

Peasants But Not Only: Indigenous Struggles for Autonomy in the Colombian Peasant
Movement of the 1970s

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“[Some people] never stopped being bigoted and calling me *Indio*¹, and actually a lot of other things. I was happy to say ‘Okay, so I am an Indian. And what’s it to you if I am an Indian? Because that is what I am.’”² These are the words of Juan Gregorio Palechor, a prominent leader in the Indigenous movement of Cauca, Colombia, when speaking of his experience in Colombia in the book of his life-history *Juan Gregorio Palechor: The Story of My Life*. The Department of Cauca in Colombia is situated in the Southwestern portion of the Colombian territory and is the department most densely populated by Indigenous communities. Palechor’s relation of his experiences of discrimination due to his Indigenous identity is one shared by many people in Colombia – and in Abya Yala³ in general – who are racialized as Black or Indian in a country whose majority identify as mixed-raced *mestizos*. Palechor further states in the book, speaking of rural Colombians in general, “you can say there’s a complex they give you, an idea that they drill into you that the people who talk are those who are educated. The people who talk have gone to school, have gone to university... those of us who haven’t gone to primary school, secondary school or university, well we just don’t have any ability.”⁴ Juan Gregorio Palechor was one of those people who did not allow this complex to take hold of his agency and instead struggled to have his voice and that of the Indigenous people of Colombia heard.

In the 1970s, Indigenous activists of Cauca, Colombia, fought within the national Colombian peasant movement through their Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC) for

¹ Indio here means Indian but in a derogatory fashion as a way to belittle people racialized as Indigenous

² Myriam Jimeno & Juan Gregorio Palechor, *Juan Gregorio Palechor: The Story of My Life*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014) p. 117

³ Abya Yala is a Guna – Guna Yala community in today’s Panama and Colombia – word to refer to the American continents and has been appropriated by Indigenous activists in ‘Latin America’ as an Indigenous word to refer to what became known as the ‘New World.’ The word Abya Yala means “land in its full maturity”; see also Emilio Del Valle Escalante, “Self-determination: A Perspective from Abya Yala” in ed. Marc Woons, *Restoring Indigenous Self-Determination: Theoretical and Practical Approaches*, (Bristol: E-International Relations, 2014) pp. 101-110

⁴ Jimeno & Palechor, *Juan Gregorio Palechor*, p. 117

the recovery of their ancestral lands but also for discursive spaces within which Indigenous knowledge, customs, and traditions – which would come to be called by activists ‘Indigenous culture’ – would be respected and seen as valuable sources for thinking about the world. In CRIC documents and journals of the time, including *Unidad Indígena*, a national Indigenous journal led by CRIC activists, the Indigenous activists “speak with our own voice, how we are truly: men, women, and children of meat and bones, with our own dignity, our own language, our own religions, with our own land.”⁵

This article seeks to highlight what the CRIC, as an Indigenous organization, has left us in texts of the 1970s. I hope to emphasize the ways the CRIC’s struggles for autonomy within the larger peasant movement, were fundamentally struggles to gain respect and value for Indigenous culture. By highlighting seemingly incommensurable differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous culture, the Indigenous activists and collaborators behind the CRIC documents and *Unidad Indígena* deployed what some would describe as essentialist notions of culture not only as a way to gain recognition of special rights pertaining to Indigenous people but also to preserve autonomous spaces from which to develop ways of being that did not have to be in line with the dominant, non-Indigenous culture. By struggling for the protection of autonomous spaces within which to develop ways of being, CRIC activists behind the documents and *Unidad Indígena* also show that there are ways of being that can be collectivistic as opposed to individualistic and that do not see the Earth as an object without subjectivity; that not all epistemologies are in opposition to or separate from nature. CRIC activists do this by reappropriating the concept of ‘culture’ from

⁵ CRIC & Secretaría Indígena, *Unidad Indígena*, No. 1 January, 1975, p. 3

anthropological discourses to articulate their own understanding of ‘culture’ and ‘Indigenous culture,’ viewing Indigenous culture as part of a relationship with the Land.

The CRIC emerged in the political environment of the Colombian agrarian reforms of the 1960s and was founded in February of 1971. The CRIC remains to this day, now marking 52 years of struggle in which Indigenous councils and organizations have proliferated across the Colombian territory. In 1982, after the split with the National Association of Peasant Users (ANUC) in 1977, the CRIC came to organize itself with other regional Indigenous organizations on a national scale under the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC). I argue that these struggles to carve out space for autonomous Indigenous organizing were and are a continuation of an anticolonial⁶ struggle to protect the freedom of communities to organize their social being on their own terms. This essay attempts to bring into academic spaces the lessons taught by the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca as they struggled within the national peasant movement of Colombia in the 1970s.

Indigeneity and Citizenship in Cauca

Cauca has seen the mobilization of Indigenous peoples throughout colonial and national history, from resisting Spanish invasion to resisting the continued genocide of their people and cultures under Colombian nation-building. Much has been written on the ethnic movements of Cauca, especially Indigenous ethnic movements, from the struggles of Juan Tama in the 18th century for recognition of Cauca *resguardos* – communally owned land titled by the Spanish

⁶ Using Fanon, Coulthard, and Liboiron to understand colonialism as Indigenous dispossession of land, resources, and self-determination within a context of a social hierarchy marked by the subjugation of the natives and the domination of the settler. Anticolonial struggles are struggles that seek to stop colonial processes. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (New York: Grove Press, 1963) p. 236; Max Liboiron, *Pollution is Colonialism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022) p. 9; Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014) p. 7

crown to Indigenous communities before independence – to the efforts of Manuel Quintín Lame in the 1920s and his political *mingas* – an Indigenous tradition of social or communal work – and to the development of the CRIC in the 1970s and the promulgation of a multicultural constitution for Colombia in 1991. In her book, *Intercultural Utopias*, Joanne Rappaport speaks about the ways the Indigenous movement of Colombia has had to focus on the differences between Indigenous culture and dominant culture in order to assert, and more crucially for the government to accept, Indigenous special rights. In so doing, the Indigenous movement has had to present what some might identify as essentialist notions of Indigenous culture. As Rappaport argues however, criticizing these movements for their ‘essentialist’ discourses does a political disservice to them by undermining their objectives. These objectives are objectives of using “culture as a tool for delineating a project within which people can build an ethnic polity protected from the hegemonic forces that surround them.”⁷ As Rappaport further posits, “culture also provides a vehicle for the construction of lifeways that afford Indigenous communities alternatives to the dominant values of individualism and consumerism.”⁸ Though the discourse surrounding culture emerging from the Indigenous movement at the time of Rappaport’s *Intercultural Utopias*, the 2000s, is much more developed than it was during the 1970s, I hope to show that the seeds of that discourse were, at least partially, germinated by the discourses on ‘Indigenous culture’ employed in the 1970s which we can glimpse in the CRIC documents and articles of *Unidad Indígena*.

The literature on the Indigenous movements of southwestern Colombia is quite developed and much of the scholarship focuses on Indigenous navigation of the interaction between the ‘local ethnic’ context and the ‘larger’ national and international context. Karla Escobar’s article “Que

⁷ Joanne Rappaport, *Intercultural Utopias: Public Intellectuals, Cultural Experimentation, and Ethnic Pluralism in Colombia*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 39

⁸ Ibid.

Significa Ser Ciudadano e Indio” (What does it mean to be a citizen and to be Indian) is a brilliant analysis of early twentieth-century Indigenous organizing in Cauca and the formation of what it meant to be an Indigenous citizen of Colombia.⁹ Escobar argues convincingly that political participation and conceptions of Indigenous citizenship were varied and not monolithic, although much of political participation centered on protecting *resguardos*. Tracing the differences between prominent Indigenous leaders from Cauca between 1902-1939, Pio Collo, Quintín Lame, and Jose Gonzalo Sanchez, Escobar’s work argues that at this time, there were not one but multiple articulations of what it meant to be an Indigenous citizen. With varying concepts and goals among them, varying appropriations of Liberal concepts as well as varying relationships between these Indigenous leaders and the State, different understandings of what it meant to be an Indigenous citizen were articulated by the different leaders. However, Escobar spends little time on discussing the meaning of the general concern of Indigenous organizers for protecting communally owned lands. What does it mean that Indigenous people were struggling to protect their communally owned lands? Of course, the answer is clearly in part about a material concern for having access to land but could there be more than ‘material’ concerns at play?

In *Cauca’s Indigenous Movement in Southwestern Colombia*, Brett Troyan analyzes Indigenous organizing through a wide lens throughout the twentieth century arguing that while at times the Colombian state repressed social movements, at times it also conceded and opened space for further mobilization.¹⁰ A case in point, for Troyan, would be the peasant mobilizations of the 1970s, which were promoted by the agrarian reform laws of 1961-1967 but then became repressive

⁹ Karla Escobar, “Qué significa ser ciudadano e 'indio'?: Sobre la diversidad de formas de apelar a la ciudadanía indígena en el Cauca (Colombia), 1902-1939.” *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* (2021): pp. 303-326

¹⁰ Brett Troyan, *Cauca's Indigenous Movement in Southwestern Colombia: Land, Violence, and Ethnic Identity* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015).

as peasant mobilization radicalized, leading the state to close avenues to class-based claims while, according to Troyan, remaining open to ethnic-based claims, which, in turn, opened space for ethnic mobilization. In addition, Troyan posits that the Colombian state's contradictory policies are best understood by considering communities' popular appropriation of official discourses. These two works by Escobar and Troyan work well to give readers an understanding of the relationship between the state and Indigenous movements throughout the twentieth century, which was repressive and collaborative – albeit not entirely – at the same time. The two works also show that Indigenous intellectuals, leaders, and communities in Cauca have many times appropriated discourses from the dominant non-Indigenous society and culture in order to create space for the articulation of their own concepts of citizenship. These essential works, which stress the plurality of 'the State' and Indigenous identity, leave open questions regarding the aspects that distinguished Indigenous identity from non-Indigenous peasant identity.

Joanne Rappaport's *Politics of Memory* is a seminal piece for understanding the processes of appropriation within Indigenous communities of discourses from without.¹¹ In her work, Rappaport takes an anthropological approach to the history of the historical consciousness of Paez communities in Cauca. Rappaport charts the emergence of the *resguardo* system in Cauca, in the early 1700s, which came as a legal victory of the Indigenous communities and the ways the memory of this event was codified in the histories written and told by Indigenous intellectuals. Rappaport demonstrates how Indigenous intellectuals in Cauca, especially in the Paez communities, used the historical retelling of their struggles as an ideological means of resisting the continued genocide of their people and culture. Reappropriating concepts such as the *resguardo*

¹¹ Joanne Rappaport, *The Politics of Memory: Native Historical Interpretation in the Colombian Andes*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

that was originally a tool of Spanish subjugation, as well as law 89 of 1890, which was promulgated by Colombian politicians with racist conceptions but which protected Indigenous communal lands in the resguardo, the Paez and other Indigenous communities in Cauca organized around these reappropriated concepts in an attempt to preserve their identity and culture in the face of a modernizing state. It was from these reappropriations alongside a national agrarian reform that brought the emergence of the CRIC in the 1970s. This organization emerged with leaders such as Trino Morales and Juan Gregorio Palechor, who went on to write, in collaboration with anthropologists Christian Gros and Myriam Jimeno, about their experiences in the Indigenous movement in *¡A Mí no Me Manda Nadie! Historia de Vida de Trino Morales and Juan Gregorio Palechor: The Story of My Life*.¹² As a Yanacona, an Indigenous community composed of migrants from displaced Indigenous communities, Juan Gregorio's account provides a necessary insight into how some Indigenous and non-Indigenous peasants differentiated themselves. Further, the stories of Juan Gregorio Palechor and Trino Morales,¹³ two important early leaders of the CRIC, serve as an insight into the lives of some of the organic intellectuals behind the CRIC and *Unidad Indígena*.

Literature on the peasant movement of the 1970s in Colombia, from which the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC) emerged, is also important to mention. Three seminal pieces on the agrarian movement of the 1970s in Colombia have been published: Cristina Escobar's *La Trayectoria del ANUC*,¹⁴ Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's *Politics and Ideology of the Colombian*

¹² Myriam Jimeno and Juan Gregorio Palechor. *Juan Gregorio Palechor: The Story of My Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

¹³ Christian Gros, Trino Morales, *¡A Mí no Me Manda Nadie! Historia de Vida de Trino Morales*. (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia, 2009),

¹⁴ Cristina Escobar, *Trayectoria De La ANUC* (Bogotá: CINEP, 1983).

Peasant Movement,¹⁵ and Leon Zamosc's *The Agrarian Question And The Peasant Movement in Colombia*.¹⁶ These works mainly focus on the national peasant movement, especially on the ANUC (National Association of Peasant Users) as an organization. Escobar's *Trayectoria* takes a chronological approach to the development of the ANUC, fashioning a very detailed timeline of the organization. Rivera Cusicanqui in *Politics and Ideology*, focuses on the ideological development within ANUC and convincingly argues that the reorientation of ANUC away from peasant concerns and towards revolutionary mobilization alienated the rank-and-file of the organization leading to its demise. Leon Zamosc's *The Agrarian Question* situates the larger national context of the peasant movement, taking a class-based analytical approach. Zamosc explains the partial disintegration of ANUC that occurred in 1977, similarly to Cusicanqui, arguing that the political strategies adopted by ANUC leadership in the latter part of the 1970s estranged peripheral sectors of the peasant movement, such as the Indigenous movement led at the time by CRIC. As a class-based analysis, it is limited in answering any questions that revolve around the particular cultural conceptions of the Indigenous movement and why they were not compatible with the direction chosen by the ANUC leadership. All three works also involved a collaboration between the three authors Leon Zamosc, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui and Cristina Escobar to compile over 100 oral interviews of peasants involved in the peasant movement, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, which is digitized and available for online open access and served as transcribed oral sources for the present study. Furthermore, the exemplary work of all three scholars has been

¹⁵ Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *The Politics and Ideology of the Colombian Peasant Movement The Case of ANUC (National Association of Peasant Smallholders)*. (Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD). 1987).

¹⁶ Leon Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement in Colombia Struggles of the National Peasant Association, 1967–1981*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

invaluable for the contextualization of questions this present essay tackles. To all three authors I am indebted.

What remains to be studied in depth in the most notable works is the split between ANUC and CRIC that occurred between 1974 and 1977, particularly the contradictions between the two organizations that led to the break. This episode in the development of the Indigenous movement is significant for what it achieved for CRIC and other Indigenous councils, namely the protection of their autonomy. This autonomy that created the space for the Indigenous movement to advance ethnic claims was essential for changing national perceptions of what it meant to be Indigenous. Christian Gros argues in *Políticas de La Etnicidad* that the politicization of Indigenous identity was accompanied by a ‘rhetoric of alterity’ through which Indigenous movements argued for a “revindication for their right to difference.”¹⁷ Gros argues that Indigenous identity as something to be proud of was a result of this politicization and struggle for the right to difference as well as the international demand for ethnic diversity.¹⁸ Gros further argues that this process of revindication of Indigenous identity particularly necessitated land guarantees.¹⁹ Gros’ work provides a way of understanding why Indigenous communities and organizations would seek to struggle for their land claims in a struggle to protect their Indigenous identity in the face of an ever-growing modernization project. Nevertheless, one is still left wondering how the ‘rhetoric of alterity,’ the reappropriations of non-Indigenous concepts, and the political strategies that led to ANUC’s decline might fit into one picture to explain the split between ANUC and CRIC in 1977 and what this split might tell us about Indigenous identity formation.

