West's system to produce, order and legitimate knowledge. It "is a system of thought which poses first principles and ultimately *a* first principle, an ultimate ground or *logos* which lies outside the system of differences which constitutes meaning in language"⁵¹. In this case, the act of signifying something or someone is based not only on difference, but by accentuating the absence and negation of the other element. Therefore, and in agreement with Shiva, Western systems of knowledge are characterized by the construction of reality through binary opposition structures and the idea that humans are individuals whose objective is to conquer and dominate nature. Within this rational, Western science is viewed as superior to other forms of knowledge, and therefore the most desirable form for all societies.

As opposed to the universal presumption of logocentrism, traditional systems of knowledge are placed-based and rooted in particular social, cultural and environmental contexts⁵². The main characteristic of this mode of thought is the circular nature of its hierarchies at nodal points. In other words, non-logocentrism is not rooted in exclusive dichotomies which separate rational thought from supernatural or religious spheres, but rather conceive them as a prolongation of the natural. In consequence, the dichotomies nature-culture, nature-supernatural and life-death are dissolved. In this sense, Apffel-Marglin⁵³ argues that non-logocentric knowledge systems have an ecological ethos that ensures regeneration of life, while logocentrism exercises an ethos of control and domination from a top down approach.

Both logocentric and non-logocentric knowledge systems have political implications. In terms of efficiency, logocentrism attempts to destroy traditional ways of regenerating community (or causing fractures in the cognitive, symbolic and representational realm shared by a collectivity) in order to establish a capitalist order of life. On the other hand, non-logocentric thought resists the knowledge and practices of the West by incentivating folk/ indigenous know-how and ways of life. The detailed description of the smallpox case illustrates the power struggle between both systems and how such a battle is put into place by and through language. Within this conceptual and analytical frame, the author sustains that Indian resistance to vaccination during the 19th and 20th Centuries was a strategy to reject the authoritarian manner in which vaccination was imposed (as well as the supposed superiority of Western science), rather than vaccination per se. Therefore, the argument in pro of the "superstitious" character of this population has to be dismissed.

⁵¹ Ibid. p. 102.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

The insight of Appfel-Marglin and Shiva sketch a much closer relationship between modernity and development, and the tight connections and interplay between science, power and politics. Nonetheless, the idea of development as a strategy of domination, which appeared frequently and with strength in several of the previous authors, seems to fall into the background. The emphasis seems to be placed more on the battle, on the struggle through and for the control of knowledge systems and practices.

Development as a Game & Anti-politics Machine

Leonard Frank⁵⁴ and James Ferguson⁵⁵ deal with development as an apparatus and discuss its influence on thought and praxis, as well as its concrete and material effects. Both authors present case studies: Frank describes a mission in Pakistan while Ferguson centers on the Thaba-Tseka Project in Lesotho, a rural development plan funded by Canada during 1975–1984.

By using a stand-up comedy tone, aided by sarcasm as a product of self-reflection and criticism, Frank⁵⁶ presents development as a game. A game of which he is part off and which he plays the role of an expert, with feelings that range from distress, ambivalence to complacency. The metaphor of the game indicates a rule governed practice whose participants are located in direct opposition to each other⁵⁷. Development is then portrayed as a competition between developed agencies, experts and donors and underdeveloped governments, communities and regions. The underdeveloped populations are characterized as needy of development due to their poverty and darker completions. This racist assertion is synthesized in the affirmation that “There is something disturbing about the people in this village: they look just like me... Their dogs are just like ours... I am used to my target group being browner... They may look like me but the truth is that they are very poor people... Their appereance is deceptive”⁵⁸. The “disapperance” of difference is a surprise to the author, but its re-installation shows that the game of development only makes sense when the other is

⁵⁴ Leonard Frank, “The Development Game”, In *The Post-development Reader*, London: Zed Books, 1997, p. 263-273.

⁵⁵ James Ferguson, “Development and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho”, In *The Post-development Reader*, London: Zed Books, 1997, p. 223-233.

James Ferguson, *The Anti-politics Machine. Development, Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994, p. 55-73, 251-256.

⁵⁶ Leonard Frank, “The Development Game”, In *The Post-development Reader*, London: Zed Books, 1997, p. 263-273.

⁵⁷ Merriam-Webster Online. “Game”. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/game>, (accessed May 18, 2008).

⁵⁸ Leonard Frank, “The Development Game”, In *The Post-development Reader*, London: Zed Books, 1997, p. 265.

conceived as belonging inherently to a inferior status, which places him/ her under the condition of needing development.

The interactions of the development game are also mediated by certain rules which define the actors and their responsibilities in order to reach what is presented as a common goal: to diminish, to vanish the state of backwardness from the Third World and to realize human potential, both individual and collective. Although never explicit, the development game requires that the parts are convinced that it is good and therefore desirable. The emphasis on rules does not however erase the elements of rivalry and struggle that are involved, it is still a contest to impose and legitimate a world view, a mentality, a set of practices while rejecting others that do not fit with the modern logic. Therefore, the game metaphor could be understood as an organizer and mediator of power relations.

The game of development also implies a procedure, a rational thought process and behavior where skill and strategy have a central role. The main tool to activate and reach development is economic growth, which in turn is promoted by investments (made by Governments and NGO's with specific interests) in infrastructure and technology, usage of natural resources and revitalization of the market. Although internally coherent, the author hints that the universal formula of development, which is usually applied without reservation, is not successful in every social, economic and cultural context: "None of us knows Pakistan but we all know what is good for it"⁵⁹. In consequence development loses its pristine rational character, and reveals its random and hazardous elements.

This critique is even sharper when the author states that even if the experts perceive relevant elements or characteristics that should be taken into account (such as the production of opium in Pakistan) for the "better and most integral" approach to development, sometimes these should be disregarded if they don't fit the scheme of development or can hinder its funding. Therefore, development trains the perception of reality, its problematization and solutions. It is not by chance that Frank states that "We are skilled at not seeing"⁶⁰: if one ignores that "reality" or characteristic is as if it does not exist, and if it does not appear in the rational sphere then one is not responsible or held accountable for that "mistake" in perception. Therefore Frank's phrase can be complemented by: "we are skilled at not seeing things that impare, obstruct or demand different approaches and actions from the standard development formula". This is perhaps the strongest connection, even continuity, between Frank's and Ferguson's texts: the enrootedness and inactment of the development game in the establishment of a suitable theoretical object of analysis and intervention.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 266.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 265.

In Ferguson's words, the objects of development need to be categorized and label with the generic Low-income Developing Countries (LDC): countries that present "all the right deficiencies, the sort that "development" institutions can easily and productively latch on"⁶¹. The countries that fulfill such criteria are considered as development magnets, such is the case of Botswana and Lesotho in Africa. In the case of Lesotho's construction, there are four theoretical premises and institutional rationales that construct this country as ideal for development even if they are not accurate: it has an aboriginal culture and economy, it is mainly agricultural, it has a national economy and the national government excersises governability though policy making and execution.

Although local people, students, the press and development agencies catalogue the Thaba-Tseka Project as a failed case of rural development (read as not aliviating poverty), Ferguson argues that it has caused powerfull and and far reaching side effects in the region. The most striking is the establishment of a new district with a local administration that reproduced institutions (prision, hospital, police) and services, through which the government controled the population. In this sense, the author argues that development served an instrumental role by expanding state bureaucratic power in a formely forgotten area⁶². Therefore the focus and ultimate effect is not the erradication or decrease of poverty but the increased efficiency of state power.

Simultaneous to the expansion of this form of power, the instrumental effect of development also produces the depolitization of poverty and the state. Both poverty and the state loose its political dimenstion via the objective, rational and neutral claims of development, which in turn are based on technical aspects, methods and criteria. This technicallity turns the problems into un-objectable. In consequence, "the hegemonic problematic of "development" is the principal means through which the question of poverty is de-politicized in the world today"⁶³. These political and practical effects of development allows the author to argue that this apparatus works as an anti-politics machine, suspending the political dimensions implicit in development, its ideals and pratices.

Although highly effective, the anti-politis machine is not able to control its outcome and repercussions. This leads to the formulation of the following hypothesis: the deployment of the development apparatus has a logic of intelligibility, of uncontrolabilty. This idea is in tune

⁶¹ James Ferguson, *The Anti-politics Machine. Development, Depolitization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994, p. 70.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 256.

with Frank's description of the random nature of development, which exceeds the intentions of the planners and cannot be understood as a conspiracy to enforce capitalism.

In Ferguson's case⁶⁴, development is not only an anti-politics machine but is conceptualized as a discourse in the Foucauldian sense. Both ideas focus on the political and power conditions of development. Although development is a discourse and practice of expert knowledge, the case study proves the need that development agencies have to exclude historical and political settings. Therefore these organizations need certain level of "ignorance". Both authors coincide that the stakes of development are high and its consequences are not light-hearted. At the end, development is more about politics than economics, although economics is its main vehicle.

Development as Discourse

In Escobar's work⁶⁵ the influence of Foucault is evident and explicit. The notion of discourse indicates a practice of representation that by systematically using a set of relatively constant metaphors, narratives, analogies, images and arguments constructs social objects, realities, interactions and orders subjectivity. In this sense, discourse is in itself a strategy of power, it is both the aim and medium of battles and struggles⁶⁶. However, discourse has a random, decisive character, that has power by itself. For this reason, discourse can be modified, strengthened or even disappear depending on the context and ideological framework.

Foucault⁶⁷ sustains that discourse and power are constitutive elements of social life, translators of battles and instruments of power. Another similarity between discourse and power is that they are evidenced in action, that is, they produce material consequences in the different realms of human experience. However, since both have a performative nature it is difficult to differentiate between practices and discourses, hence the notion of discursive practice. This notion stresses the tendency of discourse towards action and its links with power.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Arturo Escobar, "Discourse and Power in Development: Michel Foucault and the Relevance of his Work on the Third World", In *Alternative X* (Winter 1984-85), p. 377-400.

Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: the Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, Princeton University Press, 1994.

Arturo Escobar, *La Invención del Tercer Mundo. Construcción y Reconstrucción del Desarrollo*, Bogotá: Norma, 1996.

Arturo Escobar, "Power and Visibility. Development and the Invention and Management of the Third World", *Cultural Anthropology*, 3 (4), 428-443.

⁶⁶ Michel Foucault, *Historia de la Sexualidad*, México: Siglo XXI, 1986, p. 12.

⁶⁷ Michel Foucault, *El Sujeto y el Poder*, Bogotá: Carpe Diem, 1991.

The French psychologist and philosopher⁶⁸ conceptualized power as indicative of the strategies by which humans oppose the different ways of understanding objects, relations and ways to construct the world. Since power has an elaborate and changing structure and a circular and fluid nature, it cannot be studied and analyzed as a discrete attribute⁶⁹. In consequence, this concept moves away from the fundamental and universal idea of power in order to focus on the multiple power relations in society. Power relations are characterized by the effects caused on present or future actions, and not directly or indirectly on individuals. In other words, power exists only when it is put into an action that is located, rooted and part of the social sphere. Therefore, the exercise of power is produced when an action causes the modification, redirection or restructure of other actions⁷⁰. In this sense, discourses are more related to power relations than power per se. If power is contained and constructed in action, then power moves and is structured in the field of governability. Governability implies the design, direction and coordination of individual and collective behavior, as well as their field of action.

Although discourses dominate and order the production of social sceneries and articulate human experience, they are not natural or original. Discourses are products that obey historical, political, social and economic contingencies. Additionally, if discourses are not a fixed set of meanings superposed on social relations and phenomena, but rather practices that westerners impose on things, then discourses do not have a standardized representation in space and time. In this sense it can be said that human beings violently adjudicate discourse to things, people and events. This position has two implications. On one hand it opens up the possibility of analyzing discourses in order to understand the mechanics of power relations. On the other hand, the creation of other discourses is contemplated as a way to generate a rupture. In consequence, alternative discourses can appear and may challenge and even alter the order of domination and economic exploitation central to the discourse of development.

Within this context, Escobar understands development as a discourse fabricated by the Western developed countries in order to manage and control the political, economic, social and cultural dimensions of the Third World under the promise of salvation and progress. This discourse deploys a specific set of power relations and knowledge production strategies that insure the conformity of peoples and nations to a specific type of behavior. In synthesis, the discourse of development is a regime of representation, a “political technology”⁷¹ that insures

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Arturo Escobar, “Discourse and Power in Development: Michel Foucault and the Relevance of His work on the Third World”, In *Alternative X* (Winter 1984-85, p. 384).

domination and control over the Third World, its people and its reality. As it is not possible to understand development without its opposed yet integral counterpart (underdevelopment) and vice versa, it is also relevant to attempt a definition of underdevelopment.

Underdevelopment signals a set of undignified material conditions of peoples, states and regions which reflect a type of backward moral and psyche. These characteristics, also pointed out by Frank⁷², place the developing world and its population in need of urgent rescue and immediate re-directioning towards modernization and progress. Although Escobar assesses underdevelopment as a fictitious construct⁷³, the “material proofs” of its existence legitimizes the mechanism, strategies, institutions and knowledge production of development, producing its naturalization in social, cultural and scholarly arenas.

In coherence with the idea that discourse is produced in specific historical circumstances and serves specific ideological and political objectives, Escobar⁷⁴ analyzes the historical, political and cultural context that gave birth to development, its evolution, consolidation and mechanisms. The next section reconstructs the main arguments of this scholar’s narrative, and tries to illustrate how the discourse of development was introduced in Colombia, specifically in economic policies towards agriculture.

Escobar⁷⁵, as well as Sachs⁷⁶, argue that the age of development was born on January 20, 1949 when US President Harry S. Truman referred to Southern countries as “underdeveloped areas” in his inaugural speech. Although the Inaugural Address happened several months before WWII was over, it captured the moment and anticipated the reorganization of world order.

The end of WWII made evident the need to reconstruct Europe, destroyed by 6 years of warfare. The complex task of rebuilding Europe gave way to a great urge to establish a financial entity, a bank with a global character, that would be able of reaching this aim. By June 25, 1946 the World Bank (WB) inaugurated its operations with two institutions, one of which was the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD)⁷⁷. The IBRD

⁷² Leonard Frank, “The Development Game”, In *The Post-development Reader*, London: Zed Books, 1997.

⁷³ Arturo Escobar, “Discourse and Power in Development: Michel Foucault and the Relevance of His work on the Third World”, In *Alternative X* (Winter 1984-85, 377-400).

⁷⁴ Arturo Escobar, *La Invención del Tercer Mundo. Construcción y Reconstrucción del Desarrollo*, Bogotá: Norma, 1996.

Arturo Escobar, *El Final del Salvaje: Naturaleza, Cultura y Política en la Antropología Contemporánea*, Bogotá: CEREC, 1999.

⁷⁵ Arturo Escobar, *La invención de Tercer Mundo. Construcción y Reconstrucción del Desarrollo*, Bogotá: Norma, 1996.

Arturo Escobar, *El Final del Salvaje: Naturaleza, Cultura y Política en la Antropología Contemporánea*, Bogotá: CEREC, 1999.

⁷⁶ Wolfgang Sachs, “Introduction”, In *The Development Dictionary. A Guide to Knowledge as Power*, London: Zed Books, 1992, p. 2.

⁷⁷ World Bank, <http://www.bancomundial.org/>, (accessed June 30, 2008).

was responsible for rehabilitating the economies impacted by the War and redirecting them towards economies of peace. It was also created to research and generate plans to promote development in different economic sectors.

As the rehabilitation of Europe came to an end, the poverty of African, Asian and Latinamerican countries was made visible through the low levels in health, education, labor and tecnification. These regions and their countries were labeled as “Third World” and became the central focus of the IBRD’s research and intervention. In consequence the goal of the Bank had been reoriented, it now concentrated on the reduction of poverty⁷⁸. In other words, the IBRD would be in charge of encouraging foreign investment and long term economic growth in countries identified as underdeveloped. The economic discourse sustatined that the improvements of these dimension would cause an increase in the standards of living and working conditions of these countries. This task, both the creation of the programs as well as their execution, was assigned to a group of engeneers and financial analysts, which in turn gave a technical character to the projects and actions of the Bank.

According to the American economist Roger J. Sandilands⁷⁹, the underdevelopment of the Third World was undertood by the IBRD as a product of the lack of capital which in turn generated deficient economic growth. Therefore the solution centered on loans or capital directed towards development plans. During this innitial stage of development, social projects were excluded as can be evidenced in the following anedote. Robert Garner, vicepresident of the WB, was approached in 1951 by one of his best known economist, the canadian Lauchlin Currie, to finance social projects. His answer to this petition was: “Good dammit Launch, we cannot take care of things like education and health. We are a *bank!*”⁸⁰. This phrase condences the notion of development which only recognizes economic and tecnical dimensions, deemed as objective and imparcial, while leaving the cultural and social aspects unattended.

Development corresponds to the logics of modernity, and as such, it immediatly becomes the destiny of the modern and rational man who manages a lineal and sequenced conception of time. Development is both a historical process by which diverse indicators would improve (economic growth, poverty reduction,, etc) as well as a mechanism to reach

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Roger J. Sandilands, *Vida y Política Económica de Lauchlin Currie*, Bogotá: Legis, 1990.

⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 162. My own translation. The original reads: “Maldita sea, Launch, no podemos ocuparnos en cosas como educación y salud. ¡Somos un *banco!*”.

those goals⁸¹. In this sense, development recapitulates the modern ideal and promess of equality.

The improvement of humanity through development meant that it would become the sole horizon to think, act and articulate the relations between the antagonic First and Third World. The discourse of development would become a universally valid and integrated cosmovision, ordered by a physico-mathematical thought and consolidated in sophisticated laws, theorems and techniques⁸². Escobar sustains that development was not only successful in ordering the economic repertoirs and the relations among humans, but between humans and nature. This last relation is marked by the domination and manipulation of humans towards nature via science and technology. Nature is then concieved as a machine that is able to be controlled by reason, and the Earth is then able to adapt to the needs and desires of humans.

Post-development Critique

The critics of post-development can be divided into two groups: anti-post-developmentalists and cautious-post-developmentalists. The first group is formed by Ray Kiely⁸³, Meera Nanda⁸⁴ and Jan Pieterse Nederveen⁸⁵ who regard post-development as flaw with no possibilities of academic or practical enlightenment. Although the second group shares some of the critics made by anti-post-developmentalists, J.K. Gibson-Graham⁸⁶, Jeremy Gould⁸⁷, Knut Nustad⁸⁸ and Aram Zia safekeep some aspects (such as the analysis) that they percieve as useful to improve international development.

The above mentioned ctitics agree that from a historical perspective, the school was established through the 1980s by scholars from Latin America, Europe and Asia and popularized by two books whose contributions have been analized in the preceding sections:

⁸¹ Andreu Viola, "La Crisis del Desarrollismo y el Surgimiento de la Antropología del Desarrollo", In: *Antropología del Desarrollo. Teorías y Estudios Etnográficos en América Latina*, Barcelona: Paidós, p. 9 -64.

⁸² Arturo Escobar, *La Invención del Tercer Mundo. Construcción y Reconstrucción del Desarrollo*, Bogotá: Norma, 1996.

⁸³ Ray Kiely, "The Last Refuge of the Noble Savage? A Critical Assessment of Post-Development Theory", *The European Journal of Development Research*, June 1999, 11(1), p. 30-55.

⁸⁴ Meera Nanda, "Who Needs Post-development? Discourses of Difference, Green Revolution and Agrarian Populism in India", In *Science and Technology in Southern Africa and East and South Asia*, Brill, 1999, p. 5-31.

⁸⁵ Jan Pieterse Nederveen, "After Post-development", *Third World Quarterly*, 2000, 21, p. 175-191.

⁸⁶ J.K. Gibson-Graham, "Surplus Possibilities: Postdevelopment and Community Economies", *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 2005, 26 (1), p. 4-26.

⁸⁷ Jeremy Gould, "Timing, Scale and Style. Capacity as Governmentality in Tanzania," in Mosse, David/Lewis, David (eds): *The Aid Effect: Giving and Governing in International Development*. London, Pluto Press, 2005, p. 61-84.

⁸⁸ Knut Nustad, "Development: The Devil we Know", *Third World Quarterly* 22 (4), p. 470-489.

*The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*⁸⁹ and *The Post-development Reader*⁹⁰.

The authors also agree in the perception that the post-development approach is a narrative that bluntly rejects the idea and motives of development. Post-developmentalists are perceived as being deeply disappointed, disillusioned, perplexed and dissatisfied with the standard development rhetoric and practice. This fervorous rejection is considered the differential character in comparison to other critical approaches such as dependency theory, alternative development and human development. Furthermore, the critique of development is seen as a strategy to oppose the Western mindset, particularly the techno-scientific aspects which are associated with cartesianism, enlightenment thinking, positivism and foreign technology transfer. Nederveen goes as far as to sustain that post-development is really a “cultural critique of development and a cultural politics. This reflects on more than just development: “development” here stands-in for modernity and the real issue is the question of modernity”⁹¹.