¹⁷ Christian Gros, *Políticas de la Etnicidad: Identidad, Estado, y Modernidad*, (Bogota, Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia, 2000) p. 9

¹⁸ Ibid. 71, 84

¹⁹ Ibid. 67

What is it about their identities that Indigenous intellectuals sought to protect, especially in the context of the 1977 split with ANUC? If we understand peasants to mean those folk whose primary occupation was situated in agriculture, what, in the eyes of CRIC activists, differentiated Indigenous peasants in Cauca from other peasants in Cauca? What contradictions did CRIC leadership see between the Indigenous council and the directions taken by the ANUC leadership that led to the 1977 split? The importance of this 1977 split cannot be overstated, but to be clear, it is a split that occurred mainly between the leaderships of the two organizations. I seek to argue that this split that was finalized in the Fourth National Congress of ANUC in 1977 came from ethnocentric applications of leftist ideas within the ANUC leadership and CRIC's attempts to struggle against them. We can understand the struggles for autonomy by the CRIC as struggles to limit the encroachment of non-Indigenous political concepts and ways of being as well as a way to create space for the development of autonomous articulations of Indigenous culture through a reappropriation of the term 'culture' from anthropological discourses. The split between ANUC and CRIC has remained neglected in scholarship on the transformation of the Colombian state into a constitutionally multi-cultural state. Ignoring the history of the CRIC's struggle against ANUC leadership's actions leads to possibly overlooking the profundity of the lessons Indigenous intellectuals teach through their struggle. The central point of these lessons revolves around understanding *la tierra* as more than just an object of labor.

The National Context 1948-1967

In 1948, following the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, a popular leftist and anti-imperialist politician, a social conflict exploded that left hundreds of thousands dead. The period came to be known as *la Violencia* – the violence – and it saw the emergence of the guerrilla forces which came to struggle violently against the State and its paramilitary forces that were organized

to carry out “sabotage, and/or terrorist activities against known communist proponents.”²⁰ After La Violencia at the end of the 1950s, it seemed imperative to the dominant classes, those most represented by the two traditional parties, Liberals and Conservatives, that certain reforms were in order for the violence to subside, particularly in the countryside. It was in the countryside where much of the violence occurred, and following recommendations from the United States survey missions, community uplift programs were deemed necessary – along with more sanguinary actions – for the restoration of ‘peace’ in these areas.²¹

In the international context, the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s saw the triumph of the 26th of July Movement in Cuba as well as a shift in focus within US foreign policy towards Latin America. Beginning with the Kennedy administration, an ‘Alliance for Progress’ with Latin American countries was forged through which social reforms and raising the standard of living would be made primary concerns for Latin American governments. As argued by Peter Smith in *Talons of the Eagle* “the point... was to bolster reformist democratic regimes and to forestall revolutionary threats.”²² In August 17, 1961, all of the member countries of the Organization of American States except Cuba would sign the Declaration of Punta del Este in which the signing representatives of the countries would “agree to establish an Alliance for Progress; a vast effort to bring a better life to all people of the Continent.”²³ The declaration also

²⁰ United States Army Special Warfare Center, “Visit to Colombia, South America, by a Team from Special Warfare Center, Fort Bragg, North Carolina,” March 26, 1962, Secret Supplement, 2; Though paramilitarism and paramilitary institutions are not foreign to Colombia, in 1961 and ‘62 with the training of paramilitary forces by the United States Special Warfare Center there came a marked difference in paramilitary strategies as paramilitary organizations came to be more highly militarized and with access to even more technologies of terror.

²¹ Dennis M. Rempe. “Counterinsurgency in Colombia: A US national security perspective 1958-1966”. PhD diss., (University of Miami, 2002)

²² Peter H. Smith, *Talons of the Eagle: Latin America, the United States, and the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) p. 137-139

²³ Barry Sklar and Virginia M. Hagen, *Inter-American Relations: A Collection of Documents, Legislation, Descriptions of Inter-American Organizations, and Other Material Pertaining to Inter-American Affairs*. (Washington, U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1972) p. 164

included a point that stated that the alliance would “encourage... programs of comprehensive agrarian reform, leading to effective transformation... of unjust structures and systems of land tenure.. with a view to replacing latifundia.”²⁴ This alliance would then be a force that would encourage heads of state throughout Latin America to pursue reformist agendas. Colombia would follow suit and the 1960s would be a decade in which though repression and declarations of states of siege would be routine, social reforms would be enacted to consolidate State legitimacy after the bloody period of La Violencia.

Part of these reforms came in the formation of Juntas de Accion Comunal (Communal Action Boards), through which the government hoped to involve peasants and urbanites in programs of local development, including the building of roads, schools, and other related activities.²⁵ Specifically, in the rural context, Law 135 of 1961 was promulgated, creating specific stipulations for the expropriation of unused lands and to “eliminate and prevent the unequal concentration of rural property.”²⁶ The law also established the Colombian Institute for Agrarian Reform (INCORA), which would handle conflicts over land tenure and would decide which expropriations and redistributions of land were to be carried out.²⁷ Leon Zamosc has argued that though this law was an attempt at agrarian reform, it was clear, based on the areas of application, that it was to act not as a form of social transformation in the countryside but as a means to serve as a palliative to the areas of most intense violence during the civil conflict.²⁸ It was mainly in the departments with the most potential for continued civil conflict over land – where *campesinos* were most mobilized during La Violencia – that agrarian reform projects were developed. In this

²⁴ Sklar and Hagen, *Inter-American Relations*, p. 164

²⁵ Leon Zamosc. *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement in Colombia: Struggles of the National Peasant Association, 1967–1981*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 38

²⁶ Law 135 of 1961, National Congress of Colombia Doi: 12/15/1961

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Leon Zamosc. *The Agrarian Question*, p. 38

way, it became clear that only through direct action were the peasants of other departments, departments with a higher concentration of land ownership such as Cauca and Sucre, be considered for such redistribution projects.²⁹ From the rural census taken by the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) in Colombia, we can see that 62.6% of landholdings were under 5 hectares and compromised only 4.5% of farmland – that is, 62% of farms, the majority, were of fewer than 5 hectares and made up less than 5% of total titled land – while the largest .2% of landholdings, over 1,000 hectares, comprised 30.4% of farmland.³⁰ What is interesting about these statistics is their focus on the size of farms instead of the ownership of these farms, in other words, the concentration of landownership within a single owner or owning group is left out completely from the statistics. In this context of land concentration, many peasant grass-roots organizations began to spring up that would lead land invasions in the mid-1960s. In multiple departments, peasants were aided in their struggles by the conservative associated National Agrarian Federation (FANAL) while in others, especially in the Atlantic coast departments, links were made with radical workers' unions influencing the direction of peasant leaders.³¹ Although from these land struggles surged a peasant radicalism in some areas of the country, such as the departments of the Atlantic coast, overall agrarian reform remained limited in its national scope by the late 1960s.

In 1957, the national conflict known as La Violencia had come to a close through the National Front Pact. Among the main reasons for the approval by public referendum of such a pact that legally divided governmental power nationwide between Liberals and Conservatives was the Colombian populace's wish for an end to the ravaging violence of the La Violencia period. Abstention in presidential and congressional elections increased every year after the pact.

²⁹ Leon Zamosc. *The Agrarian Question*, p. 36

³⁰ DANE, *Censo Nacional Agropecuario*, 1960. As cited in Zamosc. *The Agrarian Question*, p. 150

³¹ *Ibid.* 41-44

The plebiscite of the National Front pact in 1957 saw participation of 68%, while the presidential election of 1958 saw 47% participation, 34% in the 1962 elections, and 30% in the 1966 election.³² The president elected in 1966, Carlos Lleras Restrepo, a reformist instrumental in the passing of law 135 in 1961, saw the growing disillusionment with the National Front as a danger to the political stability of the country and began his period in power by providing more substance to the up till then haphazard attempts at agrarian reform. For this, Lleras Restrepo attempted the mobilization of a significant part of the Colombian population by seeking recommendations from rural organizations such as FANAL and political figures from both Liberal and Conservative parties for a plan for peasant participation in agrarian reform.³³

The Emergence of The National Association of Peasant Users (ANUC) and the National Peasant Movement

The difficulty in carrying out agrarian reform for many countries of Latin America during their ‘Alliance for Progress’ with the U.S. was the issue of implementing and enforcing agrarian reform. True agrarian reform would constitute a transformation of many Latin American countries, and though the ‘Alliance for Progress’ aimed for change with political stability, the resulting attempts at agrarian reform would see landowning classes attempt to hold on to their privileges and power through varied tactics. In Honduras, Ramón Villeda Morales promoted an agrarian reform project in 1957, only to have the landed classes ally with the military to overthrow his administration in 1963.³⁴ Chile’s decade of land reform, initiated by Alessandri in 1962 and continued by the Christian Democrats into 1970, was marked by landowner tactics to

³² Cusicanqui. *The Politics and Ideology of the Colombian Peasant Movement*, p.37

³³ Zamosc. *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement* p. 50-51

³⁴ Smith, *Talons of the Eagle*, p. 142

dodge and inhibit land expropriations, including the subdivision of landholdings, mass dismissals of rural employees, and persecution of labor leaders.³⁵ In an attempt to increase the possibility of implementing agrarian reform in the face of reactionary attempts to stop it, both Colombia and Chile would adopt agrarian reform projects in 1967 that would mobilize the peasants themselves through unions and cooperatives.³⁶

The plan for grass-roots agrarian reform in Colombia came to fruition in 1967 with the legislative decree 755 of 1967, which Lleras Restrepo signed as a presidential decree, likely due to knowing that such a law would be obstructed by the strong presence and influence of large landowners in the national congress. The decree charged the Ministry of Agriculture with the registration of all users of services related to “land redistribution, organizations of production, credit, storage and commercialization, and other related agricultural services offered by the State directly or indirectly.”³⁷ The stated goal was the promotion of local and national associations of peasant users that would participate in the promotion of agrarian reform.³⁸ To achieve this, the Ministry of Agriculture undertook a publicity campaign that included leaflets, radio programs, and newspapers to advertise the registration process for a national association to peasants across the country.³⁹ By 1968, 700,000 peasants were registered in this not-yet-fully birthed association. Additionally, more than 50 seminars and courses were carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture

³⁵ Brian Loveman, *Struggle in the Countryside: Politics and Rural Labor in Chile, 1919-1973* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976) p. 244

³⁶ For Chile’s agrarian reform project of 1967 see Loveman, *Struggle in the Countryside* pp. 244-278

³⁷ Legislative Decree 755 of 1967, President of the Republic of Colombia Doi: 05/02/1967

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Zamosc. *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement* p. 54

and INCORA to inform peasant leaders of the programs of agrarian reform and the new possibilities that came with a national organization of peasants.⁴⁰

Now it would be helpful to define what is meant by the word ‘peasant.’ We can take peasant to mean, based on Orlando Fals Borda’s definition, those who work the land, that is, those whose subsistence comes from working the land and therefore does not include large absentee landowners, nor does it include present hacienda owners who did not labor on the land but only, if anything, oversaw labor in their haciendas. This definition of peasant does include landless workers on haciendas or other types of latifundia as well as small-holder peasants who owned the means of production – land – but still relied primarily on their own labor on the land for subsistence and market consumption. Leon Zamosc, in *The Agrarian Question*, splits the dominant frameworks of peasant conditions into four categories: areas with a ‘peasant economy’ framework (in which peasants by in large own the land they work typically marked by coffee and subsistence crop cultivation); areas of colonization (‘frontier’ lands in which peasants often were left to clear fields and then sell these cleared lands to landowners due to lack of basic services to make a peasant economy possible); areas of traditional latifundia (in which the largest sector of peasants typically did not own land and was left to work on the large estates – latifundios – sometimes in the form of sharecropping); and areas of agrarian capitalism (in which large segments of the peasantry had become proletarianized in the enclaves where agrarian capitalism had taken off typically with firm international investment).⁴¹ A national peasant organization would then have to unite the interests of peasants whose conditions were framed by different

⁴⁰ Anders Rudqvist, *Peasant Struggle and Action Research in Colombia*, (Uppsala: Dept. of Sociology, Uppsala University, 1986.)

⁴¹ See Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question*, pp. 24-32

patterns of agrarian production and landownership; in essence, the organization would necessarily have a multi-class composition.

The Ministry of Agriculture's plan for forming a national organization of peasants was to begin at the grass-roots level, starting with municipal units and organizations that would congregate in departmental associations that would then lead to the development of a national association.⁴² The seminars of local peasant leaders were instrumental in the development of these organizations and in bringing them together into the National Association of Peasant Users (ANUC). By the first National Congress of the ANUC in July 1970, 845,000 peasants had been registered, 450 municipal associations were developed, and 6,800 peasant leaders had gone through the INCORA seminars and courses.⁴³ A biweekly publication, *Carta Campesina*, written by peasant intellectuals and collaborators – with aid from the Ministry of Agriculture – was being distributed starting in February of 1970 so that by the time of the peasant organization's first national congress and the pronouncement of their first Declaration of Principles in that July congress the organization had a ready mechanism through which to disseminate the ANUC principles.⁴⁴

The principles established in the first National Congress reflected a strong relationship between the association of peasants and the reformist state. However, within the congress, there were requests and demands on the part of the peasant leadership to intensify the agrarian reform, requesting a decrease in the amount of time necessary to expropriate idle land and also demanding that even cultivated land be subject to expropriation if local peasant associations

⁴² Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement* p. 54

⁴³ Gustavo Ignacio De Roux, "The Social Basis of Peasant Unrest", PhD diss., (University of Wisconsin – Madison, 1974) pp. 329-330 as cited in Rudqvist, *Peasant Struggle and Action Research in Colombia*

⁴⁴ Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement* p. 224 note 70

declared it necessary.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the principles made it clear that ANUC embraced cooperation with the State declaring that the struggle of the peasants was “not a question of class struggle.”⁴⁶ From President Lleras Restrepo’s point of view, this association with firm links to the State would help in the improvement of the condition of, in his words, “that disorganized and ignorant mass, where revolutionary infiltration may reap its richest rewards.”⁴⁷ It is clear from this quote from the president who signed the 1967 reform into law that the improvement of the situation of campesino folk went hand in hand with deterring ‘revolutionary infiltration.’ This is almost an exact articulation of the goals of the ‘Alliance for Progress.’

From the Lleras reformist perspective, ANUC would be formed as an organization through which peasant claims could be voiced with direct access to the government’s ear in order to create avenues for the political participation of peasants. For these goals and ambitions, however, the government policies aimed toward agrarian reform had to be continued and, in fact, extended, given that land reform in the years since the decree in 1967 had been minimal, with the period mainly being used to organize peasants into ANUC. Indeed, the organization of ANUC had increased peasant aspirations and enraged large landowners sharpening contradictions between the two but with a mediating reformist state. By August of 1970, however, Lleras Restrepo’s administration had run its time, limited by the National Front pact, which alternated presidencies between Liberals and Conservatives every four years. Lleras Restrepo would be succeeded necessarily by a representative of the Conservative party, a party with historical ties to

⁴⁵ Rudqvist, *Peasant Struggle and Action Research in Colombia*; and Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement*, pg 67

⁴⁶ ANUC, “Declaración de Principios Políticos del Primer Congreso Nacional de ANUC”, (Bogota, Ministry of Agriculture, 1970) as cited in Rudqvist, *Peasant Struggle and Action Research in Colombia*; and Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement*, pg 68

⁴⁷ Carlos Lleras Restrepo “Palabras del Señor Presidente de la republica, Carlos Lleras Restrepo. Primer Congreso Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos.” (Bogota: Minstry of Agriculture, 1970) as cited in Cusicanqui. *The Politics and Ideology of the Colombian Peasant Movement: The Case of ANUC*, p. 61

the Colombian landed elite. In addition, in the international context, the ‘Alliance for Progress’ was replaced by the Mann doctrine after Kennedy’s death which “propounded four basic objectives: (1) ... absolute neutrality on questions of social reform, (2) protection of U.S. private investments, (3) no preference... for representative democratic institutions, and (4) opposition to communism.”⁴⁸ As an illustrative fact, internal documents from the Administrative Department of Security (DAS) suggest that by 1970, the Colombian government received over one thousand USD per month from the U.S. government to finance undercover agents who would infiltrate popular movements.⁴⁹

The Conservative president to come to office in 1970 would be Misael Pastrana, with promises of continuing the policies of Lleras Restrepo. The reforms of the 1960s saw very little if any, change in the concentration of land ownership. The majority of landholdings or farms (59.5%) remained under 5 hectares and comprised only 3.7% of titled land. Landholdings over 1,000 hectares (.2% of landholdings) comprised 30.5% of titled land and landholdings with over 100 hectares (including over 1,000 hectares) comprised the majority of titled land (67.5%) and only 8.4% of the total number of landholdings or farms.⁵⁰ Moreover, peasant claims and growing peasant power led to increased landowner aggression in areas of peasant organizing. In fact, as an ANUC activist would later state in an interview in 1978, in some areas “tenants and sharecroppers were worse off because the landowners had stepped up the number of evictions.”⁵¹ In the face of this growing landowner aggression and stagnant land redistribution, peasants in several departments organized land invasions, supposedly under Communist party auspices,

⁴⁸ Smith, *Talons of the Eagle*, p. 144

⁴⁹ Archivo General de la Nacion, “Boletines Informativos del Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad (DAS)” Box 32, Folder 2, File 1

⁵⁰ DANE, *Censo Nacional Agropecuario*, 1970. As cited in Zamosc. *The Agrarian Question*, p. 150

⁵¹ Rivera, Froylan. “Froylan Rivera No. 37.” By Leon Zamosc 1979 in *Entrevistas Base ANUC*, CINEP

“leading to the arrests of four INCORA officials charged with Communist party membership.”⁵² Further attacks on ANUC came from the State as it fired officials from the Ministry of Agriculture who had sympathized with the peasants and warned ANUC that the State was seeking to undermine ANUC’s autonomy by making financial assistance conditional on the removal of its independent leaders.⁵³ The close of 1970 saw an increase in the friction between peasant claims and landowner ‘rights’ with the State increasingly favoring the landowners. This led ANUC leaders to seek further independence from the traditional parties and sought instead to increase contact with leftist political groups and intellectuals. The ANUC leadership further decided, in the final months of 1970, to initiate the planning of large-scale land invasions through secret committees across the country in response to landowner aggression and State inaction on the agrarian problem.⁵⁴

The Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC)

ANUC emerged with strong links to the reformist central state and, in fact, was the result of legislation from the central government that aimed at agrarian reform by associating together grass-roots peasant organizations and depended on funding from the Ministry of Agriculture. Like other grass-roots organizations formed and promoted by the Latin American agrarian reforms of the 1960s, ANUC’s intensity and magnitude as a *campesino*⁵⁵ association exceeded the government’s ability to control it and fully incorporate it into the reformist project. The Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca, CRIC, developed in the spaces opened by the agrarian reform but without the top-down legislation that had essentially created the ANUC. Although the

⁵² Cusicanqui. *The Politics and Ideology of the Colombian Peasant Movement*, p. 86

⁵³ Ibid. 87

⁵⁴ ANUC, “Apuntes sobre la historia interna de la ANUC,” Bogota, unpublished manuscript, 1976 as cited in Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question*. P. 71

⁵⁵ Peasant in Spanish

CRIC was not established with direct cooperation from the Ministry of Agriculture and the central state, the reform legislation after La Violencia, which established the Community Action Boards (JAC)⁵⁶ that had created spaces for local peasants' political involvement, was still instrumental in the founding of CRIC. Many of the Indigenous leaders who would come to lead CRIC had experience in organizing through mobilizing in the JACs, and others had been organized within local peasant organizations that emerged during the agrarian reform, such as the Regional Social and Agrarian Federation, FRESAGRO in Cauca. As Troyan shows in her work on Ethnic Citizenship,⁵⁷ Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists – Afro-Colombians, Mestizo (mixed race) Colombians, and liberation theologians – played a fundamental role in the founding of the first Indigenous Council of Colombia. As such, even before the official founding of the CRIC, Cauca was already a stage of conflict over land whose main participants were Afro-Colombian, Mestizo, and Indigenous peoples.

Out of the organizations and struggles in Cauca, especially the mentioned FRESAGRO led by Gustavo Mejia and Father Pedro Leon Rodriguez, as well as the Las Delicias cooperative of Indigenous Guambianos, Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists in the north and east of Cauca organized an assembly to discuss the necessities of an explicitly Indigenous organization.⁵⁸ It remains unclear if any institutional funds, whether from INCORA or ANUC,

⁵⁶ These were prior to the agrarian reform and where spaces for community members to participate in community development planning. Juan Gregorio Palechor who would not be present in the first CRIC meeting but would become vice-president in the second points to his experience in the JACs as one of the ways he initiated his activism; Myriam Jimeno and Juan Gregorio Palechor, *Juan Gregorio Palechor: The Story of My Life*

⁵⁷ Brett Troyan, "Ethnic Citizenship in Colombia: The Experience of the Regional Indigenous Council of the Cauca in Southwestern Colombia from 1970 to 1990." *Latin American Research Review* 43, no.3, 2008: 166-91

⁵⁸ Brett Troyan, *Cauca's Indigenous Movement in Southwestern Colombia: Land, Violence, and Ethnic Identity*. (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015) pg 157-158; CRIC, *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca: Diez Años de Lucha, Historia y Documento*. (Bogotá: CINEP, 1981)

were used in aiding the transportation and congregation of Indigenous peasants⁵⁹ but more than 2,000 Indigenous peasant activists and non-Indigenous activists from ANUC and INCORA were present in the first assembly in Toribio on 24th of February 1971. The assembly, which had mainly Indigenous peasants from communities without *resguardos*⁶⁰ agreed upon six points: 1.) the end to the *terraje* system of labor in which in order to be allowed usufruct rights to small portions of land, Indigenous people were made to work for the owner of an *hacienda* – large rural estate – without pay; 2.) Demand from INCORA the expropriation of haciendas built on previous resguardo grounds to be returned to Indigenous families; 3.) The extension of existing resguardos that have been picked away at, encroached upon; 4.) The modification of law 89 of 1890 which treated Indigenous peoples as minors; 5.) Participation of the Indigenous sector in the revision of laws that concern them; and 6.) The elimination of the government office of the Division of Indigenous Affairs, which CRIC considered inoperative.⁶¹

The first assembly of CRIC from where these points emerged came at the same time as the national wave of land invasions that ANUC had planned after the straining relationship between ANUC and the State. Although no documented links can be found between the secret planning committees of the land invasions and the activists who organized the first assembly of CRIC, several oral interviews from 1978-79⁶² suggest that the peasants most receptive to the calls to organize in Cauca were Indigenous peasants. Thus, the organization of CRIC came at a time of increasing radicalization in the peasant movement, which was, at the time of CRIC's first

⁵⁹ Post facto oral interviews of Cauca peasants suggest that INCORA funded the assembly (Jairo Gamboa interview No.35) others suggest that it was funded instead by ANUC (Oscar Sanchez interview No.36) but no mention of such funding exists in CRIC documents.

⁶⁰ Troyan, "Ethnic Citizenship in Colombia" p. 174

⁶¹ CRIC, *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca: Diez Años de Lucha* p. 10-11

⁶² Interview with Pablo Tattay non-Indigenous activist collaborator of CRIC, on 10/28/21; see also Gamboa, Jairo, "Jairo Gamboa Interview No. 35." By Leon Zamosc 1978 in *Entrevistas Base ANUC*, CINEP

assembly, pushing for land invasions to force onto the State and landowners an agrarian reform led by peasants themselves through their national organization ANUC. As the founding organizational points show, the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca was organized to be explicitly concerned with issues pertaining to Indigenous people, and though not founded by ANUC, it made part of the networks of local and regional organizations of peasants that constituted the peasants' offensive against disproportionate landowner power and thus a close relationship with ANUC was inevitable.

The peasantry in Cauca, like in the rest of Colombia, was diverse; that is that at least two different frameworks of agrarian conditions were present. Especially in the case of Indigenous peasants, the dominant frameworks were that of traditional latifundia (marked by the mentioned *terraje* sharecropping system) and peasant economy (marked in Cauca by the presence of resguardos in which Indigenous peasants 'owned' their 'means of production' – land – but these were often lands with poor soil and in areas with unproductive climates). CRIC, as an Indigenous peasant organization, would then have to bring together the interests of these two types of peasants. Those in resguardos, would typically be more connected to Indigenous customs and traditions,⁶³ but their resguardos, as mentioned, were mostly situated in areas of poor agricultural productivity, making survival a precarious endeavor marked by the condition of needing to find work outside of the resguardo to 'make ends meet' for the family unit.⁶⁴ Other Indigenous peasants, including many of those present in the first CRIC assembly,⁶⁵ had been pushed out of their resguardos and had become *terrajeros* or sharecroppers on large estates.

⁶³ Elias Sevilla Casas, *La Pobreza de los Excluidos: Economía y Supervivencia en Un Resguardo Indígena del Cauca*, (Ethnos: Cali, 1986)

⁶⁴ Sevilla Casas, *La Pobreza de los Excluidos*

⁶⁵ Troyan, "Ethnic Citizenship in Colombia" p. 174

It is important to note that in the six organizational points, none point directly to the struggle for Indigenous culture; instead, most points are centered around material claims and demands that specifically pertain to Indigenous people. This suggests that with the influence of ANUC radicalization, there were particular material claims that were being demanded, and though the Indigenous activist must have made the distinct nature of Indigenous material claims – such as the terraje system, the extending of resguardos, etc – present in the assembly, no official conclusions to struggle for Indigenous culture came out of the first assembly. This could be due to the predominance of *terrajeros* in the first assembly, Indigenous peasants whose primary concern must have been the exploitative relationship with large landowners as their sharecroppers.

The organizing points of CRIC would come to change, except for the first point on the terraje system, before the end of 1971 with the second CRIC assembly. Between the first and second CRIC assemblies and in the face of the growing peasant emboldening came increased repression from the State, and in Cauca, CRIC was specifically targeted by the local state, with leaders like Gustavo Mejia being imprisoned in penal islands. The national land invasions of this period provide the context of such repressive reactions from, what could simplistically be conglomerated as, the dominant classes.

National Land Invasions and the Strengthening of CRIC

The land invasions of 1971 that began in late February have come to be described by Zamosc as “the most intense period of land struggles in Colombian History.”⁶⁶ More than 15,000 families would participate in these land invasions, occupying 350 estates in 13 different

⁶⁶ Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement* p. 71

departments.⁶⁷ In their statement in regards to the land invasion, ANUC leaders began using language that was more in line with a class conflict in which they called for support for the land invasions as part of direct “action against Capitalism” in the name of “the liberation of *el pueblo* [the people].”⁶⁸ The ANUC Executive Committee also stated that it was then convinced of the trickery of the agrarian reform laws and that “laws created by the rich... could never favor the peasantry.”⁶⁹ A more conflictual stance began to be taken by peasant leaders regarding the dominant classes and the State. In another statement, the *Mandato Campesino* (Peasant Mandate), the executive committee called for unity with urban workers to change the structures of power through revolution.⁷⁰

This more conflictual stance against the existing political order was then emerging alongside the 1971 land invasions. For these land invasions, committees would be set up to organize each land invasion, taking into account the land necessary for each family that would take part in the occupations. Further information was also gathered as to the nature of the owner’s involvement in the estate and once the necessary information was compiled, it would be sent to the INCORA offices along with a request for the expropriation of the estate.⁷¹ Thirty-two land invasions were carried out in Cauca alone in the year 1971,⁷² and though this number is significantly lower than the invasions in the departments of the Atlantic coast, only Huila and Tolima departments surpassed Cauca outside of the Atlantic coast. The scale of land invasions in Cauca shows the extent of mobilization of Caucanos during these waves of land invasion and

⁶⁷ Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement* p. 71

⁶⁸ ANUC, “EL COMITE EJECUTIVO RESPALDA INVASION DE TIERRAS” in *La Tierra es p’al que La Trabaja: Recopilación de Documentos de la ANUC* (Medellin: Editorial La Pulga, 1974)

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement* p. 73

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 88

⁷² Ibid. p. 75

peasant-forced agrarian reform of 1971 which in Cauca, by in large, was carried out by Indigenous peasants with 20 invasions carried out in Silvia and Toribio by Guambianos and Nasa Indigenous communities.⁷³ Such was the context between the first two assemblies of the CRIC with the time period in between them showing CRIC the strength of their claims.⁷⁴ In the second assembly which came to be held on September 6th in the resguardo of Tacueyo, now with more Indigenous communities with resguardo communal landholdings than in the first assembly, new points were established:

1.) To *recuperar*⁷⁵ the lands of the resguardos 2.) To extend the resguardos 3.) Strengthen *cabildos* (community councils from viceregal times) 4.) No terraje labor payments 5.) To make laws about Indigenous people known and to ensure their just enforcement 6.) Defend Indigenous history, language, and customs 7.) Form Indigenous teachers to educate in accord with the situation of Indigenous communities and in their language.⁷⁶

The importance of the difference between the points from the first assembly and those from the second cannot be overstated. Gone are direct references to the State and government entities. No longer are points surrounding land claims (1 & 2) undergirded by support from government institutions like INCORA. Instead, the point on land claims becomes to recover the lands themselves, seemingly by any means necessary/available. The exact word “recuperar”, meaning to recover or to take back, was not used in the organizational points of the first meeting

⁷³ Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement* p. 82

⁷⁴ CRIC, “Como Nacio el CRIC, Primeras Luchas” in *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca: Diez Años de Lucha, Historia y Documento*

⁷⁵ Recuperar means to recover and it will be a defining term in the discourse employed by Indigenous people whose struggles for land are stated as the *recuperación* the recover of lands or *Land Back*

⁷⁶ CRIC, “Como Nacio el CRIC, Primeras Luchas” in *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca: Diez Años de Lucha, Historia y Documento*

in February. *Recuperar* would come to be a defining term in the discourse employed by Indigenous people whose struggles for land are stated as the *recuperación*, the recovery/taking back of lands or *Land Back*. There would then emerge a difference between the campesino perspective of “land without masters” or “land for he [sic] who works it” and the Indigenous perspective which would be framed within the taking back of lands, indicating a historical tie with the Land, a difference that would mark other peasant movements in Latin America.⁷⁷ Campesino discourses of “land for he [sic] who works it” would emerge after the second congress in 1972⁷⁸ and pointed to a particular understanding of land ownership which centered work or labor as the precondition to ownership, while the Indigenous discourse of *recuperación* would point to an alternative as ownership, or the right to occupy an area of land, was based on the historical relationships to the Land.⁷⁹ Interesting in these differences of discourses is that the ‘non-Indigenous’ discourse is focused on labor on land while ‘Indigenous’ discourses of recovery emphasize a particular relationship to/with the Land.

The third point, which calls for the strengthening of cabildos, is significant in that it calls for the strengthening of an institution created before independence through which Indigenous people were governed by the Spanish crown indirectly, with Indigenous leaders at the heads of cabildos, a sort of council based governance which, in 1975 *Unidad Indígena* authors argued, can be seen as a continuation of pre-1492 Indigenous institutions of governance.⁸⁰ The fifth point

⁷⁷ This difference between the discourses of peasant and Indigenous movements in the context of 1960s land reform is also observed in Nancy Correa, Raul Molina, Nancy Yáñez, *La Reforma Agraria y Las Tierras Mapuches* (LOM Ediciones: Santiago de Chile, 2005);

⁷⁸ *La Tierra es p'al que La Trabaja: Recopilación de Documentos de la ANUC* (Medellin: Editorial La Pulga, 1974)

⁷⁹ I wish to make it clear that here, I am not seeking to argue that non-Indigenous campesinos did not question the ownership of land as an object void of subjectivity. Instead, I only seek to highlight the differences in the discourses employed and how the *recuperacion* discourse opened doors to Indigenous critiques of understandings of landownership encapsulated by and within Eurocentric modernities.

⁸⁰ *Unidad Indígena*, No. 5 May, 1975, p. 2

indicates a sort of political education through which laws were not called to be changed but to be made known and to be enforced justly, tasks to be carried out by CRIC. This point refers specifically to the mentioned law 89 of 1890 which was promulgated in a discriminatory fashion, labeling Indigenous peoples as “minors.” This law, however, also contained stipulations regarding the inalienable rights of Indigenous people to their communally held resguardos, voiding any transactions of sale that had happened or would happen in the future of that Land. The law had been broken many times throughout the country as those with political connections or with the monetary means to do so would, many times through trickery, buy the land – a non-legal transaction in the face of law 89 – or encroach on resguardos titling it as their own with Indigenous communities not typically having the means with which to fight back. With this change, CRIC sought to use existing tools – whether racistly conceived or not – to legitimize their struggles for land.