This anti-Western and anti-Modern feeling is seen in dialogue with post-structuralism, post-modernity, post-Marxism, critical theory, ecofemism and social movement theories. The amalgam of theoretical frames fundamentals post-development’s emphasis of the local, privileging grassroots autonomy and movement as well as endogenous cultural characteristics. Specifically Foucault’s work on discourse, power and knowledge is perceived as one of the main pillars of post-development. As a result, discourse analysis becomes the privileged method of analysis. However, Ziai⁹² is keen to show that even if post-development uses words and post-structuralists concepts, it has little, if anything, to do with Foucault’s discourse as a conceptual tool to understand power/ power relations. In this sense, this scholar is more severe in his appreciation of the role, or to be more precise, the lack of Foucault’s discourse analysis in post-developmental work than Kiely, Nanda and Nederveen. The author goes as far as to doubt the rigorosity in the application of Foucauldian thought. This argument, although not unfounded, tends to weaken one of the theoretical and methodological pillars of post-development.

In terms of the conceptualizations of development, the critics agree that there is no consensus among post-development scholars; it ranges from being a discourse, an extension of colonialism, an instrument for cultural imperialism, an ideology, or a combination of the

⁸⁹ Wolfgang Sachs, *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*, London: Zed Books, 1992.

⁹⁰ Majid Rahnema. *The Post-development Reader*, London: Zed Books, 1997.

⁹¹ Jan Pieterse Nederveen, “After Post-development”, *Third World Quarterly*, 2000, 21, p. 186.

⁹² Aram Ziai, “The Ambivalence of Post-development: Between Reactionary Populism and Radical Democracy”, *Third World Quarterly*, 25 (6), 1046, Carfax Publishing.

former. What remains a constant in the literature is the problematization of poverty, as a Western social and cultural construct that has been imposed on the Third World and has been consequently interiorized and recognized as the status quo. Not only is poverty understood as an ideological and practical tool of domination from the West to the non-West or from the North to the South, but is regarded as a material impossibility: development is seen as a failed attempt to relief humanity from poverty. However, Nederveen and Kiely audaciously point out that the idea of development as an operative imposition not only neglects but denies the agency of the Third World, which in turn highlights one of the theoretical inconsistencies among post-development writers.

In general, there are four core critiques of the post-development school: homogenization and essentialization of development, uncritical and romantic reverence of the local, reluctance to suggest concrete political alternatives and inconsistencies in the process of knowledge production. Although the different aspects involved are intertwined, each critique is presented individually.

The critique of homogenization is strongly presented in Kiely's and Nederveen's text, who accuse post-development scholars of not recognizing the changes and variations within development. This mistake is attributed to a perception of development as a uniform, regular and even discourse. This critique is well fundamented, since it is common that post-developmentalists present and treat development as a unit of theory, policy and practice, overlooking its internal discontinuities and changes over time. The emphasis on the continuity of the discourse, as opposed to its ruptures, are in opposition to Foucault's ideas about how discourses are formed, change and function. This attempt to capture development in one shot, also contrasts with the idea of a historically and socially situated discursive practice. This tendency to homogenize conduces to essentializing development, expressed by the impulse and quest to expose, to reveal THE truth about development, its intentions, methods and consequences. The detective-like quality that attempts to reveal the object per se situates post-development scholars within the same scientific regime which they are trying to resist.

The second core critique deals with the fanatic reverence of the local and the traditional in post-development texts. According to Kiely, Nanda and Nederveen, post-development scholars turn, not without nostalgia, to traditional social and economic systems as an alternative to the antagonism generated by the concept of poverty, the logic of economic growth and accumulation. Nostalgia is not an academic flaw, but overlooking the power relations, struggles and hierarchies in local communities constitute a difficulty in the process

of argumentation. Additionally, Nederveen⁹³ points out that the urge to recuperate and strengthen the local discourses and practices is fundamented on the dichotomy that all that is good is local, while all that is bad is foreign.

Although the local is revered, Nustad specifically refers to the need of recognizing the agency of local elites and the influence of technical aspects in the construction of development's problems and solutions. Both of these dimensions highlight the need to observe and learn from the way in which the "interventions are transformed, reformulated, adopted or resisted in local encounters"⁹⁴. This idea contests the wide spread post-developmental notion of development as a mighty powerful apparatus that goes unchallenged by the local passive victims. However, some post-developmentalists such as Escobar and Shiva hope that counterdevelopment practices would rise from the grassroots level, a point of internal inconsistency highlighted by Nustad and Ziai. Asking for re-contextualizing, Nustad attempts to place development discourse and practice within a political frame, highlighting the dimensions of power and resistance. In other words, and referring to Ferguson's idea of development as an anti-politics machine, Nustad designates post-development as a political machine that could re-establish the political and ethical dimensions to central developmental notions such as poverty. Taking this a step further, one could claim that this re-politization leads to a shift in power dynamics in North-South relations.

The third critique exposes the reluctance of post-developmentalists to formulate alternatives to development. In Nederveen's⁹⁵ words, post-developmentalists "whistle into the dark" when the critiques of development are not followed by practical or political proposals besides the capacity of local self-organization. This author sharply and rightly states that placing all the emphasis on the local, frees the Nation-States and international organizations from committing and becoming responsible in the well-being and livelihoods of its people. When post-developmentalists, specifically Escobar, respond to this accusation by arguing that the aim of post-development is to liberate the discourse field in order for other discourses and practices to emerge that are different from development, the critics do not fully understand and rather see it a sign of dichotomic thinking and rhetoric. Therefore the idea of finding alternatives to development is not fully understood and is not differentiated from alternative development. In this sense, post-development is seem more as a theory of resistance rather than emancipation.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Knut Nustad, "Development: The Devil we Know", *Third World Quarterly* 22 (4), p. 485.

⁹⁵ Jan Pieterse Nederveen, "After Post-development", *Third World Quarterly*, 2000, 21.

The bold criticisms of the anti-post-development group of critics is mellowed by Ziai's assertion that such rejection to construct and/ or propose concrete alternatives to development is only correct in some cases. In fact, post-developmentalists propose strategies that are in tune with the theoretical and ethical horizon, such as promoting grassroots solidarity and social movements, strengthening informal economies and recuperating local traditional knowledge. The author correctly stresses that post-development does not generate suggestions for developmental institutions, nor is it's responsibility. Gibson-Graham and Nustad also observe some spaces of contribution.

Nustad for example advocates taking post-developmental insights seriously. In his own words, the "lack of instrumentality is not a weighty argument against the analysis itself"⁹⁶. Thus, post-development ideas are seen as a window of opportunity to improve the performance and efficiency of development in the so-called Third World. Although Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham also argue that post-development ideas can become useful for the "global South"⁹⁷, they focus more on the enactment of ideas rather than theoretical issues. To illustrate their point of view, the authors present the assumptions and work of Unlad Kabayan Migrant Services Foundation Inc., an NGO that bets on overseas contract migration as an opportunity to trigger community economic development in Jagna, southern Philippines.

One of the NGO's main aims is to mitigate and ultimate change the representation of migrant workers as "powerless victims of globalization" to "investors in community-based enterprises and as contributors ... for local development in their home communities"⁹⁸. This shift is seen as a strategy to resist the hegemonic ideas that migrant workers can only be integrated into the world economy via their exploitation, and that capitalist productivity is the only path towards increasing livelihoods. Jagna is experienced by locals through diverse mechanisms and areas: goods and services transacted, labour remuneration methods and its production, appropriation and distribution of surplus. It is also varied because the relationships are contingent, "economic value is liberally distributed... economic dynamics are proliferated... and multiple temporalities and storylines are untethered from one linear narrative"⁹⁹. In this sense, the project deals mainly with ecologies of non-capitalist productivity which not only promote community well-being and ethical usage of the commons, but lead to political and developmental innovations. In other words, economic

⁹⁶ Knut Nustad, "Development: The Devil we Know", *Third World Quarterly* 22 (4), p. 479.

⁹⁷ J.K. Gibson-Graham, "Surplus Possibilities: Postdevelopment and Community Economies", *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 2005, 26 (1), p. 5.

⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 7.

⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 13.

diversity commands a process by which the different dimensions of development (rationale, knowledge systems, trajectory, hierarchy and economy) become contested in conceptual and practical terms¹⁰⁰.

In the attempt to reinforce the existing community's economy, the NGO has attempted to persuade the local government and community to understand development as a collective enterprise, distancing itself from a top-down approach. It has also emphasized development ideas and plans that are rooted in the assets of the community (businesses, infrastructure, institutions, local associations, environment, practices) rather than deficiencies. Constructing development from what the community has implies certain empowerment, and allows a move from the position of needy victims to a more reflexive and active role; this rhetoric echoes Nustad's ideas of local encounter and dynamics. In lesser degree, this NGO provides training in business management and entrepreneurship to peasants and potential overseas workers. The above mentioned aims and practices lead Gibson-Graham to understand the efforts of Unlad Kabayan Migrant Services Foundation Inc. as an exercise of post-developmental ideas¹⁰¹.

For these authors post-development thinking is a deconstructivist enterprise that focuses "on unhinging notions of development from the European experience of industrial growth and capitalist expansion; decentring conceptions of economy and de-essentialising economic logics as the motor of history; loosening the discursive grip of nonlinear trajectories on narratives of change; and undermining the hierarchical valuations of cultures, practices and economic sites"¹⁰². In other words, post-development has a wider agenda that goes beyond development to deal with Modernity's science and economic system. These high scaled aims are seen in direct dialogue with Boaventura de Sousa Santos concepts of sociology of absences and emergences. Post-development is perceived as having the ideological and conceptual framework to identify local conditions and developmental practices that are non-hegemonic and that may have a counter hegemonic potential.

In seeing this possibility, Gibson-Graham impose two demands to post-development which are in direct opposition and tension to its core values and ideas. The first demand disregards post-developmentalists rejection to generate themselves development alternatives, and proposes that it should become responsible for producing ideas, narratives and models for non-capitalist development. The second is that postdevelopment should not recognize itself by opposing and rejecting development but rather embrace the challenge "to imagine and

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid. p. 5.

practice development differently”¹⁰³, to invent new ways of life. Thus the challenge of post-development is seen as the creation of alternative and counter hegemonic discourses, knowledge, practices and experiences of development.

The fourth critique deals with the process of the knowledge production in the post-development school. Kiely highlights the “methodological inconsistencies”¹⁰⁴ such as the repudiation of statics which are later used to argue the failure of development and the highly selective anti-essentialism. Another point of discord is the lack of theoretical and epistemological consistency among post-development writers which in turn supports the idea that post-developmentalists use theories but do not produce them. In consequence, this theoretical and conceptual heterogeneity is perceived as causing a rhetoric and discursive trick, a “language gridlock” that allows sloppy and indulgent language and the lack of solid and convincing examples¹⁰⁵.

These four core critiques are common in both the anti-post-developmentalists as well as in the cautious-post-developmentalists. However, these criticisms are used by anti-post-developmentalists to support their conclusion: the post-development school is “seriously flawed”¹⁰⁶ not only because it produces anti-imperialistic texts with an anarchist touch, but because it does not fit with the scientific method of knowledge production and is lacking political and practical recommendations. To remedy the populist outlook of the post-development school Nederveen proposes an analysis of development through polycentrism, where it is understood not as a position between Eurocentrism and Third Worldism, but recognises multiple centers in the North and in the South that shape development discourse and action. On the other hand, Kiely suggests more of a radical democracy à la Mouffe & Laclau¹⁰⁷, without further elaboration.

However, it remains interesting that even if the process, results and aims of post-development are questioned, Kiely and Nederveen recognize the effort to embed development into historical, social and political contexts. These critics also value the work of recuperating the relevance and value of indigenous knowledge, cultural diversity, frugality, conciliating attitudes and local struggles. Kiely specifically acknowledges that post-development theorists

¹⁰³ Ibid. p. 6.

¹⁰⁴ Ray Kiely, “The Last Refuge of the Noble Savage? A Critical Assessment of Post-Development Theory”, *The European Journal of Development Research*, June 1999, 11(1), p. 36.

¹⁰⁵ Jan Pieterse Nederveen, “After Post-development”, *Third World Quarterly*, 2000, 21, p. 183 and 187.

¹⁰⁶ Ray Kiely, “The Last Refuge of the Noble Savage? A Critical Assessment of Post-Development Theory”, *The European Journal of Development Research*, June 1999, 11(1), p. 31.

¹⁰⁷ Ernesto Laclau & Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London: Verso, 1985.

have been able to show that “Western claims to universalism are in fact justifications for Western dominance of the world system”¹⁰⁸.

Within the cautious-post-developmental, Ziai¹⁰⁹ elaborates a synthesis of post-development criticisms and a detailed dissection of the critic’s assumptions. The analysis concludes with the assertion that post-development is not a monolithic discourse, but that it is ambivalent in its political outlook. The scholar describes two variants: sceptical and neo-populist. The next section focuses on these two discourses within post-development.

Orthrus: Sceptical and Neo-populist Post-development

“... before celebrating the post-development critique,
its ambivalence has to be taken into account.
It is of crucial importance to be aware of the dangers of
reactionary populism on the one hand,
while not overlooking the emancipatory potential of the project of radical
democracy in post-development on the other”¹¹⁰

In Greek mythology Orthrus is a two headed dog owned by Geryon, King of Hesperia. Orthrus resembles post-development: a body of theory that opposes development with two distinct heads. The two heads arise from differences regarding four central points:

1. “While post-development sometimes engages in unhelpful romanticisation of traditional culture and local communities, on other occasions it is more sceptical and does not promote them uncritically.
2. While development and modernity are sometimes rejected *in toto*, on other occasions post-development finds some positive elements that can be of use in the age after the development era.
3. While some texts see cultures as static and rigid, others promote a constructivist perspective which sees culture as unstable and changing in its practice.

¹⁰⁸ Ray Kiely, “The Last Refuge of the Noble Savage? A Critical Assessment of Post-Development Theory”, *The European Journal of Development Research*, June 1999, 11(1), p. 34.

¹⁰⁹ Aram Ziai, “The Ambivalence of Post-development: Between Reactionary Populism and Radical Democracy”, *Third World Quarterly*, 25 (6), 1046, Carfax Publishing.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 1058.

4. While sometimes the return to subsistence agriculture is preached, sometimes post-development writers explicitly avoid doing this and reject the idea of formulating blueprints for a better society”¹¹¹.

The neo-populist discourse is characterized as anti-modernity, anti-development, romanticizes traditional culture, understands cultures as static and proposes a return to subsistence agriculture¹¹². On the other hand, the sceptical post-development discourse is more cautious in its critique of modernity and science, questions the role and functions of local communities and cultural tradition, comprehends culture from a constructivist view, and avoids drawing versions of future societies¹¹³. Thus, it is sceptical because it maintains a critical attitude towards recipes that come from development or from neo-populist discourse. Within this frame of mind or attitude of doubt, there is an enormous space and need for creation and re-creation; it is its potential to improve as well as its own curse. These characterization illustrates the tensions between neo-populism and the sceptical version of post-development. Additionally critics have focused their critiques on the neo-populist version without taking into account the ambivalence between these discourses¹¹⁴.

Ziai is seduced by the project of radical democracy implicit in the sceptical post-development texts. The scholar attempts to promote skeptical post-development as a manifesto for radical democracy within international development theory and practice. In sum, this project seeks to reject universal descriptions of reality and models for society under the premise that each society has to create and live its own parameters for a good life. In consequence capitalism, racism and such social construction would need to be replaced by other structures and mechanisms that aid the road towards more equality and liberty. As “good” can be qualified through different mechanisms, values and priorities, “good” becomes contested. Therefore there needs to be a decentralizations of policy, politics, economics and societies, which ultimately lead to re-allocating power at the local level.

The local is seen as the scenery where the factual possibilities of self-determination and freedom can happen, where plurality, difference, autonomy and antagonism can coexist. This means that the idea of democracy demands a re-definition, amplification, radicalization. In consequence, a shift of power-knowledge occurs from the “experts” of development to the “recipient” societies, and the diad developed – underdeveloped is diluted, challenged. In other words, sceptical post-development ultimately attempts an epistemological

¹¹¹ Ibid. p. 1053.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

decentralization, causing a “liberating” and “empowering” effect in the South, and a shift in balance in South-North relations.

On the one hand, sceptical post-development allows visualizing the relations of subordination and oppression implicit in development, and through this, hopes to re-negotiate and challenge such order. On the other hand, both sceptical post-development and radical democracy seem alluring in theoretical terms, but the challenge remains in their implementation: in how to engage radical democracy in practice, in how to think categories, projects and plans from a sceptical post-development perspective.

Chapter 2

The Discourse of Development as Corollary of the Discourse of Modernity

From a socio-historical perspective, globalization is understood as the third phase of global transformation since 1945¹¹⁵. As the last phase of modernity, globalization evidences cultural, political and social transformations as well as changes in the relations between these dimension, which in turn highlight a shift in the capitalist world system¹¹⁶. Although much has been debated about the origins of globalization, if it is a recent or continuous phenomena, from the perspective of post-colonial theory, it is strongly linked with Western expansion, specifically the pretensions of christianizing and civilizing the world¹¹⁷.

The discovery of the New World by the Spanish empire initiated a processes of fracture of the geographic and human barriers which was based on the invention of the savages of the new found world. These beings were apt to be applied the christian mision of the Spanish and Portuguese monarchies. By the 16th Century the British and French empires influenced the image of the savages as primitive and exotic beings. By the end of the 19th century, the barriers were no longer spacial but chronological. The question focused on the distance that separated primitive beings from civilization¹¹⁸. This geographic and ideological colonizing process legitimized the concept of civilization, making it a universal and desirable quality for humanity.

The Argentinian semiotician Walter Mignolo¹¹⁹ sustains that the idea and promess of civilization had a double function. It becamas Europe's ideological justification for its economic expansion and allowed the continent to auto-proclaim itself as center of knowledge and knowledge production, which was supposed to be imparted to non Europeans, that is, to barbaric peoples and nations. This is how the ontological distinctions between West and non-

¹¹⁵ Walter Mignolo, "Globalization, Civilization Processes, and the Relocation of Languages and Cultures", In Jameson, F. & Miyoshi, M. (Eds) *The Cultures of Globalization*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1998, p. 32-53.

Emmanuel Wallerstein, "¿La Globalización o la Era de la Transición?: una Visión a Largo Plazo de la Trayectoria del Sistema-Mundo", *Casa de las Américas (219)*, 2000, p. 14-25.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

Santiago Casto, "Fin de la Modernidad Nacional y Transformaciones de la Cultura en Tiempos de Globalización", In *Cultura y Globalización*, Bogotá: CES, 1999.

¹¹⁷ Walter Mignolo, "Globalization, Civilization Processes, and the Relocation of Languages and Cultures", In Jameson, F. & Miyoshi, M. (Eds) *The Cultures of Globalization*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1998, p. 32-53. Enrique Dussel, "Beyond Eurocentrism: the World-system and the Limits of Modernity", In Jameson, F. & Miyoshi, M. (Eds) *The Cultures of Globalization*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1998, p. 3-32.

¹¹⁸ Walter Mignolo, "Globalization, Civilization Processes, and the Relocation of Languages and Cultures", In Jameson, F. & Miyoshi, M. (Eds) *The Cultures of Globalization*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1998, p. 32-53.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

West starts. In other words, the non-West was envisioned as the contrasting and lacking other, “serving as the social point for distilling the *opposites* of all those moral, ethical and aesthetic attributes that gradually accreted to constitute the very core of the West’s own self- image”¹²⁰.

According to Mignolo¹²¹ the innaguration and stablishment of globalization as the third stage in the transformation of the orders and imaginaries of the world system is signaled by American imperialism and its development and modernizing mission. This contemporary mission gives rise to a new version of imperialism and colonization of the representations and social, cultural, politic and economic realities which is articulated by the invention of the term of underdeveloped continent, country and people¹²². In our times, the promess of progress replaces the arguments in pro of christianización and civilization. This brief contextualization sets the stage for this chapter which aims at describing the discourse of development in its relation to modernity as elaborated by the Colombian antropologist Arturo Escobar¹²³.

The Discourse of Development

The work of Escobar regarding development as a discourse has two practical and political pillars: political ecology and antropology of development. Antropology of *development* contemplates development as a socio-cultural phenomena and attempts a peripheric view and analysis of development. By using poststructuralist methodologies, antropology of developments aims at being highly critical of the main arguments and practices of development¹²⁴. In opposition and tension to this view is development antropology that focuses on the design and evaluation of development institutions and their transformation. While development antropology is mainly framed by cultural theories and political economy, antropology of development is rooted in types of analysis that privilege

¹²⁰ Prasad & Prasad cited by Michael B. Elmes, *Identity, Work, and Resistance in High Places: a Study of First Nation Mohawk ironworkers*, <http://www.mngt.waikato.ac.nz/ejrot/cmsconference/2003/abstracts/postcolonial/Elmes.pdf> (accessed May 12, 2008).

¹²¹ Walter Mignolo, “Globalization, Civilization Processes, and the Relocation of Languages and Cultures”, In Jameson, F. & Miyoshi, M. (Eds). *The Cultures of Globalization*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1998, p. 32-53.

¹²² Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: the Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, Princeton University Press, 1994.

¹²³ This chapter is strongly rooted in the unpublished document: María Angélica Guerrero & Carolina Trevisi, *Discursos sobre el Medio Ambiente en una Organización Floricultora de la Sabana de Bogotá*.