The final two points from the assembly are also of importance in that here, cultural claims are stated explicitly, differentiating between Indigenous and non-Indigenous history, language, and customs, a differentiation that would tie the struggle for land to the struggle for Indigenous cultural particularity absent in the earlier points of the first assembly. These last claims become especially significant when one considers interviews of ANUC executives such as Oscar Sanchez, which suggest that ANUC was open to the claims of the Indigenous peasants, except for those cultural claims that differentiated and, to Oscar, separated the Indigenous peasants from non-Indigenous peasants.⁸¹ To Oscar, it was the anthropologists who came to CRIC in 1971 that pushed Indigenous people to raise cultural claims. Indeed, in Troyan’s piece *Ethnic Citizenship in Colombia* which traces the emergence of the ethnic discourse of CRIC, Troyan quotes

⁸¹ Sanchez, Oscar “Oscar Sanchez Interview No. 36.” By Leon Zamosc 1979 in *Entrevistas Base ANUC*, CINEP

anthropologist Victor Bonilla who stated that “I [Victor Bonilla] wanted to put forth the emphasis on the particularity of the Indigenous [claims].”⁸²

However, Troyan also states that Bonilla’s was not the only voice that recognized the distinctness of Indigenous culture and social organization. Other non-Indigenous activists such as Gustavo Mejia, impressed with the Indigenous cabildos in Tierradentro, Cauca, urged Indigenous activists to recognize the importance of cabildos and the tools at their disposal, such as Law 89, for the protection of their lands and culture.⁸³ Additionally, the points of the second CRIC assembly, as Troyan argues in her work, very much reflect the ideas of an earlier Indigenous activist, Quintín Lame,⁸⁴ who in the 1910s and 1920s had carried out political education drives named *mingas*⁸⁵ and had been an essential actor in the Indigenous movement before La Violencia. Lame’s writings would also be cited as a fundamental influence in the conscientization of Indigenous activists by some of the Indigenous interlocutors who would assist Troyan in her research on the Indigenous movement.⁸⁶

It would be useless and, in fact, inappropriate to suggest that Victor Bonilla and Gustavo Mejia had no influence on the decisions taking place in the second assembly, but it would be equally unhelpful to echo the claims of Sanchez to suggest that without Bonilla and Mejia Indigenous people would not have struggled for cultural claims. With the changing environment in the international context as it relates to ethnic political and social claims, Bonilla, Mejia, and

⁸² Troyan, “Ethnic Citizenship in Colombia” p. 177

⁸³ Ibid

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Minga refers to the Indigenous tradition of communal labor. Quintin Lame used this concept to name the political work he was doing, going from community to community to educate community members of the struggles of Indigenous people in Colombia see: Renan Vega Cantor, *Gente Muy Rebelde: Toma 2*, (Bogota: Ediciones Pensamiento Critico, 2002).

⁸⁶ Troyan, “Ethnic Citizenship in Colombia” p. 178

other non-Indigenous activists may most adequately be seen as aiding in connecting the Indigenous activists to other Indigenous communities in Colombia and to the changing international and national context. As Troyan argued, “a synergy between non-Indigenous activists, the Indigenous leaders and rank and file, and finally the leftist grassroots organization took place during this time.”⁸⁷ Notably absent, however, is the term ‘culture’ from the organizational points of the second CRIC assembly. It is instead ‘Indigenous history, language, and customs’ that is mentioned, particularities which we might call ‘culture’ but may not be exactly what the activists were thinking, especially given the common Western understanding of ‘culture’ that views humans as the only subject/actors of a culture.

The Radicalization of the National Peasant Movement and Conservative Counter Reform

The land invasions of 1971 saw the emergence of direct action that put the peasants in opposition not only to landowner authority but also to State authority. As Zamosc has pointed out, this rise of ‘illegal’ direct action through the unsanctioned occupation of titled land gave space for the development of more radical ideology and leadership as in many instances, leaders unwilling either from fear or loyalty to landowners or local governing elite were replaced by more willing leaders.⁸⁸ The most present ideologies were those with Trotskyist, Marxist-Leninist, and Maoist tendencies, which saw peasant mobilization as a means through which to wage a revolutionary struggle alongside workers against the State. In fact, many of the militants of the Marxist-Leninist and Maoist tendencies had come as part of a ‘Bolshevization campaign’ launched in 1971 through which especially students would leave the cities and move to areas of

⁸⁷ Troyan, “Ethnic Citizenship in Colombia” p. 178

⁸⁸ Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement* p. 92

rural conflict to take part in what they saw as a revolutionary moment.⁸⁹ Moreover, these ideologies served to consolidate a more independent alignment vis-a-vis the State and the traditional Liberal and Conservative parties.⁹⁰ This emerging radicalization and independence from the traditional parties also had the effect of radicalizing opposition to agrarian reform within the dominant classes, those best represented by the traditional parties. In fact, Carlos Villamil Chaux, who supported and received support from the ANUC Executive Committee, was removed from the INCORA leadership as a result of the pressure from anti-reformist sectors.⁹¹ The periodical published by ANUC – *Carta Campesina* – was also targeted by the traditionally conservative news outlet, *El Siglo*, which labeled the peasant periodical as a promoter of “subversion and crime... and repudiation for the law.”⁹² In line with the indictment by *El Siglo*, the Ministry of Agriculture canceled government funding for the periodical due to *Carta Campesina* discourses that went “against the spirit of the National Front government of making changes within a convivial environment and respect for the laws.”⁹³

This period of radicalization of ANUC, which strained relationships between the peasant organization and the State, also saw the beginnings of fragmentation within the organization. The areas of intense land struggle, those areas in the Atlantic zone that saw the greatest number of land occupations, came to be more sympathetic and, in fact, led the radicalization of ANUC. On the other hand, the areas with less intense land struggles, such as Quindío and Boyacá, and areas where leaders had firm connections to traditional parties, such as Huila and Tolima, came to be

⁸⁹ Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement* pp. 114-115; most of these students heading to the areas near the Atlantic coast

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 92; Cusicanqui. *The Politics and Ideology of the Colombian Peasant Movement: The Case of Anuc*, pp. 97-98

⁹¹ Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement* p. 72

⁹² *El Siglo*, April 14th, 1971 as cited in Cusicanqui. *The Politics and Ideology of the Colombian Peasant Movement: The Case of Anuc*, p. 98

⁹³ *El Tiempo*, April 15th, 1971 p. 6

characterized by a more moderate approach vis-à-vis the State and less sympathy towards radicalization.⁹⁴ It is interesting to see the dominant frameworks of agrarian conditions in areas of less and more intense land. In areas of less intense land struggle, such as Quindío, Boyacá, Caldas, and parts of Antioquia, the framework of a peasant economy in which smallholding peasants constituted the majority, was dominant. In these areas, the most important claims that emerged were those relating to the improvement of the market position of peasant cultivators, subsidized credit structures, and overall improvement of general rural services and utilities.⁹⁵

In *Labor in Latin America*, Bergquist makes the argument that it was not collective but “individual [peasant] strategies that produced the major changes in the social relations of coffee production before mid-century and influenced most deeply the pattern of national labor and political history.”⁹⁶ Bergquist suggests that “through allegiance to one or the other of the major parties or its factions, coffee workers secured a host of strategically placed allies in the struggle to accumulate capital and control a portion of the land.”⁹⁷ Further, Bergquist argues that the massive strikes of the 20s and 30s that “decisively influenced the course of Colombian history... occurred first and most spectacularly in the oil and banana enclaves.”⁹⁸ Bergquist’s arguments suggest that coffee and peasant small-holding – that is, peasants controlling the means of production – served in many ways to “reinforce conservative individualist values and institutions than it fostered radical, collective ones; more often solidified the social and political status quo

⁹⁴ Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question*, p. 97-98

⁹⁵ Ibid. 28

⁹⁶ Charles Bergquist, *Labor in Latin America: Comparative Essays On Chile, Argentina, Venezuela, and Colombia*. (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1986) p. 326

⁹⁷ Ibid. 328

⁹⁸ Ibid. 334

than it threatened progressively to transform it.”⁹⁹ Though perhaps not a complete answer,¹⁰⁰ Bergquist’s analysis helps us approach an understanding the different types of peasant conditions. In attempting to unify the peasantry in a struggle for an improvement to their conditions, the peasants’ national association, ANUC, had to contend with the diversity of agrarian and peasant conditions and the different influences these conditions had on the development of peasant ideologies in different areas. The movement of land invasions signified an initial divergence in the goals of the multi-class peasantry.

Though more disunity occurred in the ideological developments of ANUC in late 1971, the organization nevertheless organized a second round of land invasions in October and November of 1971, invasions that were condemned by President Pastrana, stating that “the government is not willing to tolerate nor satisfy these types of pressures,”¹⁰¹ pressures from the peasantry that attempted to force an agrarian reform on the landowning classes. In the face of these land invasions of 1971, the State came to be more unified with the Minister of Agriculture changing to an anti-reformist Jaramillo Ocampo and both Liberals and Conservatives calling for a ‘reform to the reform’ in order “to save the country from the dreadful consequences of a red revolution in the countryside.”¹⁰²

This ‘reform to the reform’ culminated in an assembly of Liberal and Conservative party representatives as well as landowners and important members of the private sector in January 1972 that would result in the Pact of Chicoral, what Zamosc labeled a formal declaration of

⁹⁹ Ibid. 279

¹⁰⁰ For example, the peasant and Indigenous Leagues of the 1930s do not make an appearance in Bergquist’s analysis

¹⁰¹ *El Tiempo*, November 25, 1971, p. 1 & 16

¹⁰² Quote from Escobar Sierra in *El Siglo*, December 8, 1971 as cited in Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement* p. 97 note 5; Cusicanqui. *The Politics and Ideology of the Colombian Peasant Movement*, p. 100

agrarian counter-reform.¹⁰³ The pact changed procedures for the valuation of land and thus subsequent payment necessary for future expropriations;¹⁰⁴ whereas previously, the census value was taken, after the pact, the commercial value of the land was used to determine the price of expropriation.¹⁰⁵ Further, the pact tightened the criteria for land liable for expropriation. In this way, the mechanisms used by INCORA to legitimate the land invasions of peasants, and expropriation of lands, came to be curtailed. It was clear that ANUC was no longer an organization with deep ties to the State through which radicalized peasants could voice their demands and concerns. The ear of the central State now became deaf to the demands of the radicalized organization of peasants.

The Pact of Chicoral came to be discussed in the 5th meeting of the National Board of Directors (Junta Directiva) of ANUC in February 1972, in which the Minister of Agriculture Jaramillo Ocampo, was present to inform the peasants of the changes. In 1976, the peasant directors of the board of ANUC wrote of the meeting describing how they argued with Jaramillo to “demonstrate... the real essence of his inventions,” after which “he [Jaramillo] had no option but to admit that he was himself a landowner and was defending the interests of his class.”¹⁰⁶ The peasants also described that at the end of the meeting, the minister drove away in his Mercedes Benz.¹⁰⁷ At a time when 89% of the rural population lived below the poverty line,¹⁰⁸ this experience must have made it evident to the peasant leaders present at the meeting that the State was not at all on their side and that functionaries lived lives much more privileged than they. As

¹⁰³ Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement* p. 98

¹⁰⁴ Cusicanqui. *The Politics and Ideology of the Colombian Peasant Movement: The Case of Anuc*, p. 111

¹⁰⁵ *El Tiempo*, January 10th, 1972, p. 5-b; see also Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement* p. 98

¹⁰⁶ ANUC, “Apuntes sobre la historia interna de la ANUC,” Bogotá, unpublished manuscript, 1976 as cited in Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement* p. 100 note 19

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Mauricio Archila Neiva, *Idas y Venidas, Vueltas y Revuelta: Protestas Sociales En Colombia 1958-1990*, (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia, 2003) p. 353

seen from ANUC statements, in many of the minds of these leaders and activists, it became apparent that the main obstacle to agrarian reform was a state dominated by landowners and the traditionally dominant classes best represented in the traditional Liberal and Conservative parties. In fact, a document that resulted from the meeting in regards to elections called peasants to eschew the electoral process and instead use other means as advised by the departmental conditions “to defeat the reactionary policies of the dominant classes.”¹⁰⁹ This was not a call to arms to overthrow the traditional parties. Instead, it was a call to more direct action similar to that of the land invasions of 1971. The call for direct action also further shows the reorientation of sectors of the peasant movement away from supporting traditional party politics, leading to further fragmentation within the organization between those with closer ties to the traditional parties and those more radical and independent.

Arrests of peasants had become more frequent in 1972, with a total of 2,084 peasants arrested compared to 845 in 1971.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, efforts were made by the State to maintain the corporatist character of ANUC without conceding to the radical demands by attempting to promote the already existing fragmentation within the ANUC structure. Using institutions within the Ministry of Agriculture that had previously aided the ANUC, Jaramillo Ocampo planned a meeting with moderate dissident leaders from the now-radicalized ANUC. As a result of the meeting, the radical leadership of ANUC was no longer recognized and the moderate dissidents were propped up as a provisional Executive Board. This government-fostered fragmentation came to a head at the Second National Congress of ANUC held in Armenia, Quindío, access to which was denied to the main radical peasant leaders that headed previous meetings.¹¹¹ The

¹⁰⁹ ANUC, “Posicion Politica de la ANUC frente al debate electoral” in *La Tierra es p'al que La Trabaja*, p. 17-18

¹¹⁰ Cusicanqui. *The Politics and Ideology of the Colombian Peasant Movement*, p. 111

¹¹¹ Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement* p. 101

government recognized the Executive Board of this Second Congress in Armenia as the legitimate leadership of the movement. However, the radical peasant leaders knowing that they would be denied access to the Second Congress in Armenia organized their own Second Congress in Sincelejo, with 10,000 peasants attending the inaugural demonstration of this congress.¹¹² The two lines came to be known for the location of their respective congresses, the Armenia line, with government support based on areas with strong ties to traditional parties and less intense struggles for land; and the Sincelejo line, with a more radical leadership and based in areas of more intense land struggle including the Cauca department.

In August and September of 1972, ANUC Sincelejo organized peasant marches across the country, mobilizing against a “false agrarian reform” and the State’s isolation of ANUC Sincelejo.¹¹³ The delegations of peasants from the south of the country would depart from the city of Popayan in Cauca with Indigenous and non-Indigenous peasants from Cauca, Putumayo, and Nariño marching together, many of them ending up detained in Popayan by the Colombian military that was called in to stop the march from Popayan.¹¹⁴ The joint mobilization and detention of Indigenous and peasant activists show that though Indigenous activists were increasingly organizing themselves within explicitly Indigenous organizations, there was still a close collaboration and shared struggle with the non-Indigenous campesinos. Though perhaps mobilizing under distinct themes, Indigenous organizations under a theme of ‘*recuperación*’ (recovery) and campesino organizations under a theme of ‘land for those who work it,’ large mobilizations like these showed a collaborative effort to resist the power asymmetry which the counter-reform of the new government would actually help solidify. The detention of Indigenous

¹¹² Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement*, p.102

¹¹³ Escobar, *La Trayectoria de la ANUC*, p. 43

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* 44

and campesino activists can, and perhaps should, be seen as part of the force undergirding the asymmetrical power relation between large landowners and peasants. Large landowners who had a direct ear to the government – able to depend on their own organizations, such as the Federation of Cotton Producers, the Colombian Federation of Ranchers, or the Society of Colombian Agriculturalists, to send at times even direct messages to the Minister of Government about peasant invasions that would increasingly result in the eviction of the peasants – and poor or landless peasants, whose struggle had been delegitimized by the new government. Not only were peasants being arrested but also, with the new constraints put on INCORA, the institute for agrarian reform would no longer negotiate with peasants that had illegally occupied lands. Blacklists were made of peasants who had participated in land invasions and would no longer have a right to any land reform.¹¹⁵ Moreover, peasant occupations became repressed not simply by the police but also by the military, which would increasingly be called in under national states of siege to repress land occupations and peasant mobilizations.¹¹⁶ The two-pronged approach taken by the government of fragmentation and repression led to an overall decrease in land invasions after 1971.