¹²⁴ Andreu Viola, “La Crisis del Desarrollismo y el Surgimiento de la Antropología del Desarrollo”, In *Antropología del Desarrollo. Teorías y Estudios Etnográficos en América Latina*, Barcelona: Paidós, 2000, p. 9-64.

language and meaning.

Although this rupture within anthropology occurred during the latter part of the 1970s, six years before the field of political ecology had already been established.. This area attempts interdisciplinary analysis by recuperating the historical connections in the relationship between ecology and society. The main focus was the analysis of political processes and institutions that play a crucial role in defining the dialectic relationship between a given society and the environment¹²⁵.

For his doctoral dissertation, which was later published in Spanish¹²⁶ and English¹²⁷, Escobar uses discourse analysis to deconstruct development. As has been stated in Chapter 1, for this author, development was an answer to the problematization of poverty that became visible after WWII, although its roots can be traced to the historical process of modernity and the evolution of capitalism¹²⁸. In this sense, it does not correspond to a radical political or epistemological rupture. The discourse of development is and corresponds to a historical construction that allows a particular order of the world, a particular way of producing a specific human subjects and social orders, and that outlines the legitimate path for its definition, knowledge and intervention. In this way, development revindicated the ideal of modernity, and as a discursive field it inaugurated a new domain of power.

This author defines development as a discourse that is produced historically and that penetrated social, economic and cultural structures of contemporary societies. Development created a space for the systematic creation of concepts, theories and practices, and grouped and dispose them in a particular way, giving them their own internal unity¹²⁹. Escobar insists that the systematic character of the relations is what establishes a discursive practice that defines, describes, qualifies and problematizes the space of influence of development, as well as its objects and practices. In this sense, development started to function as a discourse when it began to articulate knowledge and power, and when it became incorporated into the politics of knowledge and science of the West.

The incorporation of the Third World as an object of study of positive science, characterized by neutrality, objectivity and logical-mathematical rationality, caused its

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Arturo Escobar, *La Invención del Tercer Mundo. Construcción y Reconstrucción del Desarrollo*, Bogotá: Norma, 1996.

¹²⁷ Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: the Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, Princeton University Press, 1994.

¹²⁸ Arturo Escobar, "El "Posdesarrollo" como Concepto y Práctica Social", *Políticas de Economía, Ambiente y Sociedad en Tiempos de Globalización*, p. 17-31.

¹²⁹ Arturo Escobar, *La Invención del Tercer Mundo. Construcción y Reconstrucción del Desarrollo*, Bogotá: Norma, 1996, p. 88.

political, social and cultural dimension to be disjoined. This separation was necessary, useful and coherent with the idea of progress, understood as a series of technical interventions that with the pretension of universality avowed such disjunctions. In consequence, development comprehends social life as a technical problem, a variable, an object to be managed by the experts through rational criteria, and not as an enterprise that is in dialogue with specific historical and cultural contexts. This technification “allowed experts to remove from the political realm problems which would otherwise be political, and to recast them into the apparently more neutral realm of science”¹³⁰.

The study, organization, validation and diffusion of knowledge regarding the Third World can be evidenced in the proliferation of development disciplines, and specially in the flourishing of development studies in American, Canadian and European universities. That the conceptualization, categorization and programs to modify the Third World are constructed by First World experts, professionals and international organizations, who are considered morally and politically apt, suggest a rather undemocratic process¹³¹. It highlights how the system of relations put in place by development act as the rules of the game and orders the possibilities of the actors. Ultimately, the establishment of an academic regime of truth regarding the underdeveloped world is in direct relation to the progressive incorporation of problematics, starting with poverty and later including agricultural, educational, technological and moral issues. In this way, the continuous integration of features resulted in the establishment of new fields of intervention where power could be deployed. As a result of this expansion, the discourse of development was further institutionalized.

The type of knowledge produced by development institutions, experts and technocrats, as well as their suggestions for action, have been characterized by “strong normative and teleological components”¹³² firmly rooted in dichotomic thinking. As has been mentioned before, binary opposition is one of the key mechanisms by which modern rationality has colonized the world and its inhabitants and is intrinsic to the ontological distinction between West and non-West. Prasad & Prasad¹³³ highlight several dichotomies which are pervasively employed in the discourses of modernity and development: active – passive, adult – child,

¹³⁰ Arturo Escobar, “Discourse and Power in Development: Michel Foucault and the Relevance of His Work on the Third World”, In *Alternative X* (Winter 1984-85), p. 387.

¹³¹ Arturo Escobar, *La Invención del Tercer Mundo. Construcción y Reconstrucción del Desarrollo*, Bogotá: Norma, 1996.

¹³² Arturo Escobar, “Discourse and Power in Development: Michel Foucault and the Relevance of His Work on the Third World”, In *Alternative X* (Winter 1984-85), p. 387.

¹³³ Prasad & Prasad as cited by Michael B. Elmes, *Identity, Work, and Resistance in High Places: a Study of First Nation Mohawk Ironworkers*, <http://www.mngt.waikato.ac.nz/ejrot/cmsconference/2003/abstracts/postcolonial/Elmes.pdf> (accessed May 12, 2008), p. 62.

center – periphery, civilized – savage or primitive, complete – lacking, developed – backward, free – exploited, masculine – feminine, modern – archaic, subject – object, nation – tribe, scientific – superstitious, secular – religious and superior – inferior. These distinctions become the point of departure for the construction of moral, ethical and esthetic spheres of the developed West, where the non-west is seen as undesired. Nonetheless, the oppressed, dark and poor qualities of the undeveloped world allows the developed West to take a paternalist outlook, filled with the desire to change and eliminate tropical exuberance in order to comply with the norm. However, common sense also highlights the attraction between opposites, this has led in some cases to the attempt by the First World to preserve and even romanticize some qualities of the Third World.

The systematic use of such dichotomies to refer to objects, subjects and events has several effects. First, by eliminating complexity, diversity and differences among peoples and regions it becomes a hegemonic way of representation¹³⁴, and creates an aura of truth and coherence, both in its theoretical and practical levels. Second, by limiting the discursive horizon to binomial and, more often than not, pejorative construction, the discourse of development “has been able to penetrate, integrate, manage and control countries and populations in increasingly detailed and encompassing ways”¹³⁵. In consequence, the poor afrocolombians in the Colombian Pacific forest are the same as the rest of the poor of the world, not only in their status of poor but of underdeveloped. This leads to the conclusion that the same developmental plans, programs and strategies should be applied and should generate the same results. In this sense, development has triumphed, it has generated sophisticated techniques for technical and political control of Third World populations.

Escobar¹³⁶ argues that the institutionalization of development had a double function. On the one hand it allowed the registration and stabilization of the discourse within its agents which are located at different levels: international, national, local organizations and community based agencies. On the other hand, institutionalization allowed the dispersion and penetration of the developmental discourse by multiplying the sites of power where the disciplinary actions of the apparatus could be executed. However, even if the institutions of development are effective in these terms, they are ineffective in achieving the ultimate goal: relief of material restriction and progress. Nonetheless the author does not reject the fact that

¹³⁴ Arturo Escobar, *La Invención del Tercer Mundo. Construcción y Reconstrucción del Desarrollo*, Bogotá: Norma, 1996.

¹³⁵ Arturo Escobar, “Discourse and Power in Development: Michel Foucault and the Relevance of His work on the Third World”, In *Alternative X* (Winter 1984-85), p. 388.

Arturo Escobar, *La Invención del Tercer Mundo. Construcción y Reconstrucción del Desarrollo*, Bogotá: Norma, 1996.

¹³⁶ Ibid. p. 388.

in some cases, the diverse institutions that were created in pro of development have benefited people. This failure stresses the character of this discourse as an instrument of power and control¹³⁷

Another feature closely linked with the institutionalization of development is planning¹³⁸. Planning can be understood as a word game, where to be able to live in modern society it is necessary to modify the current social structures and provide new ones, that is, to develop one self in order to stop being underdeveloped. Therefore the idea of planning assumes that social change can originate or can be produced by volition. This puts the underdeveloped countries in a position to transit towards development and progress by planning a wide range of social, family and individual spheres such as health, security, education, housing and nourishment, among others. In this sense, planning legitimes the apparatus of development.

Planning is strongly rooted in the discourse of development due to the manner in which the Third World is represented. As the underdeveloped regions, countries and populations are understood as being inherently insufficient, lacking and in deficit in comparison to the First World¹³⁹, it is only “natural” that the Third World would aid them. This configuration of the Third World as needy leads to the creation and implementation of development programs, such as integrated rural development.

Rural development originated from the increase of population with hunger and desnutricion in the Third World. Due to its origin and setting, the program involves peasants, small farmers and population from the agrarian sector. Escobar¹⁴⁰ suggests that these sort of programs toward development are ultimately evaluating, judging and pretending to change the culture of rural societies by replacing it with modern western agriculture. This attempt at swaping cultures does not recognize the cultural, social and economic dynamics of the Third World and the specificity of place. To resist this logic, the author proposes to recognize the plurality of meanings and practices, its histories and the origins in order for planning to loose its strength. This will then lead to a recognition of specific social and cultural ways, as opposed to an absolute way of being and acting.

Continuining with Escobar’s discourse analysis, one of the central arguments is that the underdevelopment of the Third World, evidenced in its papethetic levels of health, education, ethics, unemployment and technological level in comparison to First World

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Arturo Escobar, *El Final del Salvaje: Naturaleza, Cultura y Política en la Antropología Contemporánea*, Bogotá: CEREC, 1999.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

countries, is attributed to a lack in capital. Therefore foreign investment and capital accumulation are the key elements in promoting economic growth and development. This logic is based on the assumption that material development is the prerequisite for social, cultural and political progress¹⁴¹. For this reason, and as an attempt to control and pull Latinamerican, Asian and African countries from underdevelopment, theories of capital formation (including factors such as commerce, industrialization, fiscal and monetary policy), promotion of modern values (such as education) and creation of international institutions (WB and IMF) was regarded as an imperative. The following section presents a brief account of the entrance of development in Colombia *a la* Escobar.

Development in Colombia

After WWII, development followed its path and by December 24, 1946, Colombia had already adhered to the IBRD, which was recognized as an institution that made loans to poor countries that had capacity of payment. Two years after, Colombia presented a loan request at the IBRD for U\$ 78 millions to finance investments for the modernization of transportation (roads, ports and trains), the purchase of electrical plants and agricultural equipment. In order to verify the needs of the country, asses the level of urgency of the loan and formulate a global program of development, the IBRD sent a group of 14 experts, who produced the first report of this type in an underdeveloped country¹⁴². The experts came from different fields: foreign trade, economy, finance to transportation, industry, energy and hydrocarbons¹⁴³. The mission, coordinated by the above mentioned Currie, took place from July 11 until November 5, 1949 and focused on two problems of the economic system: inflation and transportation.

In 1949, Colombia had a population of 11 million people and was a predominant agricultural country. The main product was coffee, which provided the highest amount of income, followed by petroleum and gold. Coffee was grown in what is known as the *Eje Cafetero* (Coffee growing axis), a name given by the fact that most of the production is located in the departments of Caldas, Risaralda, Quindío and smaller areas in Valle del Cauca and Antioquia. According to the economist Salomón Kalmanovitz & Enrique López¹⁴⁴ the

¹⁴¹ Arturo Escobar, *La Invención del Tercer Mundo. Construcción y Reconstrucción del Desarrollo*, Bogotá: Norma, 1996, p. 86.

¹⁴² Ibid.

Roger J. Sandilands, *Vida y Política Económica de Launchlin Currie*, Bogotá: Legis, 1990.

¹⁴³ Arturo Escobar, *La Invención del Tercer Mundo. Construcción y Reconstrucción del Desarrollo*, Bogotá: Norma, 1996.

¹⁴⁴ Salomón Kalmanovitz and Enrique López, *El Desarrollo de la Agricultura en Colombia*, Bogotá: Carlos Valencia Editores.

country was undergoing two important and intereconnected changes: a process of differentiation between the country and the cities, and an intense process of urbanization and internal migration triggered by the biparty strife, known as “*La Violencia*”. In addition, 73% of the labor force was working in agriculture and employed primitive techniques¹⁴⁵. In developmental terms, Colombia was the incarnation of underdevelopment.

Both Sandilands¹⁴⁶ and Kalmanovitz & López¹⁴⁷ coincide in the perception that the Mision, and in particular its director, had discovered a disproportion between the number of inhabitants in urban areas and their productivity. This was attributed to peasant families who planted crops for subsistence, used primitive agricultural techniques in lands which were remote and had difficult access. In contrast, the most fertile and accesible lands were owned by a limited number of landlords who used it to graze cattle and harvest few commercial foods. This observation meant that there was a terrible and antieconomic land usage, which indicated an extemely low productivity per agricultural worker¹⁴⁸.

Curries’s solution for Colombia was to implement a strategy to quickly generate migration of the peasants to the cities¹⁴⁹. Following the style of industrial capitalism, this strategy aimed at transforming peasants into factory workers and increasing the productivity in all sectors, starting by agriculture. In addition, the increase in agricultural productivity could by reached with little or no additional labor force, it was a matter of organizing and efficiently using the available capital. This strategy also demanded govermental support by placing stimulus on export agriulture, a modern and developed way that would allow to take benefit of the great scales of prodution. Although it took several years more for the strategy to be implemented, the soil had already been fertilized.

In this context, since the end of the 1950s Colombian government created mechanisms and institutions devoted to the promosion and creation of products and services that would be send and sold in other countries, that is, a production that aimed at exportation¹⁵⁰. This stimulus had high impact on non-traditional exportations, such as flowers, fruits and vegetables, and was consolidated in the *Plan Vallejo*, regulated by *Decreto Ley 444 de 1967* (Law 444 of 1967). *Plan Vallejo* supported Colombian exports by allowing natural or judicial persons to import goods with total or parcial tax exception with the condition that they would

¹⁴⁵ Roger J. Sandilands, *Vida y Política Económica de Launchlin Currie*, Bogotá: Legis, 1990.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Salomón Kalmanovitz and Enrique López, *El Desarrollo de la Agricultura en Colombia*, Bogotá: Carlos Valencia Editores.

¹⁴⁸ Roger J. Sandilands, *Vida y Política Económica de Launchlin Currie*, Bogotá: Legis, 1990.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Luis Jorge Garay, “De la Sustitución de Importaciones a la Apertura 1967 – 1996”, In *Colombia: Estructura Industrial e Internacionalización 1967 – 1996*, Bogotá: Colombia, 1998. <http://www.lablaa.org/blaavirtual/economia/industriatrina/003.htm>, (accessed July 1, 2008).

be used to produce goods and services that would be exported¹⁵¹. This strategy managed three programs: raw materials and agricultural goods needed for production, replacement of raw materials and capital assets. These programs configured the *Sistema Especiales de Importación-Exportación* (Special System of Import-Export).

From 1967 until 1974, Colombia's political and development strategies, as well as other Latinamerican countries, was centered on the import-substitution strategy recommended by development experts. The hope, or expected result, was that the promotion of exportation in a protected internal markets would increase agricultural productivity, making Colombia's products competitive in the world markets, which would ultimately trigger economic growth. This led to the establishment of the *Certificado de Abono Tributario* (CAT), the creation of the *Fondo de Promoción de Exportaciones* (Proexpo) and legislature changes to introduce the new changes¹⁵². During this period of time, only the government of Misael Eduardo Pastrana Borrero (1970 – 1974) integrated into national development strategies housing as a means for urban development, and the distribution of social services¹⁵³.

In terms of economic and public policy, the period from 1975 until 1984 is characterized by Luis Jorge Garay¹⁵⁴ as influenced by external shocks and the first attempt at liberalization occur. The administrations made attempts to continue with the exportation focus, but other problems (estabilization of public finance and fiscal deficit) and the general deterioration of the economy led to short term policies that had a “putting out fires” approach. The following five years were a period of adjustments and estabilization. The aim was to reactivate the economy by controlling fiscal deficit and adjusting the external sector. The 1990 – 1996 period marked the end of a protectionist and import oriented policy by introducing liberalism as a continuous effort to internationalize the economy¹⁵⁵.

This brief narration describes how development inserted itself into a nation-state and started to organize and order the priorities and policies according to one particular way, which is regarded as an undebatable truth. It also shows how the logic of political economy compulsively reorders the way people organize themselves, how and what they work, what they produce and how they produce it. The Colombian case also illustrates why post-developmentalists insist upon the need to change developmental practices and knowledges as

¹⁵¹ Corporación Colombia Internacional, http://www.cci.org.co/cci/cci_x/scripts/index.php (accessed September 11, 2008).

¹⁵² Luis Jorge Garay, “De la Sustitución de Importaciones a la Apertura 1967 – 1996”, *Colombia: Estructura Industrial e Internacionalización 1967 – 1996*, Bogotá: Colombia, 1998, Vol.

1, <http://www.lablaa.org/blaavirtual/economia/industriatitina/003.htm>, (accessed July 1, 2008).

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

politics of truth¹⁵⁶. Hence the post-developmental desire for alternative discourses and representations that are not mediated by the use of developmental language and ideology¹⁵⁷ is a central topic within the school, which in turn feeds the utopia of a development free world.

In an endeavor to provide suggestions for this ontological modification, post-development authors stress the need to multiply the centers and agents of knowledge production¹⁵⁸. Of special importance are the forms of knowledge that are produced by those who are the target of development. By recognizing alternative and contrasting knowledge production systems, the objects of development can liberate themselves and regain their status of subjects, that is, active agents¹⁵⁹. According to Escobar¹⁶⁰, there are two paths to recuperate peripheric and subaltern cognitive structures. The first one focuses on local adaptations, subversions and resistances and answers to concrete developmental actions. The second path aims at highlighting alternative strategies produced by social movements when these encounter development, such as PCN.

After having briefly described the development as a discourse and its inclusion and operation in Colombia, it is necessary and congruent with this thesis to describe the relation between society and nature. From a post-developmental perspective, and specially from Escobar's point of view, this relation has been, without a doubt, influenced by the particularities of the discourse of development.

Continuities Between the Discourse of Development and the Discourse of Sustainable Development

According to Escobar¹⁶¹, the concept of nature has been treated since the Enlightenment as something that is detached, that does not belong to the history of humanity. There is even the idea of a pristine, virginal nature, even if multiple evidence is available that attests to its exploitation. Nonetheless, the author sustains that scientific and technological progresses will lead humans to modify their perspectives of nature. Molecular genetics, the human genome, artificial fertilization, transgenics and chemicals that accelerate growth of certain products are all examples of the technification of nature, which leads to a modification in the

¹⁵⁶ Arturo Escobar, "El "Posdesarrollo" como Concepto y Práctica Social", *Políticas de Economía, Ambiente y Sociedad en Tiempos de Globalización*, p.20.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Arturo Escobar, *El Final del Salvaje: Naturaleza, Cultura y Política en la Antropología Contemporánea*. Bogotá: CEREC, 1999.

relationship between humans and nature.

However, Escobar suggests that the tropical rain forests are perhaps one of the few spaces in the planet that allow the maintenance of the ideology of nature¹⁶² in terms of organic nature. Nonetheless, technoscience has permeated these places via conservation projects, where more than trying to preserve nature, it aims at protecting the sources of food, drugs and other biotechnological valuable products. This same situation repeats itself in biodiversity projects, constituting a powerful interphase between nature and culture¹⁶³. In other words, biodiversity should be understood in structural and functional terms, and should include all living beings, their interrelations, dependencies and relations. In this way, given the great influence of development and modernity, the concept of nature starts to be conceptualized as a natural resources, that is, capitalist nature affected by technology.

The conflict between organic nature and capitalist nature gives rise to the term sustainable development. The United Nations Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm, Sweden and was the first international conference about the environment. The idea of understanding the world as a global, interconnected and interrelated world became relevant for policy making. As Escobar¹⁶⁴ highlights, this Conference is the historical and political moment where a political and ideological shift took place: global problems should be treated with globalized resolutions.

Escobar¹⁶⁵ explains in a clear and precise manner three answers raised by the problematics of the relation between nature and society in globalization: the liberal, the culturalist and the ecosocialist. The origin of the liberal answer is given by western modernity itself. Modernity in terms of its conception of an objective scientific knowledge, the manipulation of the world, the possibility to control and maneuver social reality and to plan progressive social change. However, it is the existence of an economic culture that the discourse of sustainable development adopts with great strength. The process of market expansion, utilitarianism and the idea of an autonomous economy make the concept of sustainable development un-doubtable by the modern man. When referring to nature, the West refers to resources. Since resources have a limit, in economic terms resources are imposed a value which allows them to be placed and bought through the market. The market is in turn regulated by the availability of the resources, so the modern man moves between the interplay of nature and its resources.

¹⁶² Ibid. p. 204.

¹⁶³ Ibid. p. 270.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

The culturalist answer critiques the liberal outlook and doubts the alleged economic and scientific culture of the West. This answer emphasizes culture as the fundamental dimension in human relationship with nature¹⁶⁶. From this perspective, the exploitation of nature as a resource, the indiscriminate increase of consumption due to market policies, the abuse of nature, the exploitation of countries considered underdeveloped and the consequences of modernity lead to a destruction of nature. From this point of view, the term nature has been progressively replaced by the concepts of natural resources and biologic diversity, among others. This situation has led to leave nature out from the sustainable development discussion.