While the Indigenous movement did not escape repression, especially in the form of *pajaros* – hired assassins at the pay of landowners and local political bosses such as Mosquera Chau¹¹⁷ – the National Administrative Department of Statistics collaborated with CRIC to carry out a census of the Indigenous population in Cauca. Seemingly independent of land reform, the Department of Statistics, through the census, knowingly or not provided CRIC with an opportunity with which to reach different communities in the department with their discourse of

¹¹⁵ Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement* p. 103

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* 104

¹¹⁷ This name appears frequently in the oral interviews of peasant activists in Cauca in CINEP

struggle for the defense of Indigenous land and culture. It is important to highlight, as Troyan does, the contradictory stances of the government. On the one hand, it opened avenues for peasant representation with the agrarian reform that gave rise to ANUC and CRIC. On the other hand, it closed down those same avenues through repression while leaving open avenues for ethnic-based claims based on the mentioned Law 89 of 1890. Though one could interpret this as an official attempt to divide Cauca's peasantry between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peasants, it could also, and perhaps more appropriately, be interpreted as an attempt at incorporating a popular nascent movement into State institutions that could eventually lead to an attempted moderation and appropriation, as happened with the peasant movement and ANUC – Armenia in 1972. CRIC did not leave class-based claims for ethnic-based claims; instead, based on the tools at their disposal, whether through class identities or ethnic identities, they struggled for one of the essential pieces necessary for the autonomous articulation of their culture, Land.

Indigenous Spaces Within ANUC

Out of the Second National Congress of ANUC – Sincelejo (radical) line in 1972, calls were made for the special representation of sectors of the peasantry, such as the Indigenous sector. In the congress, Indigenous peasants were described as the “sector which most gravely has been trampled by the exploiting classes.”¹¹⁸ From this congress emerged the Indigenous Secretariat, a special branch within ANUC leadership to direct national Indigenous struggles. The Armenia line came to similar conclusions though not as organized. At a time of fragmentation within the government-supported Armenia line of ANUC, some peasants claimed that the government's actions were driven by *poitiquería* – politicking – that served more the

¹¹⁸ Escobar, *La Trayectoria de la ANUC*, p. 41

government's political aims than the material needs of peasants.¹¹⁹ Some of the critiques were heard by the leaders of the Armenia line, and in fact, there was a concern about the Pact of Chicoral, but it was stated that “responsible and obedient cooperation” was the best way forward for the peasants.¹²⁰ Another Indigenous Secretariat emerged from the Armenia line congress and claimed ANUC as the authentic representative of Indigenous peasants. However, the Armenia line Indigenous Secretariat lacked the same support as the Sincelejo line Indigenous Secretariat, which was led by the most influential Indigenous regional movement, the CRIC.

With ANUC Sincelejo's increasing isolation from the State and traditional parties, there was increasing cooperation between ANUC Sincelejo and the Maoist and Marxist-Leninist activists. In her study of ANUC's politics and ideologies, Silvia Rivera states that with the growing influence of these revolutionary groups, more emphasis was placed on winning over militants from the peasantry in the struggle for a revolution.¹²¹ Rivera further argues that this led to a discourse within ANUC leadership of a “struggle *for* power” while the rank-and-file had been guided by a “struggle to resist power.”¹²² This, of course, has to be kept within the context of the experiences of ANUC. It was State power that had brought the national association into being; it was State power through the INCORA, which had legitimized many of the land invasions of 1971; but it was also State power that had counteracted such peasant victories with counter-reform and violent repression while feeding fragmentation. In seeking some stability, it became more pertinent for the ANUC leadership for there to be stronger unity within the movement in order for there to be more influence from the peasants on State power. A power

¹¹⁹ Escobar, *La Trayectoria de la ANUC*. p. 41

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 48

¹²¹ Cusicanqui. *The Politics and Ideology of the Colombian Peasant Movement*, p. 130

¹²² *Ibid.* 132

that had been, in part, the cause for the rise and the diminution of the agrarian movement. By 1973, ANUC leadership had become more concerned with counteracting the counter reform, repression, and fragmentation caused by the dominant classes and the power they held in the State than with organizing peasants for the acquisition of lands for those many who still lacked access to it. Like many revolutionary projects, ANUC became more focused on the survival of the organization than on anything else.

What is particularly enlightening is to look at the developments of the CRIC up to that time. As has already been stated, the CRIC emerged not from the State, though many reforms had allowed the environment in which the CRIC could emerge as an organization. The CRIC had focused its efforts on ‘recovering’ cabildos that had either been disbanded or that had been led by self-interested leaders. Resguardo lands, too, had been recovered¹²³ and increasingly through the Indigenous Secretariat in ANUC, collaboration between councils and Indigenous organizations of different departments had been organized. From an essay authored at an unspecified date by a CRIC educational team, published in 1989 in a compilation by Gustavo Gallon Giraldo, *Entre Movimientos y Caudillos*, there is a crucial insight into the development of CRIC as an organization and the Indigenous movement as a whole. In the article, the CRIC team states that the purpose of the Indigenous movement was not to struggle for power – meaning here State power – nor to only resist power, but rather to “*build* popular power at the local and regional level.”¹²⁴ The CRIC team further rejected, in the essay, “vertical and authoritarian practices of

¹²³ 10,000 hectares by 1974: Gros, *Colombia Indígena: Identidad Cultural y Cambio Social*, (Bogota: CEREC, 1981), 189

¹²⁴ CRIC Educational Team, “El Movimiento Indígena” in *Entre Movimientos y Caudillos – 50 Años de Bipartidismo, Izquierda y Alternativas Populares en Colombia* – ed. Gustavo Gallon Giraldo (Bogota: CINEP, 1989) p. 303

certain revolutionary organizations” that submit popular movements to their political strategies.¹²⁵

Though the essay by the CRIC could be assumed to have been published in the 1980s, it is important to note how the Indigenous assemblies of the 1970s already included a critique of vertical, authoritarian practices of the government when it came to the so-called ‘Indigenous problem.’ Between 1971 and 1973, the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca, had organized three Indigenous assemblies in Cauca, the first two in 1971 and the third in July 1973 which was labeled as the “first national *Encuentro* [assembly] of Indigenous people,”¹²⁶ with communities from Nariño and as far as the Sierra Nevada in the Atlantic coast. In the document resulting from the assembly, the Indigenous intellectual Quintin Lame – by this time no longer living – would twice be quoted in the opening page: “‘Now the Indigenous youth must awaken’... [and] ‘from the wombs of the Indigenous feminine sex will be birthed new flowers of intelligence that will call the attention of the whole of the civilization of exploiters, slanderers, and userers.’”¹²⁷ In this same introduction, the selfless acts of Indigenous activists, the ‘new flowers of intelligence,’ are praised as an “enormous base of support to our [CRIC’s] anti-imperialist and anti-feudal struggle.”¹²⁸ The inclusion of a Quintin Lame quote as well as the anti-imperialist direction of the struggle situates two very important influences for the CRIC, the autochthonous intellectual traditions but also anti-imperialist ideas typically linked to struggles of the political ‘left.’ It’s almost a braiding of the thought that existed and was being developed by Indigenous intellectuals, with the leftist thought influencing the peasant movement. It is from this

¹²⁵ CRIC Educational Team, “El Movimiento Indígena” in *Entre Movimientos y Caudillos*, p. 303

¹²⁶ Archivos Oficiales, Ministerio de Gobierno, Despacho, Caja 60, Carpeta 1, Folio 96, “III encuentro Indígena del Cauca”

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

intellectual braiding that the conclusions from this third assembly emerge including the demands for “support for the autonomy of Indigenous communities in their internal life... [and] Rejection of the forms of forced integration [by the government] of Indigenous communities to the ‘national culture.’”¹²⁹ Here the organization is explicitly arguing against top-down decisions that could lead to the erasure of Indigenous cultural diversity. This, of course will become part of the Indigenous critique of certain revolutionary organizations in Colombia but such a critique developed later, especially after the split of 1977 with ANUC.

Frictions Between ANUC Leadership and CRIC

Leading up to that split were the land invasions of 1974, which were carried out in a time of fragmentation, increased repression, and decreased legitimization of peasant claims. Though the spontaneity of the earlier invasions of 1971 was lost, Leon Zamosc points to “leftists’ politicization [replacing] the ideological support of the earlier state-fostered reformism” which provided organizational strength that compensated for the lack of spontaneity.¹³⁰ The land invasions of 1974 were mainly carried out in areas most influenced by the radical Sincelejo line of ANUC, and after seeing the decrease in successes from 1971, when ANUC had been unified, ANUC Sincelejo leadership saw the need to consolidate its influence in areas where it had been undermined through the government fostered factionalism. Zamosc further points out that as the influence of radicals of Maoist and Marxist-Leninist tendencies came increasingly to be seen as extremist, the ANUC leadership sought an independent political line.¹³¹ Still, it had been “Leftist intellectuals that had been incorporated as activists of the movement, [that] were now providing

¹²⁹ Archivos Oficiales, Ministerio de Gobierno, Despacho, Caja 60, Carpeta 1, Folio 96, “III encuentro Indígena del Cauca”

¹³⁰ Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question*, p. 112

¹³¹ *Ibid.* 116

the ideological inspiration.”¹³² In seeking an independent political force, ANUC leadership hoped to forge autonomy from outside forces, revolutionary or not, but had sought a unified rural *proletarian* movement from which to create a strong political force

The formal split of 1977, as a process, began in 1974 with the Third ANUC – Sincelejo national congress. Before the third congress, in the Tenth National Executive Board meeting, ANUC leaders made explicit the necessity of “recovering zones whose directive organs have fallen in the hands of enemies,” with ‘enemies’ not precisely defined other than those who “are not in the hands of our direction.”¹³³ Within the National Congress, some months after the executive board meeting, among the tasks that were set for the ANUC were to continue their claims of “land for they who work it”; to strengthen ANUC through local committees ‘*comites veredales*’ in more areas that would form “thousands of local leaders with a *proletarian conscience*”; strengthen relations with the working class to drive a mass movement, and “denounce permanently imperialist activities especially those of North American imperialism.”¹³⁴ Further, ideas were being posited by ANUC leaders as to the formation of a peasant party that came to fruition a few months after the Third National Congress with the creation of the ORP (People’s Revolutionary Organization) composed of ANUC Sincelejo national leaders.¹³⁵ The ANUC leadership then seemed to have sought unity of a mass political movement to stand up to American imperialism and the dominant classes in Colombia with a particular *proletarian* conscience in which land is first and foremost a means of production.

¹³² Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question*, p. 117

¹³³ ANUC, “Informe de la X Junta Directiva Nacional de la ANUC a su Reunion Ampliada”, in in *La Tierra es p’al que La Trabaja: Recopilación de Documentos de la ANUC*. p. 145

¹³⁴ ANUC, *Conclusiones Del Tercer Congreso*, (Bogotá: Editorial Vento del Pueblo, 1974) p. 37-39

¹³⁵ Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question*, p. 118

The published documents from the third congress include the conclusions of the commission of the Indigenous Secretariat. The commission was made up of CRIC representatives, representatives from the Regional Indigenous Council of Vaupes – CRIVA –, the Union of Indigenes of the Chocó, Indigenous communities from Putumayo, Nariño, Meta and Vichada, from Santander and Arauca, from Caldas, from Antioquia, from the Sierra Nevada of Santa Marta, and Indigenous delegates from Ecuador, Peru, and Panama. This Indigenous commission within the peasant congress came one year after the Third Indigenous Assembly in Cauca, labeled the First National Indigenous Assembly. The Indigenous commission was seemingly a very diverse representation of Indigenous peoples from Colombia and other parts of Abya Yala,¹³⁶ showing how through ANUC and the Indigenous Secretariat, the Indigenous movement could organize Indigenous assemblies on a national and international scale.¹³⁷ However, the fact that this commission came after the First National Indigenous Assembly shows how the idea to organize these interregional Indigenous assemblies was already present outside of ANUC and the Indigenous Secretariat.

In the published conclusions of the commission, the Indigenous authors make specific reference to *colonos* – settlers – who were often driven out of their lands by large landowners and found themselves searching for land, at times in areas of resguardos of Indigenous communities. The commission pointed out that colonos that came and respected the traditions of the Indigenous communities came to be seen as *compañeros* – colleagues/comrades – but there were also colonos who came “with the mentality and the education of the exploiters: that the

¹³⁶ Indigenous term to refer to the ‘New World’ see footnote 4

¹³⁷ This should not be taken to mean that such international Indigenous meetings would have been impossible, nor to overstate the importance of the Indigenous Secretariat of ANUC, but rather to show that the Indigenous Secretariat was part of organizing such an apparently pioneering event with transnational impact

Indian had no value.”¹³⁸ This is the type of mentality that the Indigenous movement of Colombia, and CRIC as one of its principal organizers, were attempting to struggle against. Their struggle was not only to attack structures of class domination but also to struggle against structures of thought that provincialized Indigenous peoples and their ideas as archaic. These structures were in part created and recreated by the educational endeavors carried out by religious institutions that were charged with the educational task by the State. Additionally, the Indigenous Commission argued that the institutions of education that were present in Indigenous communities and throughout Colombia characterized Indigenous traditions and knowledge production as “savagery and witchcraft.”¹³⁹ This point further brings into perspective the points of the second CRIC assembly, which made explicit the need for cultural struggles, especially those of Indigenous education for Indigenous communities. These were the cultural claims being made by the CRIC and that, as mentioned earlier, according to some ANUC executives such as Oscar Sanchez, were not well received by the ANUC leadership.

It is important to highlight some of the points of the Third Congress of ANUC that were agreed upon by the non-Indigenous leadership. As mentioned, some of the tasks which were set out by the congress for the organization were to further link peasants with worker, student, and teacher movements in the cities and to increase the formation of local “leaders with a *proletarian conscience*.”¹⁴⁰ Though not explicit in the Third Congress, part of the ideas of the leadership seemed to revolve around forming a disciplined revolutionary organization of rural proletarians – workers – who were tied to urban workers. This homogenizing discourse may have included much of the same provincializing of Indigenous traditions as religious institutions had but

¹³⁸ ANUC, *Conclusiones Del Tercer Congreso*, p. 51

¹³⁹ Ibid. p. 56

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 38; emphasis added

instead seeing Indigenous culture – as a non-proletarian consciousness – as something “retrograde.”¹⁴¹ At a time when ANUC saw unity as an utmost necessity to continue its effectiveness as an independent class-based organization, it seemed to the leaders of the organization that discourses which differentiated between different sectors of the peasant movement – like those from CRIC which highlighted the distinctness of Indigenous peasants – were not ideal. What was most pressing to ANUC leadership was the need to create a class-wide consciousness for-itself, largely overlooking differences in ethnicity and culture.

After the Third ANUC Congress, the CRIC wrote out a statement on the assembly. For the CRIC, the politicization of the peasants was inevitable but being carried out as it was by the different “leftist groups,”¹⁴² this politicization based on a ‘proletarian conscience’ was at odds with the purpose of ANUC that was to promote first and foremost peasant collaboration and mobilization. By carrying out consciousness-forming campaigns that not only attempted to homogenize all peasants as rural proletarians but also sought to connect peasant struggles with those in the city, the complexities of the multi-ethnic peasantry were ignored, as were the different levels of organizational development in different areas. ANUC, to the CRIC, was becoming more of an organization for leftist groups without a mass base to use as a vehicle for their visions of revolution and instrumentalizing the mass peasant base of ANUC for that purpose.¹⁴³ Many documents published by the CRIC, are explicit in emphasizing the need for revolutionary anti-capitalist change in Colombia.¹⁴⁴ However, what the CRIC criticized was the means by which the now radicalized and independent ANUC attempted such changes via

¹⁴¹ Sanchez, Oscar “Oscar Sanchez Interview No. 36.” By Leon Zamosc 1979 in *Entrevistas Base ANUC*, CINEP

¹⁴² CRIC, “Posicion del CRIC Frente al III Congreso Campesino” in *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca: Diez Años de Lucha, Historia y Documento* p. 151

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ For example “CRIC- Proyecto de Plataforma Política” in *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca – CRIC: Diez Años de Lucha Historia y Documentos* 65-81

discourses of homogenizing discipline. It might be that these were the critical declarations from the CRIC that caused the ANUC leadership to view the CRIC leadership as enemies by 1975, with ANUC coming to see CRIC as ‘indigenist’, ‘anarchists’, ‘revisionists’ in their periodical *Carta Campesina* in 1976.¹⁴⁵

Among the decisions taken by the Indigenous commission of ANUC’s Third National Congress in 1974 was to begin publishing a biweekly periodical directed by the Indigenous Secretariat of ANUC, naming the periodical *Unidad Indígena*. In the first issue of the periodical in 1975, the author(s) wrote, “in *Unidad Indígena* we will speak with our own voice, how we truly are: men, women, and children of meat and bones, with our own dignity, our own language, our own religions, with our own land.”¹⁴⁶ Though the periodical consists of voices from Indigenous communities around the territory of Colombia and non-Indigenous collaborators of the Indigenous movement, no articles or segments in any issue name the author(s), with the only name on the issues being that of the editor, CRIC Vice-president Trino Morales. For the sake of this paper, we will assume that although CRIC supported the autonomy of Indigenous communities, the discourses on culture used by the different voices within *Unidad Indígena*, reflect discourses that the Indigenous intellectuals behind the paper wanted to be part of the discourses influencing the readers of *Unidad Indígena*. Certain articles or segments contain letters or reports from other Indigenous struggles in Colombia and Abya Yala. These articles show the different influences on the discourses employed by the intellectuals behind *Unidad Indígena*.