The ecosocialist critique is the third answer and emphasizes political economy, although it shares several culturalists appreciations. The main proposal is to reform the political economy where the ecologic phase works in two different yet related ways: modern and postmodern forms of ecological capital¹⁶⁷.

On the other hand, O'Connor¹⁶⁸ suggests that the modern form of ecological capital functions according to modern capitalist rationality. This means that the conditions of production lead capitalism to further structure itself around productive and consumption needs, whether it be any type of merchandise, labor, space or nature. In echo to postmodern thought, this author conceives nature as a source of value, not to be exploited but rather conserved. This alternative way of understanding nature is brought by its representation. It is here where the concept of "semiotic conquest" is introduced to signal the idea that everything has value because nothing escapes the economic and productive logic.

From an ecosocialist perspective, the liberal discourse of sustainable development sets out to rescue capital, not nature. On the other hand, from a culturalists stand what is at stake is the maintenance of Western culture. Taken into consideration the main ideas of ecosocialism, the main worry is that Third World countries and social movements produce strategies that not only sustain themselves in ecological and cultural terms, but that resist the concepts of nature defined by the neoliberal discourse.

In conclusion, these three discourses influence each other in theoretical and practical levels. In other words, each of them fight for a space in the dynamics of representation and action of nature, struggle that is performed through language as enunciated by Foucault¹⁶⁹. In

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 80.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 85.

¹⁶⁸ Martin O'Connor, "On the Misadventures of Capitalist Nature", In *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, London: Guilford Press, 1993, p. 7-34.

¹⁶⁹ Michel Foucault, *El Orden del Discurso*, Barcelona: Tusquets, 1987.

this order of ideas, Escobar¹⁷⁰ proposes the search of new narratives that have as a point of departure the local cultural mediations, and that are constituted in dialogue with the different relations between cultura and nature. The proposal of this author is rooted in the construction towards a renaissance that articulates subjectivity and that at the same time, alternates with the economic, cultural and ecological dimensions where development stopped existing as an unquestionable object.

Michel Foucault, *Yo Pierre Riviere, habiendo Degollado a Mi Madre, a Mi Hermana y a Mi Hermano...* Barcelona: Grafos, 2001.

¹⁷⁰ Arturo Escobar, *El Final del Salvaje: Naturaleza, Cultura y Política en la Antropología Contemporánea*, Bogotá: CEREC, 1999, p. 129.

Chapter 3

Approximation to the Colombian Pacific Region as a Place

*“Somos pacífico, estamos unidos
Nos une la región
La pinta, la raza y el don del sabor...
Unidos por siempre, por la sangre, el color
Y hasta por la tierra”*

*“We are the pacific, we are together
We are united by the region
Our looks, our race and the gift of flavor/swing
United forever by blood, by the color
And even by land”*

Fragment of the song *Somos Pacifico* (We are –the- Pacific)
written and performed by Chocquibtown¹⁷¹, a band that fuses hip hop and funk
with traditional sounds and instruments from the Colombian Pacific coast.

The word place originates from the Latin *platea* and the Greek *plateia* and refers to a courtyard, an open space, a broad street or way. Thus, from an etymological point of view, place designates a particular physical environment, space or surrounding and highlights a sense of position, of dwelling¹⁷². Recently in social sciences the notion of place has shifted from denoting geographic coordinates to include social and cultural aspects. Place is now frequently conceptualized as a historical entity, a scene where nature and society interact and recreate each other. In consequence, place simultaneously constitutes and is constitutive of

¹⁷¹ Chocquibtown, “Somos Pacifico” (Track 2). *Somos Pacifico*. <http://www.chocquibtown.com/letras/> (accessed January 2, 2008), 2006. My own translation.

¹⁷² Definition of Place: Online Etymology Dictionary <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?l=p&p=19> (accessed April 37, 2008) and Merriam-Webster Online <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Place> (accessed April 30, 2008).

social practices¹⁷³. This idea of place is in contrast to the wide spread and contemporary notion which tends to dilute place by alluding to space, mobility, fragmentation, and migration.

In coherence with the idea of place, which echoes embeddedness and enrootedness, this chapter pretends to succinctly describe the Colombian Pacific region as a “socio-natural world”¹⁷⁴: a place that shares physical, chemical, geographical, climatic, cultural, political, economic and historical similarities¹⁷⁵. However, no attempt is made to create a photographic image of this place, rather the emphasis lies in sketching the different dimensions that come into play to configure the Colombian Pacific region.

In geographical terms (a science that presents itself as the objective knowledge of location¹⁷⁶), the Colombian Pacific region comprises 71,000 km of land, rivers and rainforests¹⁷⁷ located in the western area of Colombia between two natural barriers: the Pacific Ocean and the Western Andes Cordillera (Figure 1). To the north it limits with the Atrato River (408 km/ 254 miles), to the east with the basin formed by the Magdalena and Cauca Rivers (512 km/ 318 miles), to the south with Ecuador (168 km/ 104 miles) and to the west, both the Pacific Ocean coastal line (1,300 km/ 808 miles) and Panamá (30 km/ 19 miles)¹⁷⁸. These geographic conditions determine the climate, characterized by variable and weak winds, constant relative humidity (above 80%) and high precipitation¹⁷⁹.

Such conditions are responsible for the abundant water, and specifically, for the quick flowing rivers that pour the precious liquid into the Pacific Ocean. These characteristics have led experts to describe the Colombian Pacific, since the 1950's, as the wettest and “most spectacular rainforest of the world”¹⁸⁰. Gentry¹⁸¹ goes as far as to state that areas of the forest contain the highest degree of endemic species, not only in South America but of the whole

¹⁷³ Anthony Giddens, *New Rules of Sociological Method: a Positive Critique of Interpretative Sociologies*, London: Hurhinson, 1979.

¹⁷⁴ Arturo Escobar, *Places and Regions in the Age of Globality: Social Movements and Biodiversity Conservation in the Colombian Pacific* (without date), <http://www.unc.edu/~aescobar/html/texts.htm> (accessed November 25, 2007).

¹⁷⁵ Real Academia Española. Región. http://buscon.rae.es/draeI/SrvltConsulta?TIPO_BUS=3&LEMA=region (accessed March 3, 2008).

¹⁷⁶ Ulrich Oslender. “Fleshing Out the Geographies of Social Movements: Colombia’s Pacific Coast Black Communities and the “Aquatic Space”. *Political Geography*, 2004, 23, 957-985.

¹⁷⁷ Aprox. 45, 440, 000 acres. The tropical rainforest occupies 77% of the Colombian Pacific (Escobar, without date).

¹⁷⁸ Jaime Cantera. “Oceanografía”, In Pablo Leyva, ed. *Colombia Pacífico. Tomo I*. Bogotá: Fondo FEN, 1993. <http://www.lablaa.org/blaavirtual/faunayflora/pacific1/cap1.htm> (accessed March 4, 2008)

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Aída Palacios Santamaría, “Cultura Material Indígena o Artesanías?”, In Pablo Leyva, ed. *Colombia Pacífico. Tomo I*. Bogotá: Fondo FEN, 1993, p. 363.

¹⁸¹ Alwin Gentry, “Riqueza de Especies y Composición Florística”, In Pablo Leyva, ed. *Colombia Pacífico. Tomo I*. Bogotá: Fondo FEN, 1993, p. 200-219.

planet. It is no surprise that this forest, which is considered a luxury¹⁸², an exotic and complex ecosystem with high biodiversity, has made it into the hotspots list¹⁸³. This recognition has paved the way, since the 1980s, for multiple and ambitious conservation and development projects such as *Proyecto Biopacífico* (Pacific biodiversity conservation project).

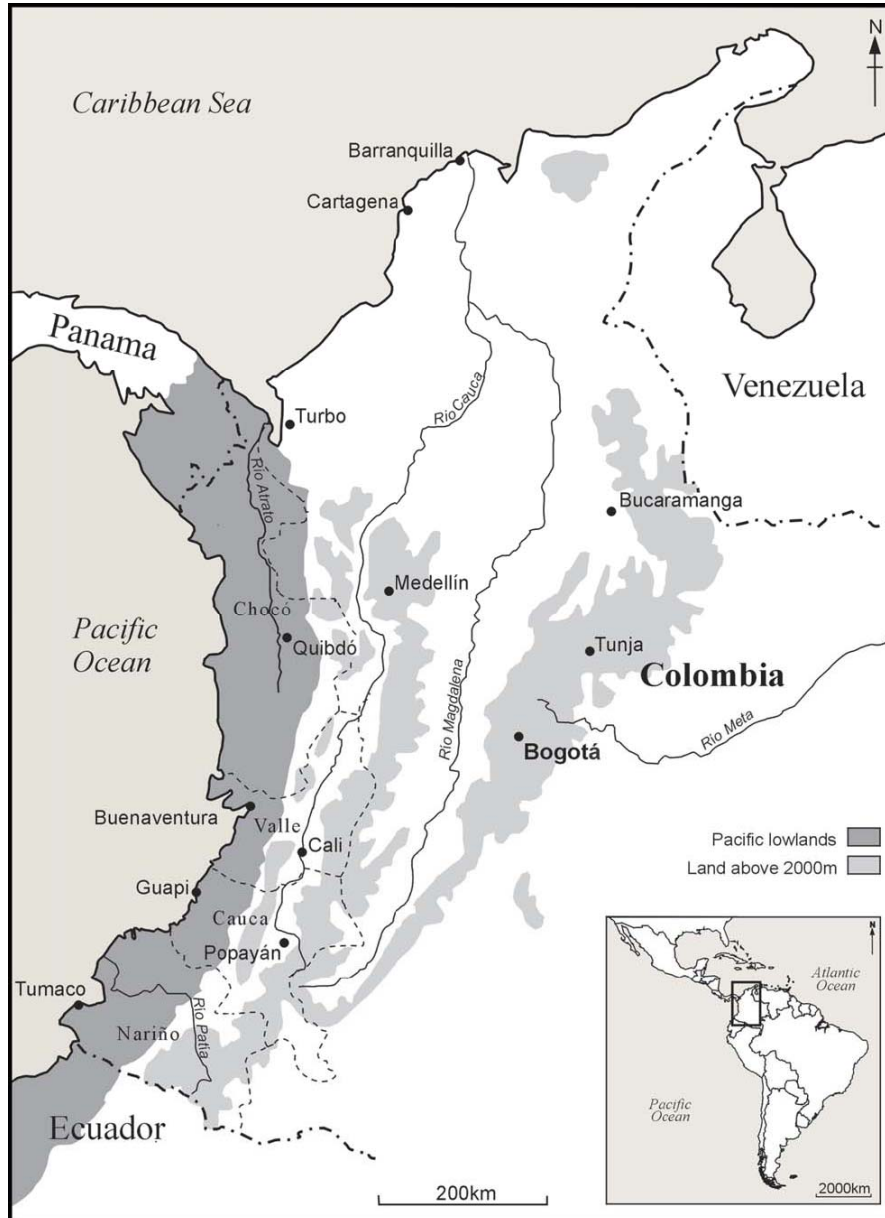


Figure 1: Map of Colombia which highlights the Pacific Region¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Robert West, *The Pacific Lowlands of Colombia. A Negroid Area of the American Tropics*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957.

¹⁸³ The Colombian Pacific is part of the Tumbes-Chocó-Magdalena hotspot (José Vicente Rodríguez-Mahecha, Paul Salaman, Peter Jörgensen, Trisha Consiglio, Luis Suárez, Fabio Arjona and Robert Bensted-Smith, "Tumbes-Chocó-Magdalena", in *Hotspots Revisited. Earth's Biologically Richest and Most Endangered Terrestrial Ecoregions* (Conservation International, 2005). <http://www.biodiversityscience.org/publications/hotspots/tumbes.html> (accessed January 2, 2007).

¹⁸⁴ This map appears in Ulrich Oslender. "Fleshing Out the Geographies of Social Movements: Colombia's Pacific Coast Black Communities and the "Aquatic Space", *Political Geography*, 2004, 23, p. 957-985.

The abundance of water is not only remarkable for scholars and researchers, it is essential for the life of its population: humans, animals and vegetation. Within this surplus of water, rivers act as the backbone that organizes the most basic yet fundamental aspects of life. For indigenous and black groups, the rivers of the Colombian Pacific are perceived as a territory, an “aquatic space”¹⁸⁵ for meeting and communication, a provider of transportation as well as food. These bodies of moving water are in direct relation to cleaning and cooking practices, gender roles, rituals and mineral extraction. It would not be far fetched to state that the rivers are one of the main sources for identity formation and social organization in this area of the world. Therefore, rivers are an obligated point of reference when dealing with the Colombian Pacific region.

Although the Pacific is part of a larger neotropical region known as *Chocó Biogeográfico* (Biogeographical Chocó)¹⁸⁶, the focus lies on the Colombian part. This means that this place is inscribed within the logics of the Nation-State, both in theoretical and practical terms. However, this Nation-based distinction does not reject probable similarities in the conception and management of territory, nature and productive process with other black populations living on the coasts of Panama and Ecuador.

Within the political-administrative perspective of the Nation-State, the region groups the following departments from north to south: Chocó, Valle del Cauca, Cauca and Nariño. It also includes western Antioquia, and small parts of Córdoba and Risaralda¹⁸⁷. Taking the socio-demographic results of the 2005 National Census, carried out by the *Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística* (DANE - National Administrative Department of Statistics), these four departments represent 17.32% of the country’s total population¹⁸⁸. Although this area was first settled by native groups, today only 24 indigenous groups survive, accounting for 6.33% of the total Pacific’s population¹⁸⁹. The largest population is Afro Colombian, representing 80.20% of the region and 44.18% of the national black population¹⁹⁰. These numbers coincide with the popular imaginary of a *Pacífico negro* (black Pacific), a place of and for blacks. The remaining 13.47% of the region’s inhabitants did not recognize

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Within this biographical region, which includes the Caribbean Coast and Darién Providence in Panamá, the northeastern area of Ecuador and the northern Pacific Coast of Peru, the Colombian part accounts for 80% of the total extension (Grueso, 2000).

¹⁸⁷ Of the bibliography consulted only Grueso (2000) includes these departments.

¹⁸⁸ DANE, “Población Conciliada 1973, 1985, 1993 y 2005, por Áreas, Según Departamentos, 2005”. <http://www.dane.gov.co/censo/files/presultados.pdf> (accessed November 19, 2007).

¹⁸⁹ Calculated based on Table 9 (Population by Department According to Ethnicity) in DANE, *Colombia una Nación Multicultural. Su Diversidad Étnica*, 2007, http://www.dane.gov.co/files/censo2005/etnia/sys/colombia_nacion.pdf. (Accessed November 29, 2007).

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

themselves, based on their language, culture and physical traits, as being part of a specific ethnic group¹⁹¹.

Blacks in Colombia are part of the African Diaspora produced by the transatlantic slave trade. The port of Cartagena de Indias on the Caribbean Sea was the main entrance of slaves who were brought to work in mining, agriculture and other domestic activities in the New Kingdom of Granada (15th and 16th Century). According to Wade¹⁹², by 1560 the settlements in gold-rich areas such as the Cauca Valley and Antioquia had increased and demanded more slaves to fulfill indigenous labor shortage. However, the difficulties imposed by the climate, terrain and indigenous rebellions posed an impediment for effective Spanish settlement. Only until the 17th Century did Spain gain full control of this region.

Although some *cimarrones*¹⁹³ had escaped towards the Pacific region in search of freedom prior to the 17th century, the mining boom brought new actors to the colonial Pacific. *Criollos*¹⁹⁴, *mestizos*, indigenous groups ordered by the *encomienda*¹⁹⁵, slaves organized in *cuadrillas*¹⁹⁶ and *libres*¹⁹⁷ lived in this region. Among these peoples, the *libres* had greater possibilities of geographical mobility, which allowed an early exploration and colonization of other areas within the region. With the declaration of independence in 1810, the Pacific was left with a population formed by a black majority, a small and elitist group of “white” families and decreasing indigenous communities. As the elites remained interested in agriculture, mining and commerce, blacks dispersed from the colonial mining centers and

¹⁹¹ The 2005 Census (carried out between May 22, 2005 and May 22, 2006) recognizes three ethnic groups in Colombia: indigenous (3.43%), Afrocolombian (10, 62%) and rom (0.01%). The rest of the population is labelled as “without ethnic belonging” (*sin pertenencia étnica*). For further information on ethnic groups: DANE, *Colombia una Nación Multicultural. Su Diversidad Étnica*.

2007. http://www.dane.gov.co/files/censo2005/etnia/sys/colombia_nacion.pdf. (Accessed November 29, 2007).

¹⁹² Peter Wade, “Introduction: The Colombian Pacific in Perspective”. *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, 2002, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 2-33.

¹⁹³ Slaves who escaped from their owners in search of liberty and settled in areas where the colonial regime was not fully established. A group of *cimarrones* could eventually form a *palenque*, that is, a free settlement where cultural, political and military reorganization took place. The *Palenque* of San Basilio, established in the 15th Century, is the only survivor of this form of black organization in the Americas. It is located in the municipality of Mahates in the department of Bolívar.

¹⁹⁴ *Criollos* and *mestizos* are categories belonging to the sophisticated colonial caste system. This systematic social classification was based on race and served as a taxonomy of the population, a sort of “spontaneous sociology” (Castro-Gómez, 2005). *Criollo* indicates a Spaniard born in Spanish America. *Mestizo* defines a person born from a Spanish and a native.

¹⁹⁵ Legal system imposed by the Spanish crown on its American colonies. Although the *encomienda* was created as an attempt to reduce the abuses and exploitation of the indigenous populations, it became a perverse and legitimized source of power that not only ordered but monopolized the indigenous force of labour, their production and the social relationship between the natives and the owners of the land.

¹⁹⁶ Small productive units organized by the owner of the slaves and mines.

¹⁹⁷ Blacks who had brought their freedom by working in mining during their off day.

resettled along the rivers where they continued to mine, fish, hunt and grow subsistence crops¹⁹⁸.

During the 19th century, the Pacific attracted the attention of the national government and, in less extent, of North American and European travellers who were curious of the new independent country and the possibilities of trade. In order to head towards progress, the national government needed to establish and generate knowledge about its territory: geography, climate, topography, human geography and what today is referred as natural resources. For this reason *La Comisión Corográfica* (literally The Descriptive Commission) was established in January 1850 with the main purpose to describe Colombia through a systematic creation of maps and drawings¹⁹⁹. As this effort included the Pacific region, this area was perceived as abandoned, isolated from the centralized government, plagued with poverty and in urgent need of modernization. Part of this condition was attributed to the blacks who populated the Pacific; blackness was problematized because it was seen as the source of indolence. As Wade highlights, this was not an “uncommon theme in ideas about black people throughout Latin America as new nations concerned themselves with their past, present, and future in a modernizing world”²⁰⁰

The ideas about racial inferiority and *mestizaje*, national progress and the general conditions of the Pacific continued well into the first decades of the 20th Century. This can be observed in travel writing and academic texts, such as *Nueva Geografía de Colombia*²⁰¹ published in 1901, *Estudio de la Costa Colombiana del Pacífico*²⁰² of 1921, and *El Litoral Recóndito*²⁰³ published in 1934. Although the 1930s and 1940s witnessed a “vogue of blackness”²⁰⁴ rooted in the popularity of black-influenced music such as son, samba, tango, *porro* and *cumbia*, this had little effect on the images and ideas about the Pacific. The Colombian Pacific remained as the embodiment of backwardness, what after WWII would be regarded as the archetype of underdevelopment.

Returning to the relationship between the settlers of the Pacific region, the uses of nature and economics, this area was first used by the pre-columbian indigenous groups to

¹⁹⁸ Peter Wade, “Introduction: The Colombian Pacific in Perspective”. *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, 2002, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 2-33.

¹⁹⁹ Biblioteca Virtual del Banco de la República, *Geografía Histórica. Comisión Corográfica*. <http://www.lablaa.org/blaavirtual/ayudadetareas/geografia/geo97.htm> (accessed June 26, 2008).

²⁰⁰ Peter Wade, “Introduction: The Colombian Pacific in Perspective”. *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, 2002, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 8.

²⁰¹ Francisco Javier Vergara. *Nueva Geografía de Colombia*. Bogotá, 1901.

²⁰² Bernardo Merizalde del Carmen, *Estudio de la Costa Colombiana del Pacífico*. Bogotá: Imprenta del Estado Mayor General, 1921.

²⁰³ Sofonías Yacup. *El Litoral Recóndito*. Buenaventura: Asociación del Pacífico, 1934.

²⁰⁴ Peter Wade, “Introduction: The Colombian Pacific in Perspective”. *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, 2002, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 8.

meet their political, cultural, religious and economic needs. By the colonial exploration of the territory, gold extraction and the establishment of a slave economy the Pacific region was integrated into the world economy. This first attempt at finding a place within the nascent capitalist economy was halted with the birth of new republic and the abolishment of slavery which allowed blacks and natives to exploit the Pacific for subsistence purposes. It is only until the late 19th century that industrial exploitation began with *tagua* (ivory palm), rubber and cacao. The following century evidenced an increase in colonization and exploitation of the Pacific²⁰⁵.

Although logging became important during the 1960s, it is only until the 1980s that the region started to re-engage with the dynamics of global markets via the production and commercialization of shrimps and African palm oil²⁰⁶. The discovery of platinum and carbon as well as the expectation of oil and gas increased the interest of national and international corporations²⁰⁷ in the Pacific. This push was strengthened by the *apertura económica* (economic aperture) of the early 1990s when the national government attempted to integrate the national economy into the global dynamics of capital²⁰⁸. Although the degree of relations between this region and the national and international markets has fluctuated throughout the years, each cycle of prosperity has left an “indelible imprint on the social, economic, ecological and cultural make up of the place”²⁰⁹ and has always involved the influx of new peoples to fulfill production needs.

The spirit of the *apertura económica* was founded on the principle of comparative advantage described in classic economic theories. Within this frame, the richness in natural resources and biodiversity of the Colombian Pacific placed this region within a global comparative and competitive advantage which would ultimately lead to regional and national prosperity. However the brute diamond had to be cut and polished by developing its population, institutions, infrastructure and technology. Of special relevance given their magnitude and high environmental, social and cultural impact are the interoceanic canal and the modern terminal in Tribugá (Department of Choco), which is part of the Pan-American

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Pablo Leyva, “Introducción”, In Pablo Leyva, ed. *Colombia Pacífico. Tomo I*. Bogotá: Fondo FEN, 1993.

²⁰⁷ Jaime Cantera & Jairo Mojica, “Geología”. In Pablo Leyva, ed. *Colombia Pacífico. Tomo I*. Bogotá: Fondo FEN, 1993. <http://www.lablaa.org/blaavirtual/faunayflora/pacific1/cap6.htm> (accessed February 15, 2008).

²⁰⁸ Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango. “Guía Temática de Política: Apertura Económica”.

2005. <http://www.lablaa.org/blaavirtual/ayudadetaareas/poli/poli69.htm> (accessed March 1, 2008).

²⁰⁹ Arturo Escobar, *Places and Regions in the Age of Globality: Social Movements and Biodiversity Conservation in the Colombian Pacific* (without date), <http://www.unc.edu/~aescobar/html/texts.htm> (accessed November 25, 2007), p. 8.

Highway²¹⁰. These projects promoted a conceptualization of the Pacific as *el océano de oportunidades para el siglo XXI* (the ocean of possibilities for the 21st Century)²¹¹, relocating the region as an economic priority for the country.

During the 1990s the Pacific became one of the main scenarios of the internal conflict. As Mosquera, Pardo and Hoffman²¹² sharply denounce, the marginalized population of the Pacific is “brutally integrated into the national dynamic through its most terrible aspects: war and internal displacement”. Guerrilla, paramilitary, druglord and the military pervaded violence and generated massive displacement of blacks to urban national centers and multiple human rights violations which caught the attention of national and international organizations. As has been described, it is not by chance that the last two decades of the 20th century are regarded as a turning point, a crucial moment where the Pacific became the target of (sustainable)developmental and humanitarian aid, assistance and programs from national and transnational actors. Among the actors are government agencies and officials, NGO’s, scholars, indigenous and black activists, guerrillas, paramilitaries and agroindustries. These interests and actions centered around three main areas: exploitation of the natural resources, conservation of biodiversity, sustainable development and humanitarian issues²¹³.

In contrast to the idea of a potentially prosperous Pacific, by means of being a reservoir of raw materials apt for extraction, the region is simultaneously imagined and perceived as an inhospitable, far off, hot and humid forest with a poor, uneducated and backward peoples consisting of *negros* (blacks) and *indios* (indigenous population). Therefore, since the beginning of the 20th Century until today, the popular imaginary of a *Pacífico negro* (black Pacific) is not complete without the connotations of geographical and racial underdevelopment and poverty, which in turn is associated to the “natural” conditions of this place. These images make the Pacific the ideal candidate for development projects.

This image of backwardness and crudeness cannot be understood as a mere coincidence, in fact it echoes the degree of isolation, segregation and invisibility that the

²¹⁰ Libia R. Grueso C, *El Proceso Organizativo de Comunidades Negras en el Pacífico Sur Colombiano*, thesis to opt for a Master in Political Science of Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, (2000), <http://www2.renacimiento.org:8080/renacimiento/otros/libros-libres/afro-colombianos/El%20Proceso%20Organizativo%20de%20Comunidades%20Negras.pdf/view> (accessed February 27, 2008).

²¹¹ Harold Enrique Banguero, *Ensayos Sobre Desarrollo Tecnológico y Competitividad del Pacífico Colombiano*, Universidad Autónoma de Occidente, 2004.

²¹² Claudia Mosquera, Mauricio Pardo & Odile Hoffman, “Las Trayectorias Sociales e Identitarias de los Afrodescendientes”, In *Afrodescendientes en las Américas. Trayectorias Sociales e Identitarias 150 años de la Abolición de la Esclavitud en Colombia*, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, ICAHN, IRD & ILSA, Colombia, 2002, p. 39.

²¹³ Arturo Escobar, *Places and Regions in the Age of Globality: Social Movements and Biodiversity Conservation in the Colombian Pacific* (without date), <http://www.unc.edu/~aescobar/html/texts.htm> (accessed November 25, 2007).

Pacific region and its inhabitants have experimented since colonial times. It is no secret that black history, identity and culture have been denied for centuries and that slavery remained important in the Pacific, even after its legal abolition in 1851²¹⁴. As the experts Eduardo Restrepo²¹⁵, Peter Wade²¹⁶, Arturo Escobar and Mauricio Pardo²¹⁷ point out, this situation changed during the 1990s, when blackness became a public and political issue.

Invention, Institutionalization and Autorecognition of Blacks as Afrocolombians

Scholars agree that one of the main events in the identitarian and political transformation of blacks in Colombia is the 1991 Political Constitution, specifically *Artículo Transitorio 55* (AT55 – Transitory Article 55) and *Ley 70 de 1994* (Law 70 of 1994). The current carta magna constructs Colombia as an ethnically and plural nation, placing multiculturalism as the official ideology²¹⁸. Within this frame, blacks are conceptualized as an ethnic and political actor with specific territorial, economic and cultural rights: *las comunidades negras* (black communities).

Comunidades negras refers to, and categorizes afrocolombians or afrodescendants into four different regions: those who live in the Pacific coast, the *raizales* of the San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina Archipelago, the community of San Basilio de Palenque and in urban centers or capitals.²¹⁹ Odile Hoffmann²²⁰ keenly suggests that the term and definition of *comunidades negras* by itself caused a redefinition of the identities in the Colombian Pacific. Blacks who had identified and referred themselves as *libres* or by the name of the nearby river, are turned into afrocolombians communities in order to claim land rights. Additionally, in order to file the claims, the *comunidades negras* had to create local

²¹⁴ Curiously, the abolition of slavery compensated the owner of the slaves and not the slaves. Although formally slavery as an economic system was halted in 1812 by a law that prohibited the commercialization of blacks, the social and cultural segregation continued. Even with legal abolition, the practices of slavery such as *arrendamiento*, *terraje*, and forced labour continued to exploit blacks (<http://axecali.tripod.com/cepac/hispafrocol/5.htm>, accessed July 2, 2008).

²¹⁵ Eduardo Restrepo, *Eventualizing Blackness in Colombia*. Dissertation proposal (2003). www.unc.edu/restrepo/eventualizingprop.doc (accessed October 26, 2007).

²¹⁶ Peter Wade, "Introduction: The Colombian Pacific in Perspective". *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, 2002, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 2-33.

²¹⁷ Mauricio Pardo and Arturo Escobar, "Movimientos Sociales y Biodiversidad en el Pacífico Colombiano", In *Emancipación Social y Violencia en Colombia*, Bogotá: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2004.

²¹⁸ Peter Wade, "Introduction: The Colombian Pacific in Perspective". *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, 2002, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 2-33.

²¹⁹ DANE, *Colombia una Nación Multicultural. Su Diversidad Étnica*, 2007, http://www.dane.gov.co/files/censo2005/etnia/sys/colombia_nacion.pdf. (Accessed November 29, 2007).

²²⁰ Odile Hoffmann, "La Movilización Identitaria y el Recurso de la Memoria (Nariño, Pacífico Colombiano)", In C. Gnecco and M. Zambrano (eds) *Memorias Hegemónicas, Memorias Disidentes*, ICANH: Universidad del Cauca, p. 97 – 120.

community councils²²¹. These legal requirements signified the creation of a new social structure that until then did not exist, and supports the argument that the model used for indigenous inclusion was being recycled for blacks²²².

Hoffman²²³ accurately points out how blacks played within those assumptions, images and legislative demands: discourses were planned and certain practices were modeled to fit in more neatly with the frame that protects and defends patrimony, the environment and land titling. This last point is particularly neuralgic because it contests the concept of land, territory and identity of black groups. While the national legislature follows a greek-roman legacy of private and clearly delimited property, blacks had communal ownership of the land with flexible borders. This incompatibility led to a process of negotiation that ultimately led to the institutionalization of the legal and cultural concept of collective land.

Although black organizations were smaller in number than the indigenous groups that participated in the process of reform, their protest and mobilization was more successful. In fact the inclusion of AT55 in the Constitution followed the occupation of a building²²⁴. The formulation of AT55 expressed several of the interests and needs of this newly baptized ethnic group such as granting collective land titles of *tierras baldías*²²⁵ in the Pacific region, community oriented development and political participation²²⁶. In this sense, AT55 is considered a milestone.

With regards to participation, blacks representatives were reserved two seats in the House of Representatives and started to work in governmental institutions such as the INCORA (*Instituto Colombiano de la Reforma Agraria* – Colombian Institute for Land Reform) and the Ministries of Mines and Energy, Education, and Environment, Housing and Territorial Development²²⁷. Organizations such as the Division of Black Community Affairs was also created, as well as the inclusion and promotion of afro-colombian studies in the national curricula.

²²¹ Ibid. p. 16

Odile Hoffmann, *Communautés Noires dans le Pacifique Colombien. Innovations et Dynamiques Ethniques*, Karthala, 2004.

²²² Odile Hoffmann, *Communautés Noires dans le Pacifique Colombien. Innovations et Dynamiques Ethniques*, Karthala, 2004.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Peter Wade, "Introduction: The Colombian Pacific in Perspective". *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, 2002, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 2-33.

²²⁵ Lands owned by the Nation but were people (in this case black and indigenous communities) live without legal land titles.

²²⁶ Peter Wade, "Introduction: The Colombian Pacific in Perspective". *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, 2002, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 2-33.

²²⁷ Peter Wade, "Introduction: The Colombian Pacific in Perspective". *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, 2002, Vol. 7, No. 2.

In terms of collective land titles, currently, there are 132 *Territorios Colectivos de Comunidades Negras* (TCCN – Colective territories of black communities) which occupy 4.13% of the total national territory.²²⁸ This judicial success cannot be understood as a favor from the political elite, but a process of struggle of approximately 135 black organizations, in dialogue with the indigenous movement²²⁹. As Restrepo and Wade²³⁰ point out, the legal frame of the 1991 Constitution promoted the creation and consolidation of unprecedented forms of black ethnic organization and identity formation in the Colombian Pacific. Nonetheless, as Wade points out, the legislature also “regionalized the issue of blackness, making the Pacific coastal region *the* location of blackness in the nation. It has also ruralized blackness, nationally and regionally, by focusing on rural land claims and effectively ignoring the large urban black populations. Finally, it has “indianized” blackness by casting the issue in terms of bounded, rural communities, based on so-called traditional production practices rooted in the land”²³¹.

Another set of critiques are summoned around the motivations of the Colombian state for including blacks as an ethnic group and giving them special rights. Formally, the replacement of the 1886 carta magna by the 1991 Constitution was promoted as an attempt to motivate political participation and facilitate the peace process with guerrilla groups. However, the recognition of minority claims has also been analyzed and interpreted as serving two political and economic interests.

On one hand the ethnicization of black communities is perceived as a strategy of the State to develop marginal regions in accordance to neoliberalism²³². In this frame, the indigenous and black communities are envisioned as the obvious and desirable guardians of the environment due to their trajectory in the areas, implying a sort of natural relationship between these groups and nature²³³. This argument seems to be specially strong when the region has a verified or potential natural and biodiversity resources²³⁴ which can be exploited and put to use in a capitalist mode. In the other hand, the conceptualization implied in the

²²⁸ DANE, *Colombia una Nación Multicultural. Su Diversidad Étnica*, 2007, http://www.dane.gov.co/files/censo2005/etnia/sys/colombia_nacion.pdf. (accessed November 29, 2007).

²²⁹ Carlos Efrén Agudelo, *Multiculturalismo en Colombia: Política, Inclusión y Exclusión de Poblaciones Negras*, 2002, http://la-datura.com/ed3/multiculturalismo_colombia.pdf (accessed June 25, 2008).

²³⁰ Eduardo Restrepo, *Eventalizing Blackness in Colombia*. Dissertation proposal (2003). www.unc.edu/restrepo/eventalizingprop.doc (accessed October 26, 2007).

Peter Wade, “Introduction: The Colombian Pacific in Perspective”. *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, 2002, Vol. 7, No. 2.

²³¹ Peter Wade, “Introduction: The Colombian Pacific in Perspective”. *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, 2002, Vol. 7, No. 2.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

term Afrocolombian as well as the related legislature is understood as a strategy to improve Colombia's international image in terms of democracy and respect towards diversity²³⁵.

The changes brought by the Political Constitution not only created political and material effects for black populations, but impacted an important number of scholars. This can be evidenced in the exponential academic interest and production regarding the problem of blacks in Colombia, with a special interest in the Pacific region. Wade²³⁶ attributes this growth to the strengthening of the black social movements in Colombia and Brazil as well as the previous work of anthropologists Jaime Arocha and Nina de Friedemann. Although the academic production attests to the variety of black experiences and situations in Colombia, this author highlights three emerging general themes: racism and the relationship between race and class, *mestizaje* with strong relations to *blanqueamiento* (whitening) and Africa, Africanism and the imprints of Africa in the New World.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

Chapter 4

PCN: Enunciation of Afro-Colombian Cosmovision

“Señor:

*Dáenos la tierra silenciosa
para que el pan huela a paisaje.
La que amasaron con su angustia
Y su ternura, nuestros padres.
La que en la sangres es referencia
De montes y cabras salvajes.
Tierra sin amos ni codicia,
Sin el tormento y el ultraje.*

*En los bohíos y en los ranchos
Todas las cosas tienen hambre.
Hay un deseo de ser libre
Como la luz sobre los aires.
Cómo la chispa del incendio,
Como una suma de volcanes.
Queremos tierra, donde el grito
Corra sin cárcel por el valle*

*Cambia la raza que nos diste
Por otra fuerte, inmensa, grande,
Que ponga leyes a los hombres
Que se robaron nuestros árboles.
Raza que labra su fortuna
Como los pájaros, su viaje,
Raza que crea en el espacio
Porque el espacio va adelante.*

*Si la avaricia no perece,
Si nuestro pan no es abundante*

*Si no se cubren nuestros ojos
Con estas tierras inmortales,
Habrá regreso a nuestros arcos,
A la locura de la sangre,
Y la tristeza que nos quema
Llenará el ámbito de sables”*

Poem *Palabras del Domingo* (Sunday words/ gospel) by Rogelio Velásquez²³⁷

The civil rights movements during the 1960s, specifically in relation to black rights in the United States and South Africa sparked and further ignited the sentiment for equality in Colombian blacks. However it would take almost a decade for the first black organizations, the most important being *Movimiento de la Negritud* (Movement of blacks) and *Movimiento Multicolor*²³⁸ (Multicolor movement), to appear in the social landscape. These small and urban organizations started to configure the black movement in Colombia, with racism and marginality of blacks as the main protest²³⁹. Although native blacks from the Pacific were influential in the movement, it had little repercussion in the region.

Although during the 1980s the movement in general weakened²⁴⁰, a couple of organizations maintained their militance. For example, the *Movimiento Cimarrón* (Cimarrón Movement), founded in 1982 in Buenaventura under the leadership of Juan de Dios Mosquera, continued fighting discrimination and advocated rights and indemnization for slavery²⁴¹. The president of *Movimiento Cimarrón* would later participate in the Constitutional reforms of the 1990s. This organization also went on to support and assist peasant land claims in the Pacific²⁴². On the other hand, the *Asociación Campesina Integral del Atrato* (ACIA - Integral Peasant Association of the Atrato) was created as an answer to the abuse of logging companies that were exploiting the forest indiscriminately and were causing a jam in the river with the logs. This group of black peasants found echo of their demands and support by the

²³⁷ Sergio Mosquera & Nicolás Londoño, “Introducción”, In: *Fragmentos de Historia, Etnografía y Narraciones del Pacífico Colombiano Negro*, Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia, 2000, p. 17.

²³⁸ *Movimiento de la Negritud* founded by Juan Zapata Olivilla. *Movimiento Multicolor* organized by Juan Zapata Olivilla (<http://axe-cali.tripod.com/cepac/hispafrocol/5.htm>, (accessed August 28, 2008).

²³⁹ Peter Wade, “Introduction: The Colombian Pacific in Perspective”, *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*. 2002, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 15.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Historia del Pueblo Afrocolombiano - Perspectiva Pastoral. <http://axe-cali.tripod.com/cepac/hispafrocol/5.htm>, (accessed August 28, 2008).

²⁴² Peter Wade, “Introduction: The Colombian Pacific in Perspective”. *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*. 2002, Vol. 7, No. 2.

Diócesis of Quibdó (Department of Chocó) and Oreva, an indigeneous organization. This signals the strong relationship that black populations in general, and the movement in particular, have with the Catholic Church and the indigeneous movement. It is not by chance that given the absence of the national government, the Church acted as promoter of peasant organizations in the Pacific, and fomented the inclusion of black history and culture in education²⁴³. Other organizations were created and followed similar demands and alliances with the Church and the indigeneous population²⁴⁴.

The last decade of the 20th century with the Constitutional reforms empowered and ignited the creation of black organizations and political participation. The rational, mechanisms and implications of the reforms are discussed in Chapter 3. This chapter deals with one specific organization the *Proceso de Comunidades Negras* (PCN): its emergence, demands and conceptualizations about what it means to be black in the Pacific region, and how nature is understood. With this aim the chapter is organized in two sections. The first one, titled “Black movements in Colombia during the late 20th century: the birth of PCN” describes the stages of PCN, its principles and strategic actions. The second section “Afrocolombian cosmovision: introductory grammar” introduces the local model for understanding, categorizing and explaining the natural world in the Pacific.

Black Movements in Colombia During the Late 20th century: the Birth of PCN

Wade²⁴⁵ and Escobar²⁴⁶ sustain that the emergence of the black movement in Colombia challenges traditional theories and analysis of social movements. On the one side, the concept of black community was placed under the lense of ethnicity by a range of different organizations and not only by the agency of grassroots movements²⁴⁷. This highlights the dialectic relationship among the involved organizations. Second, the black movement itself is a result of an intricate network of activities of several organizations and intitutions²⁴⁸.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Among the other organization cited are: *Organización de Barrios Populares de Quibdo* (OBAPO - Organization of Popular Neighborhoods of Quibdo), *Asociación Campesina del San Juan* (ACADESAN – Peasant Association of San Juan), *Asociación Campesina del Baudó* (ACABA – Peasant Community of the Baudó) and *Coordinadora de Comunidades Negras* (Coordinator of Black Communities) which was strongly funded and associated with the Liberal Party.

²⁴⁵ Peter Wade, “Introduction: The Colombian Pacific in Perspective”, *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*. 2002, Vol. 7, No. 2.

²⁴⁶ Arturo Escobar, *Places and Regions in the Age of Globality: Social Movements and Biodiversity Conservation in the Colombian Pacific* (without date), <http://www.unc.edu/~aescobar/html/texts.htm> (accessed November 25, 2007).

²⁴⁷ Peter Wade, “Introduction: The Colombian Pacific in Perspective”, *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*. 2002. Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 16.

²⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 16.

Third, the interest of the movement does not adhere around class issues but land rights, ethnicity, identity and the environment²⁴⁹. Fourth, the movement is characterised by a diverse range of actors and modes of relation²⁵⁰ which dispute the idea of a homogeneous and unitary phenomena.

Among the actors within the black movement in the Pacific, Wade²⁵¹ mentions: subsistence farmers, school teachers, educated individuals who live in the cities and are part of an organization and are mainly interested on legislative matters, few national black activist organizations, a large number of small economic enterprises, cultural associations and organizations, and few politicians, mainly from the Liberal Party. Of special interest is the role of formal education within the group and how it has been used, in some cases, as a power tool to determine what is or is not afrocolombian. As Hoffman shows, the better educated urban dwellers “are often engaged directly with “the communities,” making regular field trips as advisors and disseminators of information about Law 70... in some cases, older, less-educated community members defer to their advisors on matters of what constitutes black culture and tradition”²⁵².

The enterprises are mainly cooperative in nature, run by and for women and pursue the improvement of income. In addition, these economic ventures provide and stimulate the participation of women in workshops that deal with afrocolombian issues, such as history, identity and culture²⁵³. The cultural organizations focus especially on traditional and fusion music and dance, and vary on their ideological views regarding black rights, identity and racism²⁵⁴.