¹⁴⁵ Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos (ANUC), *Carta Campesina*, No. 31 October 1975 p. 3; and *Carta Campesina*, No. 35 November 1976, p. 7

¹⁴⁶ CRIC & Secretaría Indígena, *Unidad Indígena*, No. 1 January, 1975, p. 3

If we think of Trino Morales and Juan Gregorio Palechor, respectively vice-president and secretary of the CRIC for much of the 1970s, as representatives of the activists who led the movement and wrote many of the articles in *Unidad Indígena*, we may be able to think of these leaders as figures who mediated between the ‘local Indigenous world’ and the ‘outside world.’ In communities marked by low levels of literacy and poor educational opportunities like those of rural Cauca, Trino Morales and Juan Gregorio were among those who received at least a primary education, Trino Morales in Catholic mission schools in Bogota and Medellin,¹⁴⁷ and Juan Gregorio in rural schools in Cauca.¹⁴⁸ Both Trino Morales and Juan Gregorio used their literacy and education to aid Indigenous communities, becoming *tinterillos* – self-educated rural lawyers or legal experts and scribes – who would help Indigenous peasants advocate for their rights through legal means. Having had more experience with the institutions of the ‘outside world’ Indigenous intellectuals like Morales and Palechor often became natural leaders whom communities looked to for guidance in dealing with the ‘outside world’ which could be the State, political ideologies, anthropologists, or missionaries. These are the types of leaders and collaborators who were likely behind *Unidad Indígena* in the 1970s from CRIC and the Indigenous Secretariat. Their mediator roles would be fundamental in the autonomous articulation of Indigenous ‘culture’ during the late 1970s.

What is important to note is that the institutions of the ‘outside world’ favored male participation. Though we lack statistics that track differences between educational opportunities for men and those for women and other non-men, it may not be wrong to assume that women and non-men in rural and urban contexts faced barriers to their education and political

¹⁴⁷ Gros & Morales, *¡A Mí no Me Manda Nadie!*, p. 23

¹⁴⁸ Jimeno & Palechor. *Juan Gregorio Palechor*, p. 46

participation that men did not. This might be one of the factors that led to CRIC and the Indigenous Secretariat being largely dominated by Indigenous men, as often it was Indigenous men that were able to develop their role as mediators between the ‘local Indigenous world’ and the ‘outside world’ due at least in part to the patriarchy inherent in many institutions of the ‘outside world.’

Unidad Indígena

The first issue of *Unidad Indígena* begins with a report from the First Arhuaco Congress in the Sierra Nevada of Santa Marta. Arhuaco people are part of the four Indigenous communities that live in the Sierra Nevada mountains. Many Arhuacos in the 1970s and even today, maintained their traditions of *poporo*¹⁴⁹ usage and traditional clothing as well as a strong link to their Indigenous spiritual leaders known as *mamos*. Arhuacos represent Indigenous communities that remained very tied to Indigenous traditions. The article states, “The Sierra Nevada is the root of our existence, it is our mother which has given us life... we have *our own* science, *our own* culture, which, along with the land, we have been defending for five hundred years against the abuses of the missionaries, landowners, and settlers.”¹⁵⁰ This opening segment of the periodical is massively important as it sets the tone for the future segments and issues of the periodical. It clearly posits the difference and separation between the sciences and the cultures of Indigenous societies and those of non-Indigenous society, which we might simplistically abstract as the dominant culture. The same report continues, “we [Arhuaco people] struggle now for the sake of maintaining our house and our natural laws that permit us to live with *equality and justice* and not with the minor laws (Colombian law) of our younger

¹⁴⁹ A receptacle made for dipping chewed coca leaves into lye produced from crushed sea shells

¹⁵⁰ CRIC & Secretaría Indígena, *Unidad Indígena*, No. 1 January, 1975, p. 2

brothers,¹⁵¹ which have become unjust and allow the exploitation of Mother Earth and our brothers.”¹⁵² We see here again, the propping up of what we can understand as two worlds, the world of the elder brothers, the Arhuaco Indigenous world, and the world of the younger brother, the world of the dominant culture. This could be seen as discourses which would divide the campesino struggle for land among Indigenous and non-Indigenous struggles and yet, in concluding their report of the congress, the authors, most likely Arhuaco, state: “in our struggles, we have received great experiences and valuable support from organizations of both peasants and workers. We share with them the same needs and sufferings and manifest the importance of continuing to struggle together because we are in a system that is not good and is not ours.”¹⁵³ It seems then that the author(s) are arguing for the respect of Indigenous cultures as part of a larger struggle against the systems and structures of exploitation and oppression, both ecological and Human.

In this same report on the Arhuaco congress, there is a list of demands from the Arhuaco community on the government which include “recognition of our own autonomy and respect [for] our culture, our tradition, our own government, our organization.”¹⁵⁴ These demands come as the Arhuaco community identified “the persecution and humiliation of our culture” as the principal causes of community disintegration and impoverishment and, as such, concluded that they “sought to return to the source of *lo nuestro*.”¹⁵⁵ *Lo Nuestro* in this context, means ‘that which belongs to us,’ and it is significant that this comes after the Third ANUC Congress in

¹⁵¹ For Indigenous people of the Sierra Nevada, non-Indigenous people are considered the ‘younger brothers’ of Indigenous people. For more on this see: *From the Heart of the World*, Alan Ereira, 1990, BBC, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJNpMxhO4Ic>

¹⁵² CRIC & Secretaría Indígena, *Unidad Indígena*, No. 1 January, 1975, p. 3

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 9

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

which the transnational Indigenous commission argued for the need to struggle against the humiliation of Indigenous culture that the dominant Catholic culture labeled “savagery and witchcraft.”¹⁵⁶ This is among the earliest mentions of *lo nuestro* in the documents surveyed with only “Como Nacio el CRIC” (How the CRIC was born), a history of the CRIC by the CRIC written presumably in 1974, using the term in characterizing the second CRIC assembly points as returning to “*lo nuestro*.”¹⁵⁷ This term could be read to indicate that increasingly by the time of *Unidad Indígena* in 1975 after the Third ANUC congress, the intellectuals of the CRIC and aligned segments of the Indigenous movement were using the idea of culture to talk about that which was their own, *lo nuestro*, as opposed to that from outside.

In the second issue of *Unidad Indígena*, a special issue commemorating the death of Gustavo Mejia, particular words from Gustavo Mejia are posted on a segment titled “Words from Comrade Gustavo Mejia.” Speaking on preconquest Cauca, Gustavo Mejia is quoted as saying, “the crops established in large scale by the system of work by all for all, and the equal distribution of the harvest required that property of the land could not be held by individuals. The land belonged to the Indian state.”¹⁵⁸ The inclusion of the larger quote, which includes a call for Indigenous unity, shows the influence of non-Indigenous collaborators. However, the article also shows the collectivistic and anti-exploitative discourses that CRIC and Indigenous activists producing *Unidad Indígena* chose to tie to Indigenous culture, *lo nuestro*.

In this same issue, a section on Indigenous communities from the Vaupes speaks of the loss of generational knowledges taught by traditional medicine-folk who no longer had anyone to

¹⁵⁶ ANUC, *Conclusiones Del Tercer Congreso*, p. 56

¹⁵⁷ CRIC, “Como Nacio el CRIC, Primeras Luchas” in *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca: Diez Años de Lucha, Historia y Documento*, p.12

¹⁵⁸ CRIC & Secretaría Indígena, *Unidad Indígena*, No. 2 February, 1975, p. 5

learn this “rich cultural heritage” other than “‘anthropologists’... who do it [learn the cultural knowledges] not to put those knowledges in service of the community but to benefit themselves and those they represent with books and articles for the white world.”¹⁵⁹ In concluding the segment, the author(s) state “they [Indigenous communities from the Vaupes] have maintained their traditional forms of work, such as the ‘mingas’, their language, and they begin to revive *their own* culture.”¹⁶⁰ Clearly, a theme arises within the *Unidad Indígena* in these early editions which differentiate between *lo nuestro* and that from the dominant culture, the culture of the exploiter. But equally present, is a theme that a sort of intercultural dialogue, a productive encounter between *lo nuestro* and that from outside, is possible whether it be in joint political struggles, as highlighted in the Arhuaco Congress report, or in joint life as highlighted in a report of Indigenous Guajibos of the Meta department in the third issue of *Unidad Indígena*. In this report on Indigenous Guajibos, the author(s) state that “the poor peasants who live with us, work like us, and marry our children, are not enemies, they have come to our lands and we have welcomed them as friends for also being victims of violence and exploitation.”¹⁶¹

The segment titled “Culture and Struggle” in the fourth issue of *Unidad Indígena*, to a certain extent, defines Indigenous culture. In the segment, the author(s) explain that “We [Indigenous people] have struggled... to remain being Indigenous, it’s our communitarian forms of labor, our own government, our language, our science, our legends, music and dance, in the end, with everything that constitutes our culture.”¹⁶² The segment further explains how the struggle for land and culture are linked. The author(s) explain that the struggle to defend “our”

¹⁵⁹ *Unidad Indígena*, No. 2 February, 1975, p.10

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*

¹⁶¹ *Unidad Indígena*, No. 3 March, 1975, p. 3

¹⁶² *Unidad Indígena*, No. 4 April, 1975, p. 1

land is the only thing that can “guarantee the survival of Indigenous people” but for that struggle “it has been indispensable for us to maintain our unity” and “an important factor of our unity has been the set of cultural values of our communities... our language and beliefs, our forms of government and social organization, our methods of work, our own education.”¹⁶³ The segment further states, “culture has been an important factor in our past struggles and we must continue conserving and utilizing it to defend... our communities.”¹⁶⁴ Reading these issues together, one might begin to read culture as being envisioned as a space of unity based on Indigenous practices and knowledges that provide an alternative to the non-Indigenous world ruled by exploitation and individualism. Whether this idea of culture was understood at the community level is another question;¹⁶⁵ however, the intellectuals behind *Unidad Indígena* were clearly attempting to put forth this vision of Indigenous ‘culture.’ We can then view *Unidad Indígena* as a place for Indigenous intellectuals and collaborators to explore and share ideas about Indigenous culture, history, and Indigenous and peasant activism. It may not have been read by every Indigenous person in Colombia, but the periodical did make its way to many cabildos and is also cited in future CRIC works. As such, *Unidad Indígena* has to be part of the story of the development of Indigenous discourses on culture and Indigeneity.

Unidad Indígena became one of the battlegrounds for the autonomy of the Indigenous movement in the face of ANUC leadership’s attempts at subordination. It was the periodical’s direction which, according to the CRIC, the ANUC leadership was attempting to “recover.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ *Unidad Indígena*, No. 4 April, 1975, p. 2

¹⁶⁴ Ibid

¹⁶⁵ A question which would necessitate immense labor outside of the documentary archive and which would probably result in problematizing any view which might suggest a purely top-down diffusion of Indigenous thought from Indigenous ‘elites’ to ‘non-elites.’ That is not my view.

¹⁶⁶ CRIC, “Posición del CRIC Frente al Movimiento Indígena y Al Comité Ejecutivo de la ANUC” in *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca: Diez Años de Lucha, Historia y Documento*, p.159

Indeed, in the oral interview of Oscar Sanchez, the executive states that when the contradictions between ANUC leadership and CRIC sharpened after the Third Congress –in his words, due to the Indigenous claims of recovering their culture – the ANUC leadership demanded that the periodical be directed by the Indigenous Secretariat – which ANUC leadership had attempted to undermine in July 1975 – for the periodical to continue receiving any ANUC funding. In the interview conducted in 1978, Sanchez then blames anthropologists for influencing Indigenous activists to take autonomy over the periodical. To Sanchez, “it was the anthropologists who published and wrote” the periodical.¹⁶⁷

In my conversations with Pablo Tattay, a non-Indigenous student activist who had come to be involved in the rural struggle of the 60s and 70s in Tolima and Cauca as a volunteer for INCORA, becoming an important collaborator for the CRIC, we spoke a bit about *Unidad Indígena*. One interesting conversation occurred when I mentioned that ANUC leaders had criticized *Unidad Indígena* for supposedly being written by anthropologists. In response, Tattay indicated that Victor Bonilla and other anthropologists did not have much influence or say over the writing process. Tattay mentioned that after the first issue of the periodical, the anthropologist Victor Bonilla threw the publication on the ground in disapproval. Though we did not get to go over exactly what Bonilla disapproved of, what is important is that the story indicates that Bonilla and other anthropologists did not have had the influence that ANUC leaders like Oscar Sanchez argued they did. It is likely that the author(s) were not lying when in the first issue, they stated, “in *Unidad Indígena*, we will speak with our own voice, how we truly are.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Oscar Sanchez Interview No. 36 1979

¹⁶⁸ *Unidad Indígena*, No. 1 January, 1975, p. 3

In August 1975, the CRIC leadership wrote up a document denouncing the attempts by ANUC leadership in their Executive Board Meeting of July to “take into their hands the direction of the Indigenous movement” by dismissing the Indigenous Secretariat committee that had been elected by Indigenous representatives in the Third National Congress of ANUC.¹⁶⁹ In his oral interview, Oscar Sanchez ANUC executive, claims that the Indigenous Secretariat did not belong to the CRIC (“they were mistaken in thinking that the Indigenous Secretariat was theirs”¹⁷⁰) and that “the Executive Committee [of ANUC] can suspend it [the Indigenous Secretariat] whenever they choose or elect the Indigenous representatives.”¹⁷¹ We see here, in interviews post-facto, that the ANUC leadership had seemingly looked to undermine autonomy within the Indigenous movement which was in many ways spearheaded by the first and largest regional Indigenous council, the CRIC. The pioneering nature of the transnational Indigenous assembly, which occurred in the Third Congress and elected the Indigenous Secretariat, was not mentioned and only the hierarchical power that the ANUC Executive Committee possessed was highlighted. Neither was the intense labor on the part of the CRIC and its activists to help coordinate national Indigenous organizing mentioned, instead, it was seen with suspicion as if their autonomous efforts to advance the Indigenous movement were threatening.