One of the organizations that is frequently mentioned, recognized and studied within the Colombian black movement is *Proceso de Comunidades Negras* (PCN), focus of this thesis. PCN started in the 1980s with some black river groups in the southern Pacific region who resisted diverse strategies of development²⁵⁵ and claimed their ethnic, cultural, territorial and political rights²⁵⁶. With the 1991 Constitutional reforms, the group was reinforced by

²⁴⁹ Karl H. Offen, “The Territorial Turn: Making Black Territories in Pacific Colombia”, *Journal of Latin American Geography*, 2.1 (2003), 43-73.

²⁵⁰ Peter Wade, “Introduction: The Colombian Pacific in Perspective”. *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*. 2002, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 16.

²⁵¹ Ibid. p. 16.

²⁵² As cited by Peter Wade, “Introduction: The Colombian Pacific in Perspective”. *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*. 2002, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 16.

²⁵³ Ibid. p. 16

²⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 16.

²⁵⁵ Arturo Escobar, *Places and Regions in the Age of Globality: Social Movements and Biodiversity Conservation in the Colombian Pacific* (without date), <http://www.unc.edu/~aescobar/html/texts.htm> (accessed November 25, 2007).

²⁵⁶ Libia R. Grueso C, *El Proceso Organizativo de Comunidades Negras en el Pacífico Sur Colombiano*, thesis to opt for a Master in Political Science of Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Faculty of humanity and social

other black organizations and proliferated. During this time PCN worked with a small NGO that no longer exists today²⁵⁷.

The defunct NGO was partly funded by Swissaid and had experience counselling indigenous communities in territorial titling. This experience was translated into the Pacific region, and also included workshops to diffuse information about Law 70 of 1993²⁵⁸. Funding for this training strategy was partly derived from Ecopetrol, the Colombian petroleum company with interest in exploration and extraction of oil in this region. According to Pardo²⁵⁹, it is problematic that the search for financial support follows traditional institutional paths because even if the black communities can benefit, it serves commercial needs that in the long run might harm the region and its population. Of great concern to this scholar is that such strategies have become a generalized practice²⁶⁰. In Pardo's perspective, this tends to dilute the revolutionary spell, the radicalness attached to social movements. To this observation, Wade²⁶¹ suggests that these sort of transactions, could be accepted when social movements are understood "as complex networks with varied connections to a variety of nodes in civil society, the state, and mainstream politics"²⁶².

Continuing with the historical trajectory of PCN, by the mid 1990s, partly due to the intensification of guerrilla and paramilitary violence in the Pacific region, members from this NGO toured several European cities in search for support for their strife and to expose the massive human rights violations that were occurring. This led to the transnationalization of the movement. Today, PCN is an assemblage of 120 ethnic, cultural and popular organizations spread throughout the four departments of the Pacific, Bogotá and more recently in the Atlantic Coast. PCN is also available via the world wide web. It is just a matter of entering "Proceso de Comunidades Negras" in Google and the first link leads to their home page. However it remains uncertain, and at first confusing, why PCN has added the word *renacientes* to its name in the homepage.

sciences, (2000), <http://www2.renacientes.org:8080/renacientes/otros/libros-libres/afro-colombianos/El%20Proceso%20Organizativo%20de%20Comunidades%20Negras.pdf/view> (accessed February 27, 2008).

²⁵⁷ Peter Wade, "Introduction: The Colombian Pacific in Perspective". *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*. 2002, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 17.

²⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 17.

²⁵⁹ Pardo as cited by Peter Wade, "Introduction: The Colombian Pacific in Perspective". *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*. 2002, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 17 – 18.

²⁶⁰ Wade (2002) mentions that the organization Ku Mahana, which works with PCN, has also received funding from another oil-related company called Transgas. This time it financed "community work" in relation to the construction of pipeline in rural areas near Cali. In this same volume, Oslender cites the case of a palm-heart processing company that sponsored the process of territorial titling of a Pacific community.

²⁶¹ Ibid. p. 17 – 18.

²⁶² Ibid. p. 17.

The website has information about the main principles and strategic actions of PCN, a blog used to denounce violations to afro-colombians and ethnic minorities, recent events, and free e-books about racism, human rights, land rights in Colombia and Ecuador. However it is rather striking that no referencer is made to their political claims, while the strategies and the principles are mentioned. Giving priority to the voice of PCN, the principles and strategies are first described, followed by a synthesis of the demands offered by Escobar.

As outlined in the site, PCN has 5 basic principles²⁶³:

- *afirmación del SER* (affirmation of being)
- *espacio para SER* (space to be/ become)
- *ejercicio del SER* (excercise of being)
- *una opción propia de futuro* (our own option of future)
- *solidaridad* (solidarity)

The first three principles deal directly with the possibility and experience of being, of becoming afrocolombian as well as a collective black community. *Afirmación del SER* is explained as the reaffirmation of the cultural identity of black communities. *Espacio para SER* while highlights the relevance of the Pacific territory (referred as “*territorio ancestral*”, an ancestral territory) and its sustainability for identitarian formation. Implicit in this principle is the idea that the Pacific, both its people and nature, is being threatened and therefore it must be preserved. In this sense, identity and territory are irrevocably linked and engaged in a dialectic of reinforcement. The third principle stresses the relevance of autonomy, participation and decision making in black communities and organizations. Here the collective element stands out, and reveals the threat that plans and actions from outside the black communities may have in their way of life.

Una opción propia de futuro is in direct relation to the exercise of being, but seems to concentrate on the necessity of having and creating a development option that is coherent with the cultural aspirations of black communities, and that is at the same time, environmentally and culturally sustainable. *Solidaridad* emphasizes the choice to support initiatives that lead towards a fairer and just world by means of civil rights struggles and mobilizations.

The PCN webpage also lists eight *líneas de acción* or strategic actions²⁶⁴:

1. Strengthening of the autonomous organizational processes of black communities and their organizations.

²⁶³ Renacientes PCN Colombia, “Principios Básicos”, <http://www3.renacientes.org:8080/principios-basicos> (accessed July 2, 2008). My translation.

²⁶⁴ Renacientes PCN Colombia, “Líneas de Acción”, <http://www3.renacientes.org:8080/lineas-de-accion>, (accessed July 3, 2008). My translation.

2. Defend, develop and strengthen the cultural identity of black communities.
3. Recognize and expand the field of rights of black communities as an ethnic group: ethnic, cultural, territorial, social, economic and political.
4. Promote self organization of communities and organization. Promote the definition of development policies in accordance to its cultural identity and aspirations.
5. Actions to defend the territory and natural resources. Management and resolution of conflicts.
6. Defense of the black communities Human Rights in referente to the internal conflict. Prevention and protection of forced internal displacement, massacres and selective asseinations, etc. in black communities.
7. Strengthen the participation of afrodescendent women and children by making the situation visible and defining concrete strategies to face the situation of vulnerability and lack of knowledge of their rights.
8. Fight racism and racial discrimination by positioning the problems. Communicate the national and international initiatives and discussions. Illustration by case studies. Ideas to design legal strategies for the problems.

These strategic actions stress the centrality of ethnicity for PCN but also reveal that it is a gender sensitive organization. The keenness to enviornmental issues is presented in dialogue with the use of territory, its resources and modes of usage, which are portrayed as cultural rather than technical dimensions.

Although the PCN webpage does not refer in any way to the demands of this organization, Libia Grueso²⁶⁵, one of the founding members of the movement, recognizes three political claims: the right to territory, the right of being and the right to determine one's own future. According to this activist, these demands were based on local characteristics and dynamics of the Colombian Pacific, that could then be represented at the national level. In order to recuperate and articulate these experiences and concepts and turn them into political demands, PCN started discussing and debating with local river populations through workshops and meetings. These experiences led to a subregional and national knowledge of the Pacific and its blacks.

In this knowledge production process there were certain constant characteristics among the different river communities such as nature, the recognition as an ethnic group, the right to

²⁶⁵ Libia R. Grueso C, *El Proceso Organizativo de Comunidades Negras en el Pacífico Sur Colombiano*, thesis to opt for a Master in Political Science of Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, (2000), <http://www2.renacimiento.org:8080/renacimiento/otros/libros-libres/afro-colombianos/El%20Proceso%20Organizativo%20de%20Comunidades%20Negras.pdf/view> (accessed February 27, 2008).

territory and the control of natural resources, traditional productive practices and the meaning of being black. The identification of these themes outlined the core issues and interest of PCN. There were also points of disagreement that remained as differences, and which in the long run affected the trajectories, experiences and problems of the different black organizations that currently operate²⁶⁶.

The right to territory demands governmental recognition of the Pacific territory²⁶⁷ where afrocolombians have made a living since colonial times. This implies a reconceptualization from *tierras baldías* to land that is titled in a collective manner. But the claim is not only in legislative terms, it extends to autonomy in the use and administration of the land, rivers, coasts and scenery²⁶⁸. This emphasis on territory can be seen as a cultural attachment to place, to the forms of life that are recreating in that specificity. As has been pointed out before, the Pacific region is neuralgic to these communities because it is directly involved in the construction and recreation of identities: the territory is the habitat that facilitates being and becoming an afrocolombian. Thus, the 5.9 million acres of land that the black communities have received have direct implications on the memory and culture of these populations.

The right of being is understood as the right to be black, to be different²⁶⁹. This surpasses the construction of identity based solely on the color of skin to highlight blackness as a cultural practice that structures one's life. In other words, this right can be translated into the need to be recognized and treated as a subject. Lastly, the right to determine one's own future confronts and resists the naturalized idea that neoliberal principles should define the way people produce in the Pacific. It is a demand to be actor and subject of personal, communal and regional development that is synchronized with the needs, desires and values of afrocolombians in the Pacific.

As the objective of these three claims is to defend a particular order of life and of living of afrocolombians in the Pacific, these demands are constructed from the specific cultural, social and economic practices of this population. In other words, the daily cultural

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Nina S. Friedemann, *La Saga del Negro*. Santa Fe de Bogotá: Pontificia Universidad Javeriana Human Genetics Institute - Faculty of Medicine, 1993. <http://www.lablaa.org/blaavirtual/antropologia/saga/indice.htm>, (accessed November 5, 2007).

Peter Wade, "Introduction: The Colombian Pacific in Perspective". *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*. 2002, Vol. 7, No. 2.

²⁶⁸ Libia R. Grueso C, *El Proceso Organizativo de Comunidades Negras en el Pacífico Sur Colombiano*, thesis to opt for a Master in Political Science of Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, (2000), <http://www2.renacentes.org:8080/renacentes/otros/libros-libres/afro-colombianos/El%20Proceso%20Organizativo%20de%20Comunidades%20Negras.pdf/view> (accessed February 27, 2008).

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

practices become the source of and for political practice. This proves, according to Escobar²⁷⁰ and Grueso²⁷¹, that there is in fact a strong relationship between culture and politics, even more, between place, culture and politics. The following section introduces the local model for understanding, categorizing and explaining the natural world in the Pacific.

Afrocolombian Cosmovision: Introductory Grammar

“the world was founded with everything in it:
water, air, saints, *visiones y espantos*, trees, serpents, deer and birds.

The world exists and functions at many levels,
without any entity being more important than any other,
save in the kind of power they possess,
in which the shaman (*hechicero*) may find nourishment.

Men and women grow on the generosity of nature,
on its tireless goods and even on those which are unreachable”,²⁷².

The aim of this section is to describe the cosmovision of afrocolombians in the Pacific through the ritual of *la ombligada* explained by Belgian antropologist Anne-Marie Losonczy²⁷³ and Escobar’s²⁷⁴ antropological revision. No exhaustive explanation is attempted, rather a portrayal of cosmovision seen as a symbolic and cognitive system *a la*

²⁷⁰ Arturo Escobar, *Places and Regions in the Age of Globality: Social Movements and Biodiversity Conservation in the Colombian Pacific* (without date), <http://www.unc.edu/~aescobar/html/texts.htm> (accessed November 25, 2007).

²⁷¹ Libia R. Grueso C, *El Proceso Organizativo de Comunidades Negras en el Pacífico Sur Colombiano*, thesis to opt for a Master in Political Science of Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, (2000), <http://www2.renacentes.org:8080/renacentes/otros/libros-libres/afro-colombianos/El%20Proceso%20Organizativo%20de%20Comunidades%20Negras.pdf/view> (accessed February 27, 2008).

²⁷² Alfredo Vanín, “Naturaleza: Abundancia y Lejanía en la Literatura Popular del Pacífico”, *El Hilero*, 1995, 2, p. 21, as cited in Escobar’s *Places and Regions in the Age of Globality: Social Movements and Biodiversity Conservation in the Colombian Pacific*.

²⁷³ Anne-Marie Losonczy, “Del Ombligo a la Comunidad. Ritos de Nacimiento en la Cultura Negra del Litoral Pacífico Colombiano”, *Revindi*, 1989, 49-54.

²⁷⁴ Arturo Escobar, “Nature”. In *Places and Regions in the Age of Globality: Social Movements and Biodiversity Conservation in the Colombian Pacific* (without date), <http://www.unc.edu/~aescobar/html/texts.htm> (accessed August 1, 2008).

Losonczy and as a local model of nature *a la* Escobar²⁷⁵ and Descola & Pálsson²⁷⁶. Several figures have been created in the hope of facilitating understanding.

The Symbolic- Cognitive System of Blacks in the Pacific

Losonczy²⁷⁷ understands the cosmivision of afrocolombians in the Pacific as an original, creative and cohesive cognitive system of meaning and representation. This intricate symbolic system is interpreted as a strategy of resistance against the hegemonic socio-cultural models of individual and communitarian identity formation. In this sense, the idea of cosmivision entails symbolic, cognitive, identitarian elements that come into play in diverse moments of life, one of these events is birth.

For afrocolombians in the Pacific, while procreation is “*un asunto humano*” (a human issue), conception is perceived as “*un asunto divino*” (a divine enterprise/ issue) that comes from Above. In consequence God is placed as a mediator between men and women and the origin of children is placed in an extra-human domain. Before conception, children are part of the *angelitos sin sexo* (sexless angeles) that abide in the heavens along with other spiritual beings, including the dead that had a righteous life and death. The baby’s sex is fixed by the *comadrona-curandera* (midwife-shaman who embodies the whole community) who cuts the umbilical cord two fingers length if it is a boy, and three fingers length if it is a girl. As sexual identity is defined post-birth, it is extremely important that the cutting is precise²⁷⁸.

Labor and birth take place in the pregnant woman’s house and only in the presence of the *comadrona-curandera*, older sisters and mother-in-law, all other members of the family have to leave. However the role of the *comadrona-curandera* is not assisting labor and delivery, but to receive and welcome the new born, understood as a being that is in transition from the divine world of the Above to a specific ethnic community. She is in charge of burying the placenta (conceptualized as the child’s fetal double) and umbilical cord in the domestic land-territory of the village/ community. If it is a girl, these organs are buried underneath the house between the pillars, and if it is a boy, underneath a tree in the vicinities of the forest. Putting these organs under ground/ soil is a way of *enraizar*, of rooting the new

²⁷⁵ Arturo Escobar, “After Nature: Steps to an Anti-essentialist Political Ecology.” *Current Anthropology*, 1999, 40(1), p. 1-30.

²⁷⁶ Descola, Phillippe. *Nature and Society. Anthropological Perspectives*. London: Routledge, 1996.

²⁷⁷ Anne-Marie Losonczy, “Del Ombligo a la Comunidad. Ritos de Nacimiento en la Cultura Negra del Litoral Pacífico Colombiano”, *Revindi*, 1989, 49-54.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p. 50.

born in the territory of his nuclear family, which is also part of the community. The child is thus “planted” into that specific territory²⁷⁹.

The *comadrona-curandera* is also in charge of *ombligar* the new born, that is, to immediately put inside the navel a powder of animal, vegetable or mineral origin, previous agreement with the mother. Among the animal substances destined generally for boys, Losonczy²⁸⁰ lists: nails of tapir, cooked spider, squirrel bones, burnt feathers and rabbit’s foot. The vegetable substances, privileged for girls, usually comes from curative and domesticated plants that are categorized as warm or luke warm, and that are grown in the home garden or near bodies of water. Other objects can also be put into the baby’s belly button without discrimination by sex, such as sweat from the *comadrona-curandera*, gold or water from the river. The *ombligada* evidences that for afrocolombians, humanity is not detached from nature, but rather, in order to be fully human one needs to have, to be part animal or plant.

Ultimately the ritual of *la ombligada* aims at transferring metaphorically the characteristics, properties and strengths of the substance into the infant’s physical and mental traits. Thus, in the case of males, the tapir is to transfer potency and its wild character while the rabbit imprints the new born with its agility and capacity to procreate easily. For females, the hen enhances motherly features while some curative plants catalyze fertility and goodness. The substance thus indicates the virtues of the babies and to some extent determines their cultural destiny, making them robust and equipped to face social life. *La ombligada* performs a double attachment: it joins the child with the territory of its community via a detached substance (external and that precedes the child), and adheres the new born to a socio-natural world. Thus, the magical nature of *la ombligada* has a striking effects in the social organization of black communities, and on material every day aspects of life.

The Local Model of Nature

In general terms, as the natural environment of the Pacific (rivers, ocean, forest, animals, plants, mountains) has provided blacks a place to live, it is strongly rooted in the cultural imaginaries and models of nature²⁸¹. In fact, the afrocolombian local model of nature, term coined by Escobar²⁸² and Descola & Pálsson²⁸³, is in direct dialogue with the Pacific

²⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 50-51.

²⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 51.

²⁸¹ Arturo Escobar, “Nature”. In *Places and Regions in the Age of Globality: Social Movements and Biodiversity Conservation in the Colombian Pacific* (without date), <http://www.unc.edu/~aescobar/html/texts.htm> (accessed August 1, 2008).

²⁸² Arturo Escobar, “After Nature: Steps to an Anti-essentialist Political Ecology.” *Current Anthropology*, 1999, 40(1), p. 1-30

²⁸³ Descola, Phillippe. *Nature and Society. Anthropological Perspectives*. London: Routledge, 1996.

natural world and can be understood as a cohesive cognitive, cultural and ecologic system that objectifies the idea, enunciation, practice and experience of and with nature. However distinct, this way of understanding the world presents strong similarities with other black groups in Ecuador, Panamá and Venezuela and indigenous populations of the Colombian Pacific, such as the Embera²⁸⁴.

Escobar²⁸⁵ distinguishes three features of this model: use of spaces, multiple worlds and a taxonomy of beings. In the spatial configuration (see Figure 1), black communities believe that the world is made up by different realms distributed along a vertical axis, each inhabited by particular beings. At the center of the axis is *este mundo* (this world), which corresponds to the biophysical and human domain. Above and below *este mundo* are other worlds which are connected by specific rituals and or beings that have the ability to travel among worlds.

Above *este mundo*, and highest on the vertical axis is *el cielo* (the sky) and *la gloria* (the glory) and is inhabited by Our Lord Jesus Christ, saints, angels, virgins & *angelitos* (babies, toddlers and children that died without sin). This mystical sphere tinted with Catholic repertoire is not distant from humans that populate *este mundo*, but are perceived as beings with human characteristics that accompany the poor. This heavenly divine world is connected to *este mundo* through *arrullos* and *chigualos*²⁸⁶. *Arrullos* are songs directed to the *Niño Dios* (Holy Baby/ Infant) and the patron saints, and are often employed during the *velorio* of an *angelito*²⁸⁷. *Chigualos* (also referred as *gualí* in northern part of the Pacific) is a ceremony of rejoicing in pain. The community sings *arrullos* and *rondas*²⁸⁸ using a question and answer scheme that aims at teaching games to the dead child and giving him/ her advice for life in the other world. This ritual assures the the *angelito* goes directly to heaven. These burial rituals, strongly rooted in funerary oral and musical traditions, have a central role in fomenting social cohesion²⁸⁹ and gender roles²⁹⁰.

²⁸⁴ Ulloa, Rubio & Campos (1996) for the Embera model. Losonczy (1993) for similarities and differences.

²⁸⁵ Arturo Escobar, "Nature". In *Places and Regions in the Age of Globality: Social Movements and Biodiversity Conservation in the Colombian Pacific* (without date), <http://www.unc.edu/~aescobar/html/texts.htm> (accessed August 1, 2008).

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Jaime Cifuentes Ramírez. Memoria Cultural del Pacifico.

<http://www.lablaa.org/blaavirtual/antropologia/memoria/memo10e.htm>, August 21, 2008.

²⁸⁸ Songs or refrains used by children while they play. Commonly used in *chigualos*.

²⁸⁹ María Mercedes Jaramillo. "Los Alabaos, los Arrullos y los Chigualos como Oficios de Difunto y Ritos de Cohesión Social en el Litoral Pacifico Colombiano". *INTI. Revista de Literatura Hispanica*, 2006, No. 63-64. p. 277-300.

²⁹⁰ Norma E. Whitten Jr. "Ritual Enactment of Sex Roles in the Pacific Lowlands of Ecuador-Colombia". *Ethnology*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Abril 1974), p. 129-143.

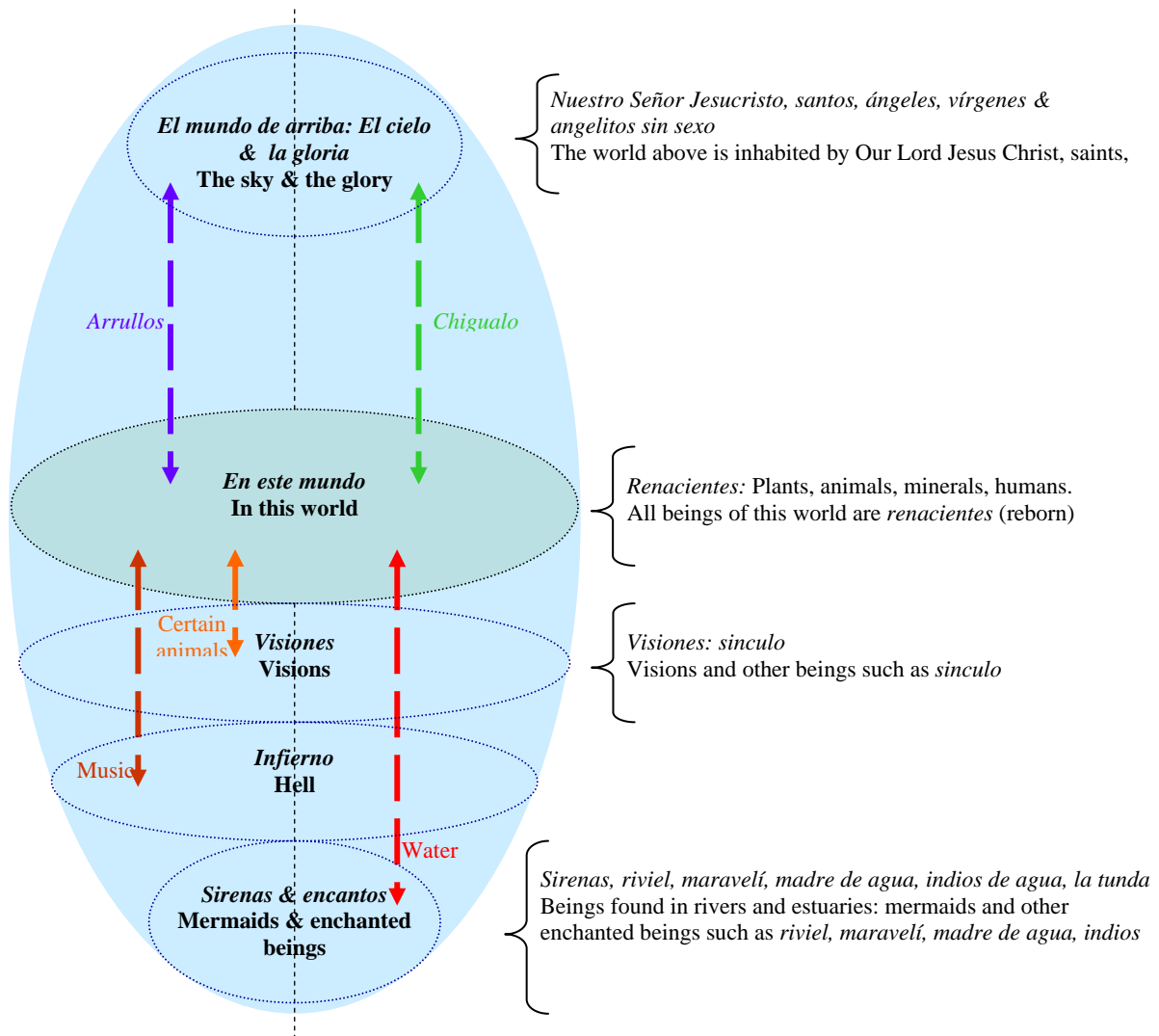


Figure 1. Spatial configuration of the local model of nature.

On the other hand, there are three distinct worlds underneath *este mundo*. The lowest point of the vertical axis is dominated by an aquatic world of *sirenas y encantos* (mermaids and enchanted beings). Among the beings that dwell in rivers and estuaries are mermaids, the *riviél* (ghost ship), the *maravelí* (woman ghost borne by the devil and a black woman), the *madre de agua*, the *indios de agua* and *la tunda* (woman ghost with the ability of changing and resembling a person close to the person she encounters in order to take them to her world). These magical beings can access *este mundo* mainly through water formations and in less degree through the forest. The world above *sirenas y encantos* is the *infierno* (hell), reminiscent of Christian imaginary and can be invoked through certain music²⁹¹. Music and

²⁹¹ Arturo Escobar, "Nature". In *Places and Regions in the Age of Globality: Social Movements and Biodiversity Conservation in the Colombian Pacific* (without date), <http://www.unc.edu/~aescobar/html/texts.htm> (accessed August 1, 2008).

the local instruments such as *marimba*, *conunu*, *tambora* and drums are key mechanisms to catalyze communication between worlds.

Above the *inferno* is the world of *visiones* (visions) populated by visions, other beings and few animals, such as crabs that can travel to and from *este mundo*. In Escobar's²⁹² words, it is an inversion of *este mundo*. It is populated by the *sinculo*, beings that look like humans but that feed on the smell of food. As no eating effectively takes place, the digestive system and anus are not needed. These beings are anus-less (ass – less), literally *sin culo*. Above *visiones* is *este mundo* populated by *renacientes* (beings that have been reborn): that is animals, plants, minerals and humans.

The notion of *renacientes* encapsules the believe that every natural object of *este mundo* is subject of rebirth, that is: it cannot become extinct because it is abundant. However if under pressure (excess fishing, hunting, deforestation, etc.), animals, plants and minerals can become unattainable to humans, that is, distant in time and space, while humans can transform into *espantos* (scary visions) and *animales de monte* (wild animals)²⁹³. Thus the concept of *renacientes* stresses the continuity between humans and the environment, and operates on the principle of transformation²⁹⁴ of beings. In this sense, the inclusion of the word *renacientes* in the PCN homepage functions as a way of framing the movement into this particular social and cultural background. Therefore, it would not seem far fetched that PCN activists and members also consider themselves as part of *este mundo*.

Although some mythological and popular characters warn humans of overuse and can be understood as cultural efforts guided to conservation, the category of *renacientes* restricts Pacific afrocolombians from imagining extinction because it is an absurd idea within this cosmovision. Extinction is not imaginable because the creation and recreation of all beings in the forest, in *este mundo* is not under the influence of humans: the forest and the beings of the forest appear spontaneously. Hence, Western ideas and efforts towards conservation of the forest, biodiversity of species and natural resources do not constitute problems and areas of concern for afrocolombian farmers. In this sense, the romantic image of a harmonious relationship with the environment is fractured.

According to Escobar²⁹⁵ the second feature in the local model of nature of Pacific black groups is the presence and interrelation among different worlds. To some extent this mechanism has been discussed in terms of other realms outside, yet in relation, to *este mundo*.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

However, the idea of worlds is also applied to organize and categorize the beings within *este mundo* into: animals, *cosas de la tierra* (things of the earth/ soil) and plants (see Figure 2). The criteria of classification is based on mobility, ranging from beings that are endowed with the capacity to move (animal kingdom), passing through beings that can travel without moving (plant kingdom, for example: plants that grow/ spread horizontally or vertically) and beings that cannot move (minerals). Thus plants articulate and mediate between animals (alive) and minerals (not alive); the opposition is not life-death, but mobile-static, which echoes the character of *renacientes*.

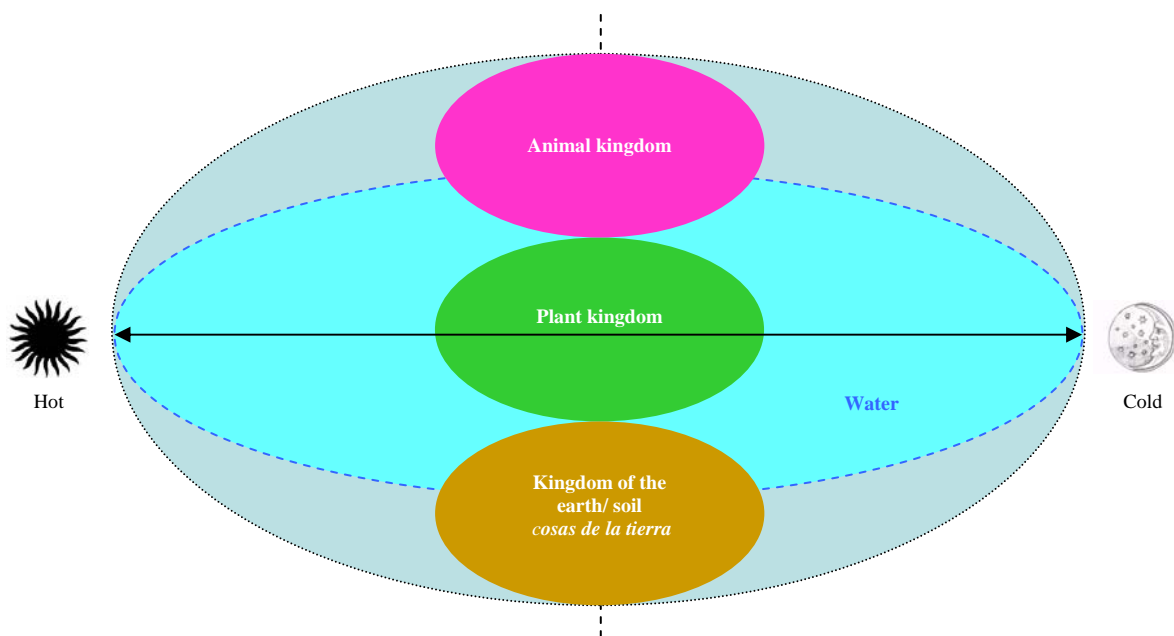


Figure 2. The worlds of *este mundo*.

The animal kingdom includes animals, birds, *mariscos* (molluscs/ seafood) and *avichuchos* (strange and dangerous). Animals are *animales de servicio* (beings of service/ useful to humans) that reproduce sexually and have the ability to move, except by flying. The ability to fly is what distinguishes animals from birds. *Mariscos* are aquatic beings, that may or may not be of service to humans. *Avichuchos* share some of the qualities of animals but are not of service to humans; they usually harm people (scorpions that sting). The kingdom of *cosas de la tierra* includes minerals, fossil fuels, mushrooms, small insects²⁹⁶.

The plant kingdom comprises palm trees, *palos* (twigs), *bejucos* (vines), *yerbas* (herbs) and *matas* (plants), beings that have a relative capacity to move. Palm trees are characterized by their peculiar leaves and trunk, *palos* have a rigid wooden structure, *bejucos* grow in a way

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

that gives them elasticity and continuity, *yerbas* are mostly medicinal and *matas* have simple leaves and are more related to domestic gardens²⁹⁷. This kingdom is heterogeneous: it encompasses magic and therapeutic beings with wild or domestic varieties which grow on the forest or in the villages. In this sense, plants connect the space of the village with the space of the forest. But plants also mediate between the natural and the supernatural, female and male, and present and past²⁹⁸. Hence the plant world is central to the local model of nature, articulating both natural and social aspects of black communities.

Classification within the worlds of *este mundo* is also based on thermal criteria, in clear opposition to western science use of taxa which correspond to a hierarchical and “natural” structure of classification. Figure 2 illustrates the taxonomy constructed and used by afrocolombian groups to classify each group of *renacientes*. The two main sources for the production and shift of temperature are the sun²⁹⁹ (linked to daylight and the generation of heat) and the moon³⁰⁰ (linked to the night and generating coolness), and to lesser degree the earth/ soil and air. Hence there are animals, plants and beings of the earth/ soil that are cold, warm, luke-warm or hot.

The plant kingdom is at the centre of *este mundo* and is perceived as a synthesis of opposed thermal beings given its ties to water, which is seen as encompassing both cold and hot. The thermal criteria is also applied to understand health, diseases and healing. A healthy being is one in which the elements are balanced, while disease is understood as a manifestation of an imbalance of elements (leaning either to the hot or cold end of the thermal spectrum), and healing practices (usually relying on herbs) aim at restabilising balance. Thus healing practices also signal the continuity between humans and the environment³⁰¹.

Each of the beings of *este mundo* are further categorized in three simultaneous scales. The first one regards the character of the entity, whether it is *manso* (tame) or *arisco* (wild). *Manso* is appropriated through domestication, while *arisco* cannot be appropriated by humans and can be destroyed. As Escobar³⁰² highlights, this categorization has material consequences in terms of conservation practices for the local black communities. The second scale is the spatial belonging, which is determined by the entity’s food and territorial habits in reference to an imaginary line that runs through the ground: if it is a being *de lo alto* (belonging to

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Image taken from gettyimages, <http://www.gettyimages.com>, accessed August 24, 2008.

³⁰⁰ Image taken from gettyimages, <http://www.gettyimages.com>, accessed August 24, 2008.

³⁰¹ Arturo Escobar, “Nature”. In *Places and Regions in the Age of Globality: Social Movements and Biodiversity Conservation in the Colombian Pacific* (without date), <http://www.unc.edu/~aescobar/html/texts.htm> (accessed August 1, 2008).

³⁰² Ibid.

above/ high) or *de lo bajo* (belonging to below/ low). The third category indicates if the entity is *producida por el hombre* (produced by mankind) or *producida por la tierra* (produced by the earth or forest). Figure 3 graphs the concrete position of the beings that have been mentioned until now, focusing only in the spatial and character scale.

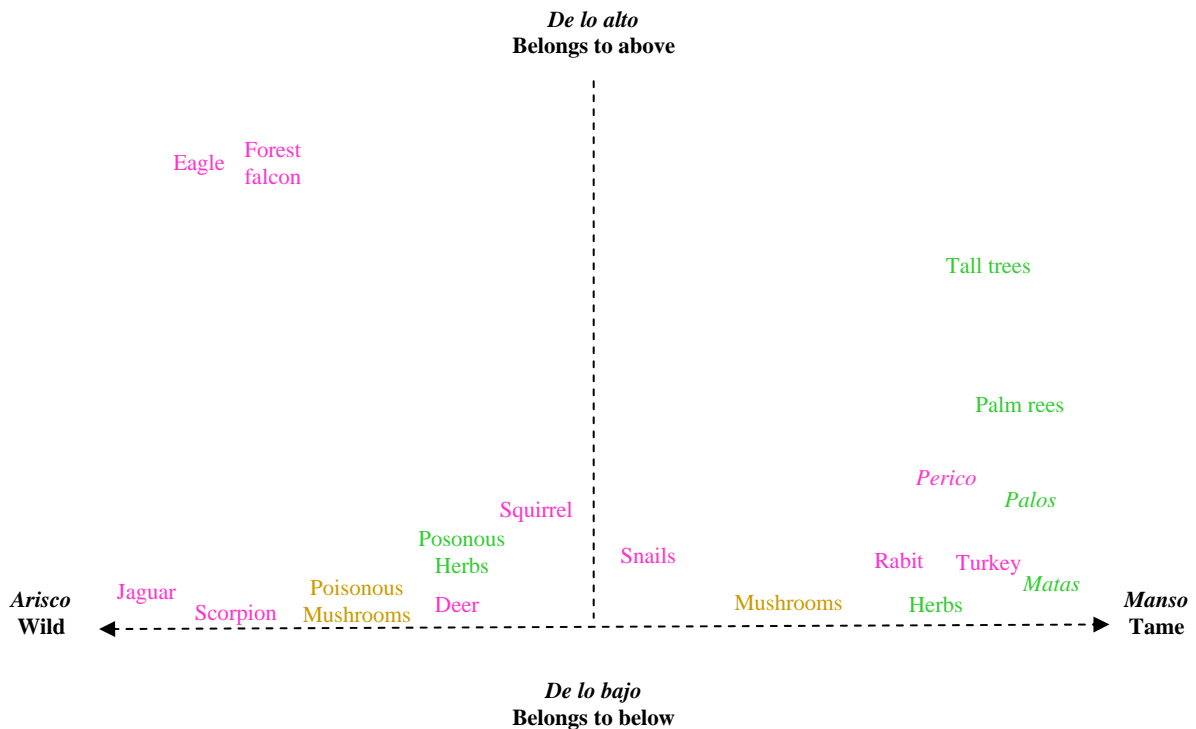


Figure 3. Classification of *renacientes* on a character – spatial axis. The colours maintain the colour scheme used in Figure 3.

In Figure 3, eagles, forest falcons, tall trees are *de lo alto*, while jaguars, scorpions, mushrooms, deer, squirrel, snails, rabbits, turkey, herbs, *matas*, *palos* and palm trees are *de lo bajo*. However, eagles and forest falcons are more *arisco* than tall trees, which are perceived as more *manso*. This system of classification also distinguishes from beings that even if belonging to the same spatial area vary in their character, such as mushrooms and herbs. Although the construction of Figure 1, 2, and 3 may prove useful, they are still simplified sketches of the complex cognitive, symbolic and representational construction of reality and its appropriation. For this reason, the next paragraphs are devoted to the traditional productive system (TPS) of black communities in the Colombian Pacific, understood as one dimension where the social, ecological and cultural are intertwined and this grammar is enacted. The description is a synthesis of Escobar's detailed account taken from the *Proyecto*

Biopacífico report³⁰³. For this reason, it is a generalized version and does not present the internal differences among communities, where certain aspects may gain or lose relevance.

TPS corresponds to a small-scaled family-based units of production oriented mainly towards self-consumption and reproduction. Each unit of production has a *finca*, *cultivo* or *colinos* (cultivation area of one or several families obtained by different means, from purchase, inheritance to exchange) which is integrated into a communal productive structure which is held together by the idea of territory. For afrocolombians in the Pacific, territory is a communal property that encompasses the sea, mangrove, swamps, forests and *bosques de respaldo* (forest areas for occasional or potential use), each with its own social imaginary and function³⁰⁴ (See Figure 4). TPS tacitly implies that the community holds a set of knowledges and practices for gathering, production, transformation and distribution of goods. Thus TPS contributes to food security and conservation (maintenance of a wide range of food during the year), and is directly linked to resource availability and natural cycles and dynamics³⁰⁵.

The afrocolombian TPS in the Pacific maintain a high production (within traditional activities and not in reference to market economy understanding of input-output-yields) and biological diversity by using low-intensity technologies and limiting their dependence on external inputs. TPS is also characterized by a high use of human energy within the units of production. While labour is primarily determined by kinship and the distribution is done within this social structure, the division of tasks and responsibilities corresponds to sexual parameters which reinforce gender roles. TPS also involves barter exchange and food security practices such as salting fish and raising animals. These practices correspond to a diversified economy that does not obey the logic of accumulation characteristic of capitalism, and where labour is not conceptualized or subject to the mechanisms of the market³⁰⁶.

³⁰³ PBP was a biodiversity conservation Project that took place between 1993 and 1998. The research is catalogued by Escobar as a “deeply negotiated process between local groups and staff members” that “engaged in the defense of a particular construction of nature in terms of traditional production systems. They also developed a sophisticated theory and management strategy for promoting sustainable development of the Pacific which is a far cry from the destructive extractivist and development strategies introduced after its dismantling, the identity-centered black and indigenous movements, and the space provided by the global discourse of biodiversity conservation, progressively deviated from the dominant biodiversity discourse. They sought to endorse a local cultural model of appropriation of nature --a local nature-culture regime” (p. 94). For the complete 9 volumes of the PBP report refer to: “Proyecto Biopacífico. Informe Final General”, Ministerio del Medio Ambiente, GEF-PNUD, 1998.

³⁰⁴ Arturo Escobar. “Nature”. In *Places and Regions in the Age of Globality: Social Movements and Biodiversity Conservation in the Colombian Pacific* (without date), <http://www.unc.edu/~aescobar/html/texts.htm> (accessed August 1, 2008).

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

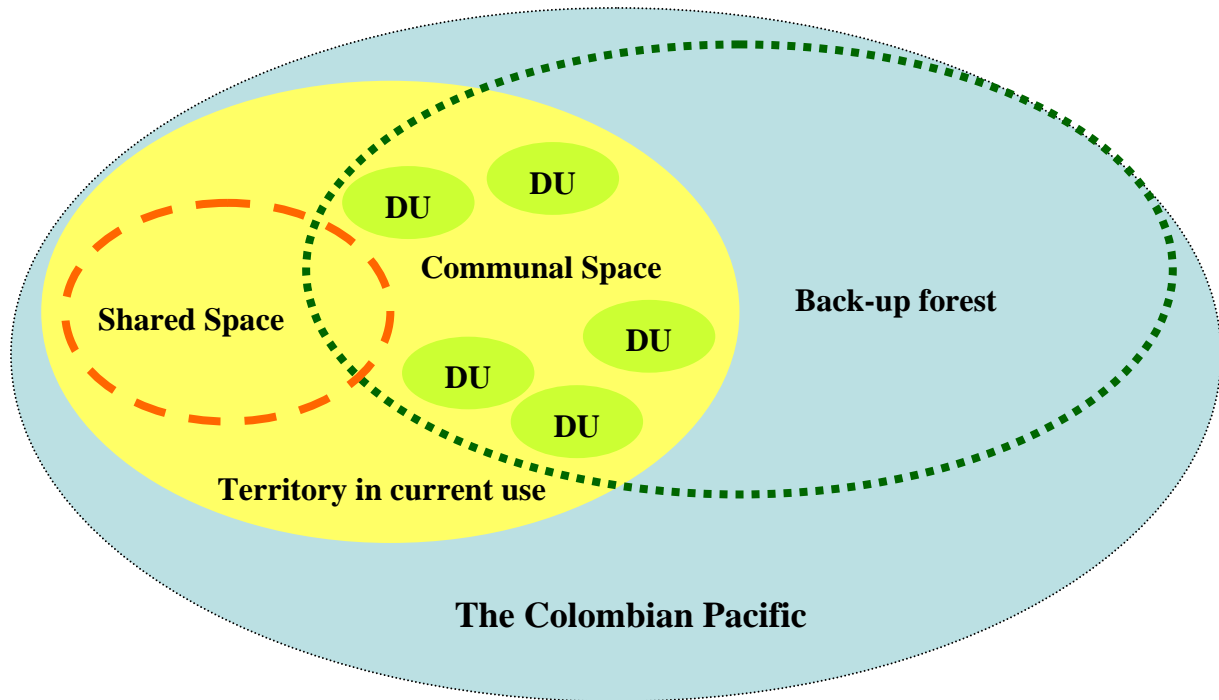


Figure 4. Spatial organization of territory in black Pacific communities³⁰⁷. DU: domestic unit.