According to the CRIC document published in response to ANUC’s Executive’s attempts to undermine the Indigenous Secretariat, the Executive Committee of ANUC justified their actions as a response to the “‘racist’, ‘indigenist’ content” of the periodical.¹⁷² In the Fourth

¹⁶⁹ CRIC, “Posición del CRIC Frente al Movimiento Indígena y Al Comité Ejecutivo de la ANUC” in *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca: Diez Años de Lucha, Historia y Documento* p.155

¹⁷⁰ Oscar Sanchez Interview No. 36 1979 “They were mistaken in believing that the Indigenous Secretariat belonged to them”

¹⁷¹ Ibid

¹⁷² CRIC, “Posición del CRIC Frente al Movimiento Indígena y Al Comité Ejecutivo de la ANUC” in *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca: Diez Años de Lucha, Historia y Documento* p.160

CRIC Congress in Toez, Cauca, on August 9th, a month after the attempts by ANUC, the CRIC decided that each Indigenous community in other departments would be responsible for their own articles in *Unidad Indígena* but that all articles needed to be sent to CRIC offices for final revision by the executive committee.¹⁷³ It is hard to say whether this was a new policy in response to the ANUC attempts to undermine CRIC influence in the Indigenous Secretariat. However, in a conversation with Pablo Tattay in July 2022, Pablo suggested that this was always the case for *Unidad Indígena*. Moreover, in spite of ANUC attempts to divide it, the Indigenous Secretariat, including CRIC members, met in Popayan in August of 1975 and, among other points, concluded to “reaffirm their autonomy given that its [Indigenous Secretariat] mandate came from the bases [the grass-roots] themselves” and to reject “bureaucratic styles of meeting every two or six months,” instead choosing to meet “whenever possible and necessary.”¹⁷⁴ This final decision must have been influenced by the fact that, according to *Unidad Indígena*, the Vaupes representative was unable to make the meeting due to lack of transportation.¹⁷⁵ This last point lends credence to the view that the Indigenous Secretariat was not as involved in the editing of *Unidad Indígena*, given the difficulties in having all the members of the secretariat present at one time.

In the same Fourth CRIC congress in August, among the conclusions arrived at was that at the national level “the Indigenous Movement must continue collaborating with the peasant movement and continue acting within the ANUC,” and that the Indigenous Secretariat, not the CRIC, is responsible for coordinating the tasks of the movement “counting on Autonomy within

¹⁷³ *Unidad Indígena*, No. 7 August, 1975, p. 9

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 10

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

ANUC.”¹⁷⁶ However, by September of 1975 in the 13th National Board meeting of ANUC, CRIC was again criticized for “anarchist positions” and its ‘indigenist’ direction, with ANUC executives presenting a photograph of CRIC activist and Indigenous Secretariat president Trino Morales with anthropologist Victor Bonilla in Holland as proof of the CRIC being directed in their indigenism by anthropologists.¹⁷⁷ In the meeting, CRIC activists responded that the council could not be criticized for its indigenism when they had continuously organized with ANUC, had participated in marches side by side with non-Indigenous campesinos, had hosted ANUC leaders and activists during the Tenth National Board meeting in Popayan, and had continually stressed the peasant identity of Indigenous people without forgetting their indigeneity and the particularity of their cultural struggles.¹⁷⁸ To CRIC, ANUC was only interested in highlighting the peasant identity of Indigenous people and their movement as a way to use the Indigenous movement for propaganda purposes.¹⁷⁹ CRIC instead hoped the Indigenous movement would be taken seriously in its cultural struggles, not just provincialized to the realm of “‘Folkloric’ activity.”¹⁸⁰

The CRIC wanted to see the Indigenous movement as an equal part of the peasant movement. Published in October 1975, a segment titled “The Indigenous Struggles are part of the Struggles of the Colombian People” in the eighth issue of *Unidad Indígena* reaffirmed the dual class and ethnic struggles of the Indigenous movement. The segment states that Indigenous struggles are “based on the own claims of the Indigenous sector such as the recovery of the resguardos, the rights to [their] own forms of organization, the defense of culture.” The segment

¹⁷⁶ *Unidad Indígena*, No. 7 August, 1975, p. 6

¹⁷⁷ Escobar, *La Trayectoria del ANUC*, p. 85

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 85-86

¹⁷⁹ CRIC, “Posicion del CRIC Frente Al Movimiento Indígena y al Comité Ejecutivo de la ANUC”, in *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca: Diez Años de Lucha, Historia y Documento* p. 160

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 163

then stated that “we [the Indigenous movement] are beginning to comprehend that within the capitalist system it will be impossible to find a real solution to our problems” and as such, argued that Indigenous communities must be participants in the liberation of the whole of the Colombian people to establish a more just society.¹⁸¹

Interestingly, the ninth issue of *Unidad Indígena* includes a letter from Kechwa and Aymara Alcaldes Mayores espirituales (Elder and Spiritual leaders) Andres Gachakollu and Matilde Kolke is included in which Andres and Matilde state that the Spanish hid from Indigenous people their Indigenous religions and spiritual beliefs with the “Christian Catholic sacred books” whose commandments are not followed by “these men” who will cause “the destruction of the world.”¹⁸² Andres and Matilde characterized the beliefs of their ancestors as believing in “true living God not dead God” and “complying with the words of Pachakamaj Wiracocha Inti Tata¹⁸³.”¹⁸⁴ Matilde and Andres stated in the letter that “now we the descendants... want to comply as before,”¹⁸⁵ juxtaposing this with “these men [who will cause] the destruction of the world because they do not follow the words and commandments of God Spirit.”¹⁸⁶ Matilde and Andres then declare that “the indians of this world must wake up, think, meditate on that if the past and current religions are not followed, the suffering indians... must unite cosmically and spiritually for the good of all suffering indians and for the whole of the world.”¹⁸⁷ This letter allows us to view some of the influences that the authors of *Unidad Indígena* received and hoped to share among its readers, influences that differentiated Indigenous

¹⁸¹ *Unidad Indígena*, No. 8 October, 1975, p. 10

¹⁸² *Unidad Indígena*, No. 9 November, 1975, p. 11

¹⁸³ A creator deity in Andean cosmology

¹⁸⁴ *Unidad Indígena*, No. 9 November, 1975, p. 11

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁸⁶ *Unidad Indígena*, No. 9 November, 1975, p. 11

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*.

beliefs from non-Indigenous beliefs. In this article, non-Indigenous beliefs are not belittled or attacked, rather the lack of compliance with those beliefs is criticized and the need for spiritual and cosmic unity of Indigenous people is highlighted. We can see that it was not only anthropologists who influenced Indigenous activists in Cauca but Indigenous people outside of Colombia who were also urging other Indigenous activists to consider the importance of Indigenous unity, Indigenous beliefs, and ways of understanding the world. In fact, the author(s) of *Unidad Indígena* had a sense of the international scale of the Indigenous movement as they not only included this letter from Kechwa and Aymara Indigenous people, they also reported on the Indigenous congress of Panama in 1976 and stated that “*Unidad Indígena* wants to be the channel through which” Indigenous Colombians and Panamanians could communicate their experiences and with this, increase the effectiveness of their struggles.¹⁸⁸ The author(s) also mention the invitation received by the CRIC to attend the Xicanindio festival in Arizona on April 1976¹⁸⁹ as well as the invitation from the Indian Brotherhood of Canada to attend international conferences in Guyana and Denmark in 1975.¹⁹⁰ Clearly, the international Indigenous movement was among the influences that guided *Unidad Indígena* authors in their discourses.

In another segment of the ninth issue, called “La Medicina Indígena: an important aspect of our culture”, the author(s) state “the Indigenous people have a power, a science: the science of our medicine-men which the dominators were not able to finish off. Now that we are organized we must again study this knowledge to strengthen our struggles and to better organize our communities.”¹⁹¹ For the author(s), with the coming of the Spanish, Indigenous people were

¹⁸⁸ *Unidad Indígena*, No. 10, January, 1976, p. 5

¹⁸⁹ *Unidad Indígena*, No. 13, May, 1976, p. 10

¹⁹⁰ *Unidad Indígena*, No. 7, August, 1975, p. 10

¹⁹¹ *Unidad Indígena*, No. 9 November, 1975, p. 6

made to be scared of this ancestral knowledge “telling the people that all of those things of our culture were sin that we had to abandon our traditions in order to learn what they [the Spanish] were bringing to us, *which did not correspond with our way of being...* in reality bringing only slavery and exploitation”¹⁹² The segment continues, “Some cabildos [councils] forgot the custom of consulting the Indigenous medicine men and began consulting nuns, priests, politicians, and exploiters.”¹⁹³ For the author(s) “the recovery of our science is part of the general struggle for the recovery of our Indigenous culture.”¹⁹⁴ Indigenous medicine, and culture as a whole, is depicted as a conceptual space that informs and strengthens Indigenous social organization and is distinct from that which the nuns, priests, politicians, and exploiters propose. As such, for the author(s) culture is an essential part of the Indigenous struggle as without its revindication, they would be left with concepts that belittle Indigenous knowledges and bring about slavery and exploitation. This then helps bring into focus specifically Indigenous cultural claims and the importance of a specifically Indigenous movement that struggled for discursive and organizational autonomy.

Nevertheless, in the same ninth issue of *Unidad Indígena* the peasant identity of Indigenous people is highlighted in the first sentence of the issue, “Indigenous people are also peasants... and as such our struggles have been framed within the general context of the peasant movement.”¹⁹⁵ However, the author(s) criticized the attitudes of the Executive Committee of ANUC which the author(s) saw as believing that “they [ANUC Executive Committee] must discredit all existing revolutionary organizations” in order to put themselves at the helm “of all

¹⁹² *Unidad Indígena*, No. 9 November, 1975, p. 6; emphasis added

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 7

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 2

exploited classes.”¹⁹⁶ The author(s) further criticized the ways ANUC Executive Committee “would declare [critics] as enemies of ANUC and would make war on them [the critics].”¹⁹⁷

These anti-democratic and authoritarian attitudes of the ANUC leadership came to be exemplified in the Fourth National Congress of ANUC in September 1977. In this congress, dissident factions of ANUC, including but not limited to the CRIC, were given limited credentials to attend the congress and as such were blocked from fully participating in the voting processes.¹⁹⁸ Moreover, during Trino Morales’s speaking time, *Unidad Indígena* author(s) denounced that he was received with chants of “abajo los indios!” (down with the indians!).¹⁹⁹ Though these remarks are obviously racist, one should not assume and generalize to suggest that all of the peasants in this congress were chanting the ugly remarks. What it does show is that the environment created by certain individuals seeking to discredit the CRIC and its leaders was indeed racist and made part of the anti-democratic practices that alienated the CRIC. Within this congress marked by anti-democratic processes, the ANUC leadership launched a program to turn the ORP (People’s Revolutionary Organization) into the Movimiento Nacional Democrático y Popular MDNP (National Democratic and Popular Movement) which was to be the official party representing the ORP in the 1978 elections. At this point in the Fourth Congress, it became clear that, as Silvia Rivera argues, “the gap between the spontaneous campaigns [of the peasants] and the political platform which claimed to express them” had widened to the extent that the leadership of the organization was no longer able to mobilize the same popular action which had occurred just six years earlier.²⁰⁰ With the MNDP, it was believed that it was possible to

¹⁹⁶ *Unidad Indígena*, No. 9 November, 1975, p. 6

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *Unidad Indígena*, No. 20, March, 1977; and Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question*, p. 181-182

¹⁹⁹ *Unidad Indígena*, No. 20, March, 1977 p. 2

²⁰⁰ Rivera Cusicanqui, *The Politics and Ideology of the Colombian Peasant Movement*, p. 180

“undermine the power of the landowners” through electoral participation, which was so entrenched in the State and its local and national political structures.

Here again, we find ANUC falling into the trap that CRIC criticized later in *Entre Movimientos y Caudillos*. The trap was one that other revolutionary organizations had also fallen into, including the Marxist guerrillas, who had waged a struggle to *conquer* power, especially State power. In seeking to secure the effectiveness of its organization, ANUC leaders saw the necessity of leading the peasant movement towards a unified front with the exploited masses of Colombia not as a way to build popular power but as a way to attain State power for the sake of revolutionary change. In falling into this trap, the ANUC leaders moved further into anti-democratic processes of forceful unity through homogenization via attacking ‘enemy’ influences. Those who came to be seen as the enemies were dissident groups such as CRIC, which criticized not ANUC itself and non-Indigenous peasants but the ANUC leadership, which sought to force a particular discipline among its constituent parts, seemingly, for the sake of unity and the continued effectiveness of its organization.

In the 25th issue of *Unidad Indígena* in October 1977, a month after the Fourth ANUC congress, CRIC denounced another ANUC attempt at dividing the Indigenous organization, this time within Cauca with a “committee for the restoration of the CRIC ‘Gustavo Mejía’.”²⁰¹ A transcribed interview carried out by Leon Zamosc in 1978 of Jairo Gamboa, ANUC activist in Cauca with ties to the CRIC, sheds light on the issue. Jairo Gamboa, states in his transcribed interview that “we believe that we have to show Indigenous people the problem of revisionism.”²⁰² It is uncertain who the ‘we’ here means but likely it is the leaders of a group

²⁰¹ *Unidad Indígena*, No. 25 October, 1977, p. 2

²⁰² Gamboa, Jairo, “Jairo Gamboa No. 35.” By Leon Zamosc 1978 in *Entrevistas Base ANUC*, CINEP

Gamboa was part of which Gamboa described as “the Gustavo Mejia Movement for the restoration of the CRIC.”²⁰³ Among the critiques levied by Gamboa on the CRIC was the absence of “*comites veredales*” – hamlet/local committees – “the lack of information,” the abuse of organizational funds, and lack of contact with other popular organizations such as ANUC.²⁰⁴ Jairo Gamboa does not identify his ties to ANUC but in ANUC executive Oscar Sanchez’s interview, Sanchez mentions that Mov. Gustavo Mejia was composed of “indigenes in contradiction with/against the CRIC,” was oriented by Jairo Gamboa.²⁰⁵ Sanchez further states that while anthropologists had influenced the CRIC to see all whites as enemies, the ANUC continued ties with the Mov. Gustavo Mejia. To the CRIC, however, the Gustavo Mejia movement was part of a strategy from the ANUC to undermine the autonomy of the Indigenous movement

In another transcribed oral interview, Juan Gregorio Palechor a consistent leader of the CRIC, speaks of the Mov. Gustavo Mejia and of Jairo Gamboa specifically. Palechor states that initially Gamboa came to the CRIC without stating that he was linked to the ANUC but that in the Fourth Congress of ANUC held in 1977, he had “unmasked himself” by being part of those who were treating CRIC representatives poorly.²⁰⁶ What is also interesting is that the words used by Gamboa to describe one of the problems with CRIC, ‘the lack of hamlet committees’ – *comites veredales* – is the same term used by ANUC’s third congress to indicate the structures with which ANUC would strengthen itself in various zones via the formation of leaders with a “proletarian conscience.” Perhaps this is what was meant by Gamboa in his interview when he

²⁰³ Ibid

²⁰⁴ Gamboa, Jairo, “Jairo Gamboa No. 35.” By Leon Zamosc 1978 in *Entrevistas Base ANUC*, CINEP

²⁰⁵ Ibid

²⁰⁶ Palechor, Juan Gregorio, “Juan Gregorio Palechor No. 55” by Cristina Escobar 1978 in *Entrevistas Base ANUC*, CINEP

stated that the Mov. Gustavo Mejia was a movement for the “restoration of the CRIC” to “show to indigenes the problem of revisionism” and to “not fall into indigenism.”²⁰⁷ It is quite difficult, from the documents available, to make out the exact nature of the Gustavo Mejia movement and who the Indigenous activists in its ranks were. It is equally difficult to ascertain the critiques of CRIC levied by these activists but what one can surmise from the documents is that after the ANUC attempts at removing CRIC leaders from the Indigenous Secretariat, at least one ANUC non-Indigenous activist, Jairo Gamboa was an important part of the Gustavo Mejia movement and, judging from his interview, he took issue with the ‘indigenist’ direction of the CRIC.