However TPS is not a closed system. The increase of capitalist forms of production and consumption in the Pacific has led afrocolombians to engage in an unequal relation between the products produced within the TPS and the products and services offered by the market. Especially the black farmers involved in timber have become trapped into a system of *endeude* (indebtedness). Escobar seems to agree with the PBP Report in the appraisal that the growing integration of TPS with the national internal market, the construction of roads, the specialization of crops and the expansion of areas dedicated to illicit harvests has led to an increase of impoverishment, a loss of product diversity that entails a decline in the maintenance of food security, and a negative impact on ecosystem and biological diversity and conservation³⁰⁸.

TPS is conformed by three subsystems: agricultural, extractive and complementary³⁰⁹. Each subsystem has its own time allocation, and spatial and productive distribution that involves specific beings/ species, instruments and products. The basis of TPS is agriculture which varies according to the characteristics of the place and the needs of the crops. While the alluvial planes are populated with coconut trees, rice, cocoa, *papachina* (arrowleaf: *Xanthosoma sagittifolium*), sugar cane, corn, *yuca* (cassava: *Manihot esculenta*) and beans,

³⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 93. Originally taken from *Proyecto Biopacífico* final report.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

the slopes of the Western Cordillera allow less crop diversity but is more suitable for hunting, gathering and some cattle grazing³¹⁰. Agriculture thus implies the following practices: selection of seeds and plots, land clearing, attention to the lunar cycle, differentiated knowledge of crops/ species, farming techniques (crop rotation and fallow periods) and the use of family and reciprocal labour. This first subsystem also includes fishing and hunting in less degree.

The second subsystem is formed by low-impact extractive activities (gold and platinum mining with the traditional *baharequeo* system and extraction of timber) which generate income to cover basic goods (oil to cook, clothes, school supplies) and unexpected events (celebrations, calamities). The third subsystem refers to complementary activities such as raising domestic animals (pigs and chicken as a source of food and a way of saving), *zoteas* (rectangular wooden structures constructed two meters above the ground used to cultivate herbs, medicinal plants and some crops, these are responsibility of women) and providing fluvial transportation³¹¹.

In conclusion, this local model of nature as well as the symbolic and cognitive system through which it operates evidences the numerous interphases between nature, culture and production processes. The *ombligada*, the categorization and representation of the Pacific in terms of worlds, spaces and categorization of beings can be understood, as Escobar³¹² proposes, as a mechanism to appropriate territory, and of territory as a nest for identity formation and social struggles. These ontological assumptions about the world evidence that our knowledge and images of nature are in direct relation to our ideas and experiences with the natural.

A significant aspect of Pacific afrocolombian cosmovision is the coexistence of interconnectedness, relatedness and fragmentation between worlds, beings and dimensions of the real, their meaning and use. The cognitive and symbolic system used to classify worlds, beings and phenomena do not correspond to those used by modern positivist science. Even more, afrocolombian culture does not have the pretension of manipulating nature, as they see themselves as part of it; this evidences the absence of division between natural/ biophysical, human and supernatural dimensions. Other central characteristics of this local model of nature are: absence of strict dichotomic divisions as part of a rigid binary system, nature is not conceived as external to humans and to the process of knowledge production, and nature is not subordinated or driven by the logic of the market³¹³.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Ibid.

The above mentioned characteristics lead Escobar to assess this model of nature as an organic regime of appropriation of nature. “Cultural regimes of appropriation of nature” refers to “the concrete expressions of the articulation between biology and history established by human action”³¹⁴. The organic regime is different to capitalist nature. The capitalist regime of nature is linked to modernity and capitalism and is motivated by a pretension of universality. It is founded upon the belief that humans and nature belong to two different orders, the first controlling the second and transforming and treating it as a commodity. On the other hand, organic regimes correspond to a local logic of place, territory and identity formation³¹⁵.

³¹⁴ Ibid. p. 98.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

Discussion

In the last two decades the Colombian Pacific region has become highly visible for the Nation-State, national and international enterprises, organizations and scholars. In academia, the Pacific has gained interest from scholars in various fields, ranging from the hard sciences (biology, environmental sciences) to social sciences and humanities (social anthropology, geography, political science and Latin American studies). In the “softer” science spectrum attention has been placed on black and indigenous groups with regards to ethnicity, territory and land rights, justice, collective memory and identity, to name a few of the most popular research topics³¹⁶.

Within these academic and political interest, *Proceso de Comunidades Negras* (PCN) has seduced several scholars, such as Arturo Escobar. It is precisely his words that became the point of departure and inquiry for this thesis:

“... It can be stated that the conceptualization of alternative development constructed by PCN... is an example of post-development. The activists and communities not only have claimed their right as knowledge producers ... but in doing so, they have developed an alternative conceptualization of the Pacific as a “territory-region” of ethnic groups that does not correspond to a conventional construction of a place for regional development. In addition, they have created... an alternative political ecology based in the notions of sustainability, autonomy, diversity and alternative economies that do not comply with the dominant development discourse”³¹⁷

Although not in complete disagreement with Escobar, the history of PCN shows that there are traces of the development discourse and practices that linger and remain present. In consequence, PCN does not completely reject development as an ideology.

PCN does comply with the four point definition given by Escobar³¹⁸. It is in effect a grassroots movement that defends and promotes a localized, context and history specific way of understanding life, nature, culture, as well as the interphases between these dimensions. The defence of local traditional knowledge central to their symbolic and cognitive system is also a strategy to uphold the organic model of nature described in Chapter 4. As the local

³¹⁶ For a rewarding introduction and analysis to these topic refer to Mosquera, Pardo & Hoffman (2002), Hoffman (2004) and Gnecco & Zambrano (2000).

³¹⁷ Arturo Escobar, “El “Posdesarrollo” como Concepto y Práctica social”, *Políticas de Economía, Ambiente y Sociedad en Tiempos de Globalización*, p.20. My translation.

³¹⁸ Escobar 1995 p. 215 as cited by Aram Ziai, “The Ambivalence of Post-development: Between Reactionary Populism and Radical Democracy”, *Third World Quarterly*, 25 (6), 1046, Carfax Publishing

model of nature of afrocolombians in the Pacific is different to the capitalist regime, it stands in a strainful position to the values of modernity. Therefore it can be said that PCN maintains a critical outlook towards established scientific and modern discourses.

Escobar is also keen in observing that the alternative conceptualizations of place (the Colombian Pacific as *territorio-región* indispensable for social organization and identity formation), blackness (afrocolombian, black communities, autonomy of being) and autonomy over the use and administration of their territory configure a different scheme from the top-down pre-made development package. In this sense, PCN is a celebration of the local, a radicalization of difference and plurality in the regional and national identitarian repertoire. However, three aspects of PCN do not aid the argument that PCN rejects the entire development paradigm: the relationship of PCN with the Nation-State (in particular the legislative system), their funding strategies and the use of the some development terms.

In general, PCN has maintained a position of collaboration and compliance with the state in order to have their rights recognized and their land titled; this is far from the anarchist feeling of many post-developmental texts. The procedure to obtain land titles has caused a shift in the way blacks organized themselves, as the black communities had to re-organize and name themselves as such and create local councils in order to make the claims. In this sense, PCN works within the legislative and bureaucratic system of the state and puts its demands in the political sphere through traditional mechanisms and institutions. It is a legitimate way of setting claims forward. Thus, PCN is not challenging the structure of the nation-state, but has become part of the process, procedure and to certain extent, outcome. This is visible in the synchrony that exists between the ideology of a multicultural state and PCN's demands and claims.

Second, although PCN claims autonomy as a social organization, it depends on funds given by an array of donors and partners such as United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United Nations High Commission for Refugees, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, SwissAid and Global Greengrants Fund in cooperation with other local NGO's such as *Grupo Semillas* (Seed Group). The involvement of PCN with UN bodies and their programs for development, Amnesty International and Human Right Watch illustrates PCN's interaction, and even some level of subscription to development principles and western ideals. However, PCN is selective in its "submission": the organization subscribes to aspects that are in tune with its motivations and demands and rejects those that are not "in accordance with its

cultural aspirations”³¹⁹. Hence, PCN is selective and strategic in its negotiation and adoption of terms and needs.

Swissaid is a Bern-based organization involved in “cooperative development projects in nine countries”³²⁰. In the Colombian Pacific Swissaid has focused on “independent administration and management of communal land and natural resources by local organisations; integral, organic, small farmer-style agriculture and sustainable use of natural resources; and empowerment and promotion of women to equal decision-making status and ensuring they receive and use their economic, social and cultural rights in both the public and private arenas”³²¹.

The American based Global Greengrant Fund describes themselves as a “public charity” that acts as a middleman “between those who can offer financial support and grassroots groups in developing countries”³²². For 2008 in Colombia, this organization has given nine grants with the help of International Rivers, Friends of the Earth and Rainforest Action Network. Five of the projects deal directly with afrocolombian problematic: conservation of natural resources, promotion of environmental awareness, protection and training, legal land titles, reestablishment of local agricultural practices and maintaining afrocolombian culture and identity³²³. Of interest is that Libia Grueso, founding member of PCN, is part of the Andes Regional Board in behalf of this movement.

Citing these examples does not dismiss the potential positive effects and improvements in the livelihoods of the people. Rather, it wants to highlight PCN’s willingness and, perhaps, need of financial assistance coming from international development/aid organs. Thus PCN is not a completely autonomous movement nor can it be assessed as an organization that challenges the institutionalization of the development discourse. In this aspect, PCN is submissive to the development regime and illustrates Rahnema’s argument that aid and its institutions hinder the creative autonomy of traditional local communities³²⁴. This highlights two additional dimensions. First, it acts as a remainder that the utopia post-development world is not so clear cut, and radically opposed to development as most post-developmental belief. Second, the organization, mechanics and heterogeneity of PCN as

³¹⁹ PCN. “Principios básicos”. <http://www2.renacientes.org:8080/renacientes/principios-basicos>. (Accessed July 9, 2008).

³²⁰ SwissAid. http://www.swissaid.ch/wEnglish/ueber_uns/ueber_uns.php?navid=25 (Accessed September 20, 2008).

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Global Greengrants Fund. “About Us”. <http://www.greengrants.org/about.html> (Accessed September 15, 2008).

³²³ Global Greengrants Fund.

³²⁴ Majjid Rahnema, “Towards Post-Development: Searching for Signposts, a New Language and New Paradigms,” in *The Post Development Reader*, London: Zed Books, 1997, p. 393.

well as its “bargaining” capacity, support Wade³²⁵ and Escobar’s³²⁶ argument that PCN as a social movement surpasses the traditional social movement theories and analysis.

The third aspect of PCN that does not aid the argument that it rejects the entire development paradigm is the use of some development terms. PCN not only uses terms like “sustainability” and “biodiversity” but insists on the need to “develop” a cultural identity in its strategic actions statement. While this can be interpreted as subversive in the sense of re-defining notions traditionally used in the development domain to advance its cause, it still generates some conceptual disturbance. First, using those stale words (and the images and power relations that are evocated) keeps PCN restrained to the development paradigm because it is trapped by its language. Second, using such language causes an expansion of the developmental repertoire, leading to an ever more encompassing developmental discourse (at least in a local, regional and national level), one that makes room for otherness. In this sense, PCN is not inventing alternatives to development, but rather remodelling development. In consequence, this aspect does not promote the post-developmental aspiration of a conceptual, representational and factual materiality after development; rather it shows the necessity to create new terms to escape development.

The three aspects described above correspond more to a neo-populist post-development perspective in which the anti-development and anti-modern rhetoric is highly valued. However, although these are areas of inconsistency with post-development thought, as a whole PCN cannot be rejected as a post-development organization. PCN coincides with other key elements in this school such as: rejection of neo-liberalism (especially the idea of nature as a commodity), awareness and conservation of local knowledge and culture, and the conception of culture as mobile. In this case the categorization proposed by Ziai of sceptical post-development becomes useful.

PCN does not repudiate every single element and notion related to development, but rather sceptically investigates its own traditional culture while maintaining a constructivist approach to afrocolombian culture and identity. This movement also cautiously criticizes certain aspects of modernity and rejects the Eurocentric images, metaphors and categories imbedded in development. It also advocates decentralization of political and economic power to ensure localization of power and emancipation of afrocolombians at the grassroots level. As a movement that gathers over 120 groups, it works through a highly decentralized scheme,

³²⁵ Peter Wade, “Introduction: The Colombian Pacific in Perspective”. *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*. 2002, Vol. 7, No. 2.

³²⁶ Arturo Escobar, *Places and Regions in the Age of Globality: Social Movements and Biodiversity Conservation in the Colombian Pacific* (without date), <http://www.unc.edu/~aescobar/html/texts.htm> (accessed November 25, 2007).

allowing self-organization and decision making. As such, the different groups are empowered in their context and areas of influence, and still battle together as PCN in pro of territorial demands and right recognition. These characteristics fit in with Ziai's description of sceptical post-development, and evidence the emancipatory character of PCN and its links with the concept of radical democracy.

In conclusion, PCN does not reject the development apparatus as a whole. This is partly due to the strongly founded trusteeship inherent to the discourse and its institutions³²⁷. Nustad argues that this is one of the strongest impediments to transform development and generate alternatives to development. However the production and recreation of more democratic and participatory development projects can be greatly improved with local agency, as the case of afrocolombians in the Pacific illustrates. That PCN cannot be catalogued as a post-development organization *in toto* is not a cause to grief, but rather highlights a much more complex idea of what a "post-development era" resembles in this particular moment in time. For now in the Colombian Pacific, it embodies a critical revival of local traditional knowledge, knowledge of the hegemonic political and social systems and ability to negotiate with its institutions and agents, prioritization of demands at a group level, and the ability to use certain aspects of the discourse of development to suit local needs and promote local concerns. In sum, PCN is in the strife to defend the afrocolombian idea of a "good life" in the Pacific.

³²⁷ Knut G. Nustad, "Development: The Devil We Know," *Third World Quarterly* 22, no.4 (2001), p. 484.

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Carolina Trevisi

Müllnergasse 6/21 Vienna 1090, Austria.

Mobile: +43 (0)6764851664 or +44(0)7531017435 Email: carotrevisi@gmail.com

QUALIFICATIONS

- **MA in Global Studies** London School of Economics and Political Science, University of Vienna, University of Leipzig and University of Wroclaw (October 2006 – July 2008)
- **Bachelors in Psychology** Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá, Colombia (January 1999 – October 2005)
- **Industrial Engineering** Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá, Colombia (August 1997 – December 1998)
- **High school** Miss Porter's School, Farmington, CT, USA (September 1992 - June 1996)

WORK EXPERIENCE

- **Freelance market researcher** (2002 – 2007)
Executed field research using various techniques: participant observation for anthropological studies, in-depth, semi structured and structured interviews, questionnaires and in-home visits. Translated Spanish – English final reports, screeners and guides for focus groups and interviews. Recruited participants for group sessions, interviews and anthropological studies.
CJS Investigaciones de Mercado, Bogotá, Colombia
- **Academic assistant of the project “Escuela de Control Social”** (September - December 16, 2005)
Supported writing the memoirs of the social control exercises in three of Bogotá's localities: Usaquén, Barrios Unidos and Chapinero. Contributed to the construction and presentation of the advance and final reports. Acted as bridge between the academic and logistic needs, processes and activities.
Institute for Social and Cultural Studies Pensar Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá, Colombia
- **General field and personnel coordinator, project “Los Jóvenes Opinan: Estudio Sobre La Juventud Facatativeña Agosto – Septiembre 2005”** (July - October 2005)
Research in mental health and methodological, operative and logistic consulting. Advised on the structure, organization and development of the field work. Designed and carried out the recruitment, selection and training of the operative team. Created and implemented the communication strategy for the community and possible interviewees. Planned, coordinated and accompanied the field work. Carried out individual and group feedback. Wrote weekly and final reports, analysis and recommendations.
Fundación Saldarriaga & Concha & Fundación Granjas Infantiles del Padre Luna, Bogotá, Colombia
- **Academic assistant of the project “Consultores en Psicología”** (February - April 2005)
Organizational consultant: contributed to the formulation of alternatives for the structure and functioning of “Consultores en Psicología”, the psychotherapeutic service offered to low income citizens of Bogotá by the PUJ Faculty of Psychology. Supported writing the final report and visual presentation. Fieldwork researcher applying semi structured interviews and document revision, as well as analysis of the information.
Institute for Social and Cultural Studies Pensar Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá, Colombia
- **National Supervisor Colombian Mental Health Survey** (July - December 2003)
Designed and developed the recruitment, selection and training of the operative personnel (profiles of the interviewers, test application, in-depth interviews, conformation of the work groups) and gave feedback of the process to the interviewers. Structured and coordinated the different areas of the 7 day training (sample and field procedures, interviewing strategies, personal computer basics). Developed and coordinated the communication strategy used in the 60 urban municipalities of Colombia. Carried out field supervision of the technical and group aspects. Submitted weekly, monthly and final reports. Obtained the best response rate in comparison to the other 26 countries that are part of the WHO-World Mental Health Initiative.
WHO, Colombian Ministry of Social Protection & Fundación FES, Bogotá, Colombia

- **Member Panel of Experts** (April - June 2003)
Worked in the translation and harmonization of the Colombian Adolescent Composite International Diagnostic Interview (CIDI), following the WHO translation protocol, which implied: identification and correction of inadequate technical expressions, highlight the differences between the English CIDI adult and adolescent versions and the Colombian versions and the delivery of a final report and suggestions.
WHO, Colombian Ministry of Social Protection & Fundación FES, Bogotá, Colombia

FURTHER EDUCATION/ COURSES

- **Trade, Development and the Environment and Development in the International Political Economy**
The London School of Economics and Political Science, London, United Kingdom (July – August 2008)
- **Introduction to psychoanalysis** Colombian Society of Psychoanalysis, Bogotá, Colombia (June – December 2002)
- **Introduction to Economics and Business Administration** Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá, Colombia (January - June 1997)

OTHER SKILLS

- **Languages:**
Mother tongue: Spanish
English: Proficient listening, reading, writing and speaking interaction and production.
French: Intermediate listening, reading, writing and speaking.
German: Basic reading, listening and speaking.
- **Computer literacy:** proficient in Windows, Microsoft Office and Internet.
- **Achievements:** My work experience has focused on team work and clear and respectful communication, whether it be verbal or written, in order to reach the goals and quality standards expected. I am highly organized, detailed oriented and have the ability and willingness to learn quickly and adapt to different situations, characteristics that became crucial for the management and training of over 60 people in the Colombian Mental Health Survey.

ACTIVITIES

- **Volunteer work:** From January to August 2005 initiated and coordinated an alliance between the local government in the rural municipality of San Alberto (Cesar, Colombia) and the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana to save the San Alberto River. Coordinated and accompanied the first field observation. The project known as “*Salvemos el Rio San Alberto*” (Let’s Save the San Alberto River) has gained greater commitment from the local authorities and negotiations for field assessment, diagnosis and financing are taking place. I also taught English to underprivileged children at the “Camilo Torres” public school in Bogotá.
- **Hobbies:** Attending art exhibits, traveling, learning to cook new dishes from different countries and having dinner parties.

PUBLICATIONS

- Posada - Villa, J. & Trevisi, C. (2004). Prevalencia, severidad y necesidades no satisfechas del tratamiento de los trastornos de ansiedad, relacionados con sustancias, del estado de ánimo y del control de los impulsos en adultos según el Estudio Nacional de Salud Mental, Colombia 2003. *MedUNAB*, 7, (20), 65 – 72.
- Vargas, L., Aragón, D., Rivera, S. & Trevisi, C. (2004). Discursos circulantes y construcción social de empresa en una organización del sector floricultor colombiano. *Universitas Psicológica*, 3, (2), 197 – 212. Facultad de psicología. Pontificia Universidad Javeriana.
- Castellanos, S. & Trevisi, C. (2005). La Franja T: una alternativa de intervención grupal desde la teoría de los fenómenos transicionales. *Universitas Psicológica*, 4, (2), 245 - 250. Facultad de psicología. Pontificia Universidad Javeriana.