In this context, dissident factions of the peasant movement split from ANUC after the Fourth Congress in 1977 in Tomala, including the CRIC, which led to the end of the ‘Indigenous Secretariat.’²⁰⁸ The CRIC, in this instance, was struggling for its autonomy to develop as an organization without the constraints of a non-Indigenous leadership which sought to coordinate by subordinating. In 1978, the Executive Committee of the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC) wrote the first full outline of their political platform. The CRIC begins the outline of its project by stating first that the struggles of the Indigenous people of Colombia and the rest of Latin America are fundamentally framed within two aspects. First, the document states, the struggles are framed by their being “descendants of the original inhabitants of this [American] continent.” and also from their being “part of the exploited and oppressed masses.”²⁰⁹ For the executive committee, the genocide brought on by the Spanish invasion was detrimental to Indigenous culture and social organization but it was through the struggles of Indigenous

²⁰⁷ Jairo Gamboa, Interview No. 35, 1978

²⁰⁸ Trino Morales, “El Movimiento Indígena en Colombia.” In *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca: Diez Años de Lucha, Historia y Documento*

²⁰⁹ Executive Committee of the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca, “CRIC- Proyecto de Plataforma Política” in *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca – CRIC: Diez Años de Lucha Historia y Documentos* p. 65-81

ancestors against this genocide that essential features of their identities were conserved. In the document, the committee highlights the diversity of Indigenous customs, languages, traditions, community authorities, and norms for social behavior.²¹⁰ It also highlighted that those Indigenous cultures are under the dominant culture's constant pressure, which necessitates an Indigenous resistance to ensure the survival of their distinct ways of being. In this vein, the committee calls for the indispensable recognition of autonomy for Indigenous communities to develop their distinct identity.²¹¹

This call for autonomy is crucial for us to keep in mind when thinking of the split that occurred in 1977 with ANUC, given that, on the surface, the two had similar anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist ideologies. We can take autonomy here to mean self-governance though that would only take us so far. As CRIC stated in a document written in 1980 on their ideological stances, “Our character as autochthonous peoples with a culture *deeply rooted in the land...* with a social and political organization sustained by our councils and specific forms of communitarian production, explains in large part our resistance against domination.”²¹² Part of this culture can also be seen in biographical works of Indigenous leaders of the CRIC, such as Juan Gregorio Palechor, who would be a prominent leader of the Indigenous movement in CRIC until his death in 1992. One of the things which Palechor remembers in *Juan Gregorio Palechor: The Story of My Life* is the custom of the mingas in which families from the resguardo would come together to work for the benefit of the whole community or for the benefit of a family which needed assistance in their labor.²¹³ These customs, however, Palechor saw as being deteriorated by that

²¹⁰ Executive Committee of the CRIC, “CRIC- Proyecto de Plataforma Política” in *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca – CRIC: Diez Años de Lucha Historia y Documentos* 65-81

²¹¹ Ibid. 78

²¹² CRIC, “Documento de Discusion Sobre el Marco Ideologico del Movimiento Indígena” in *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca – CRIC: Diez Años de Lucha Historia y Documentos* p. 234 emphasis added

²¹³ Jimeno & Palechor, *Juan Gregorio Palechor*, p. 78

production which is directed only by the acquisition of money.²¹⁴ As stated in the 12th issue of *Unidad Indígena*, “the communal holding of land, communitarian labor, the distribution of products [of labor] between the whole of the community is being destroyed since the arrival of the Spanish.”²¹⁵

Collectivity, in production and ownership, have been part of the discourses articulated by many CRIC documents and segments in *Unidad Indígena* when speaking of Indigenous culture. The cabildos, too, can be seen as part of this culture though they are colonial institutions imposed on Indigenous communities by the Spanish crown. Cabildos provide an institution that can be used for self-determination and self-organization of Indigenous communities. Though cabildos, in Cauca, came to replace what the CRIC called the Pubenense Confederacy made up of Pubenenses, Coconucos, Totoroes, Guambianos, Paeces, Guanacas, and Pijaos after the fall of Popayan, the capital of this confederacy, in 1536²¹⁶, the intellectuals behind *Unidad Indígena* saw the cabildos as “gather[ing] many of the elements of the traditional organization of our ancestors”²¹⁷ and no doubt saw cabildos as a way to advance the self-organization of communities. What is more, as detailed by Marcela Echeverri in her work *Indian and Slave Royalists in the Age of Revolution*, at the end of the 18th-century, Cauca cabildos organized Indigenous guards, who were community members organized collectively in order to stop the chaos and looting during Indigenous mobilizations.²¹⁸ Indigenous guards are also present today,

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ *Unidad Indígena*, No. 12 April, 1976, p. 9

²¹⁶ Executive Committee of the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca, “CRIC- Proyecto de Plataforma Política” in *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca – CRIC: Diez Años de Lucha Historia y Documentos* 65-81

²¹⁷ *Unidad Indígena*, No. 5 May, 1975, p. 2

²¹⁸ Marcela Echeverri, *Indian and Slave Royalists in the Age of Revolution: Reform, Revolution, and Royalism in the Northern Andes, 1780-1825*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) pg 63; it is important to highlight that this does not seek to erase the atrocities and the attempts at subordinating Indigenous communities by the Spanish, instead, it serves to show how Indigenous people – as all people do – used the tools available to them in order to carve out space for their distinct way of being

not least due to the efforts of the CRIC, which have mobilized in recent Colombian protests to ensure peace in mobilizations and which have apprehended agent provocateurs sent by the government to instill chaos in recent mobilizations.²¹⁹ This shows that Indigenous intellectuals have, since colonization, used the discursive tools available to them to create spaces for their self-organization and the continued articulation of their traditions whether through cabildos, resguardos, or through the concept of ‘culture.’ It is interesting that cabildos were seen as “gather[ing] many of the elements of the traditional organization of our ancestors” suggesting that cabildos too could be considered part of Indigenous tradition even if they were not ‘purely’ Indigenous. Resguardos, which could be translated as ‘reservations,’ were seen by CRIC intellectuals not simply as Spanish creations but instead as a way for the Spanish to recognize Indigenous peoples’ rights to the land.²²⁰ These two cases of cabildo and resguardo institutions suggest that even throughout the viceregal period – often called the ‘Colonial’ period – of Latin America, Indigenous peoples used and formed traditions not as invariant repetitions but as a “stimulus towards innovation and change,”²²¹ which helped continue their distinct relation to *la tierra*.

Among the most enlightening remarks from CRIC documents about the distinctness of Indigenous culture is their insistence that *la tierra*, “the land/Earth,” is more than a means of economic production and survival. The CRIC wrote in their V Congress in 1978, “The Earth/land is our mother” indicating land as something more than an object.²²² Further, in one of

²¹⁹ CRIC, “El Infiltrado Sí es Policía.” *Actualidad Indígena Nacional* (blog). Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca. 05/07/21 <https://www.cric-colombia.org/portal/el-infiltrado-si-es-policia/>

²²⁰ CRIC, “CRIC- Proyecto de Plataforma Política” in *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca – CRIC: Diez Años de Lucha Historia y Documentos*, (Bogotá: CINEP, 1981) p. 71

²²¹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, (London: Verso, 1993) p. x; Here Gilroy is talking specifically of Black Atlantic Modernity, I believe that in Colonial Racial Capitalism, racialized populations use non-western traditions in similar ways, creating their own non-western modernities.

²²² CRIC, “V Congreso del CRIC” in *CRIC: Diez Años de Lucha Historia y Documentos* P. 113

the documents presented by the Indigenous Secretariat in the Third ANUC Congress, titled “The position of Indigenes in the Peasant Movement,” they state specific cultural differences in relation to the land which problematize Western distinctions between nature and culture:

The Earth is more than an economic good.

For us, the Indigenous [people], it is not just the object of our labor, the source of the food that we consume, instead it is the center of our whole life, the base of our life, the base of our social organization, the origin of our traditions and customs.²²³



²²³ Secretaria Inidgena del ANUC, “Posicion de los Indígenas en el Movimiento Campesino” p. 166

²²⁴ *Unidad Indígena*, No. 35, May, 1979, p. 7

Also illustrative of the influence of this idea of Indigenous difference is the image above which was published in *Unidad Indígena* in 1979. Key in this image is the subtitle to the image as well as the subtitle to the sign in the image. The subtitle to the image reads, “the solidarity is with all of the Indigenous peoples of America.” The sign in the image reads: “support for the redskin struggle” and the subtitle reads: “we do not want the system of life of the ‘whites’ any longer.” The image indicates a growing consciousness among Indigenous activists that Indigenous movements were linked together by their indigeneity but also by a struggle against the “system of life of the ‘whites.’” Theirs was a struggle to posit a different Indigenous system of life not based on individualist and anthropocentric conceptions of the world. This seems to be what the term ‘Indigenous culture’ was mainly used for, Indigenous unity and autonomy in the face of an individualist and anthropocentric dominant culture.

In analyzing some of the transcribed oral interviews with peasants from 1978-79, certain statements are telling of the split between CRIC and ANUC. Firstly, the articulation of cultural difference was seen by ANUC leaders to be due to the influence of anthropologists. However, given that the block quote above comes out of the Third ANUC congress in which Indigenous representatives from Ecuador, Panama, Peru, and all over Colombia were present, this idea of the alterity of Indigenous culture deeply rooted in the Land most likely comes from pan-Indigenous conversations. Secondly, Oscar Sanchez, the ANUC Executive, stated that “ANUC accepted many things [Indigenous claims] but rejected certain claims it deemed retrograde, most of all those linked to the recovering of [Indigenous] culture.”²²⁵ This reveals part of a larger trend in Colombia and in Latin America, where non-Indigenous individuals see an incompatibility between modernity or modern movements and Indigenous cultures and traditions. In *From*

²²⁵ Oscar Sanchez, Interview No. 36, 1979

Peasant Struggles to Indian Resistance, Amalia Pallares argues that the reformist state of Ecuador intended to integrate Indigenous communities through agrarian reform in an effort to create an ‘ideal’ homogenous nation with the interests of this nation defined by mestizo conceptions of progress and culture.²²⁶ One can sense a similarity between these attempts at homogenizing Indigenous people as part of the mestizo nation in Ecuador and attempts at their homogenization as Colombian peasants whose leaders needed to develop a ‘*proletarian* consciousness.’

Whether in Ecuador, Colombia, or elsewhere with dominant mestizo cultures, there is a way in which Indigenous traditions and cultures were, and still are, provincialized spatially to their *resguardos* – in Colombia – or their protected areas and temporally to pre-modern, archaic pasts. These are traditions and cultures deemed archaic, “retrograde,” having nothing to do with modernity and in need of tutelage.²²⁷ From such perspectives, it makes little sense for Indigenous people to have an organization with autonomy from larger organizations that seek to lead exploited and oppressed peoples in a struggle against common enemies. Sanchez exemplifies this perspective as he further states in his interview that when ANUC and CRIC were invited to the Russell International War Crimes Tribunal,²²⁸ Trino Morales, – an influential CRIC leader – along with other CRIC activists, “began gaining financial support from Europe *without coordinating things with us. They [CRIC] appealed to and received support from organizations that were not supporting us [ANUC],*”²²⁹ a claim which Trino Morales refutes in the Indigenous

²²⁶ Amalia Pallares, *From Peasant Struggles to Indian Resistance: The Ecuador Andes in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 2002) p. 46

²²⁷ See the anecdote in the preface of *From Peasant Struggles to Indian Resistance*

²²⁸ Founded by Bertrand Russell and other intellectuals such as Jean-Paul Sartre in 1966 to investigate U.S. war crimes in Vietnam, the tribunal would do a second series of sessions on the repression in Latin America through the mid-1970s

²²⁹ Oscar Sanchez, Interview No. 36, 1979; emphasis added

Secretariat meeting of August 1975.²³⁰ From the tone that appears in the transcribed interview, Sanchez seemed to have been displeased with the fact that CRIC could develop separate sources of financing. Sanchez saw the contradictions between ANUC and CRIC as mainly due to Indigenous people's cultural claims, which, to Sanchez, had been brought to the communities from the outside by anthropologists that “injected indigenes with racism. Any white is an enemy.”²³¹ However, ANUC began to act in the same way the State had acted towards ANUC from the Pastrana administration onwards. Just as the State had undermined the autonomy of ANUC as an organization and promoted a parallel organization, the ANUC – Armenia line, so too, increasingly from 1975 onwards, ANUC did not recognize the autonomy of CRIC and the Indigenous movement.

The transcribed interviews show how some parts of the leadership of ANUC came to view CRIC two years after the formal split that occurred in 1977. Anglo-phone historical literature which deals specifically with the CRIC and the formulation of ethnic claims led by this organization from the 1970s to the 1990s,²³² points specifically to the international and national context in which these ethnic claims were articulated and the influence of outside actors in order to understand the achievements Indigenous communities in Colombia have attained. These works are essential for understanding the full picture of the ethnic mobilization in Colombia. However, such works may leave space for erroneous interpretations, such as those from Oscar Sanchez, of the Indigenous movement that suggest the movement’s cultural claims came from without. As has already been highlighted in discussing the changes from the first CRIC assembly

²³⁰ *Unidad Indígena*, No. 7 August, 1975, p. 10

²³¹ Oscar Sanchez, Interview No. 36, 1979

²³² Troyan, “Ethnic Citizenship in Colombia: The Experience of the Regional Indigenous Council of the Cauca in Southwestern Colombia from 1970 to 1990.”

to the second CRIC assembly, the international context of the 1970s was itself influenced by Indigenous struggles. Whether it be the continued struggles of African Americans and Native Americans in the United States culminating in the self-defense and civil rights movements of the 1960s and 70s or whether it be anticolonial struggles being waged across the colonized world, these movements by different Indigenous communities across the globe have been what has pushed the international context to have to listen to ethnic-based claims. Racism has been part and parcel of the capitalist modernization of the world. The challenges to the racist colonial common sense that still inhabits much of our culture today have emerged from the struggles waged by different Indigenous peoples around the world.

Indigenous struggles for autonomy and against ethnocentric attacks on their cultures have not come only as struggles against the State and empires. The split between ANUC and CRIC, which culminated in 1977, is one such struggle that reminds us that marginalized ethnic groups have had to struggle for their autonomy in the face of ethnocentric revolutionary projects. Autonomy is that space created in which people and communities are able to pursue their own aims, their own visions. These spaces have not meant a refusal of anything outside of them; in fact, collaboration with non-Indigenous collaborators such as intellectuals and activists has been part of the tools used by Indigenous communities to develop autonomous articulations of modern traditions from Indigenous cultures. Part of this struggle for autonomy is also seen in the 5th Congress of the CRIC in 1978 which initiated the Bilingual Education Program (PEB) to struggle for Indigenous autonomy over the education of Indigenous youths, promoting community research on the communities' history and culture. Collaboration between different cultures continued to be part of the ideas behind the PEB, and by the 1990s this came to be understood as 'interculturalism.' In a community curriculum for Paez communities from 1990,

the CRIC defines interculturalism as: “To start from a knowledge of one’s own culture in order to integrate other forms of knowledge.”²³³ For educators like Roberto Chepe bilingual, intercultural education is “an education that is in accord ... not only for Nasas but for everyone. It means consolidating what is ours and appropriating what is alien, but strengthening what is ours.”²³⁴

. In *¿Que Pasaría Si la Escuela...?* from 2004, a CRIC educational team of several members detailed the decades-long struggle for the construction of Indigenous self-education. The team behind the work states that the PEB places the education of Indigenous communities in the hands of Indigenous teachers that teach in both Spanish and the Indigenous language of the community and in which Indigenous *cosmovisiones* are respected and valued. As the team states, the PEB contributes directly to goals of the CRIC: unity, territory, culture, and autonomy, and that this program developed out of the struggles for Indigenous culture framed by the second assembly of the CRIC.²³⁵ The emergence of the PEB also initiated the development of the term *cosmovision* which is the processes of creating devices (spiritual, philosophical, epistemological) to analyze the world and to act within it.²³⁶ Part of the process of the development of *cosmovision* included the intellectual endeavors carried out by Indigenous intellectuals to form themselves in ethnolinguistics at the University of the Andes in Bogota in order to develop Indigenous articulations of non-Indigenous concepts, one of them being ‘culture.’ In the 1990s and early 2000s, Indigenous linguists from the Nasa community developed the term *wét*

²³³ CRIC, “Elaboración de currículo en comunidades indígenas paeces.” (Popayan: PEB-CRIC, 1990) p. 4 as cited in Joanne Rappaport, *Intercultural Utopias : Public Intellectuals, Cultural Experimentation, and Ethnic Pluralism in Colombia*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) p. 131

²³⁴ Roberto Chepe, interviewed by Abelardo Ramos, August 8, 2001 as cited in Rappaport, *Intercultural Utopias*, p. 145

²³⁵ Graciela Bolaños et al., *¿Qué Pasaría Si la Escuela...? 30 años de Construcción de una Educación Propia*, (Editorial Fuego Azul: Bogota, 2004) p. 21

²³⁶ *Ibid.* 83

úskiwe' nxi to translate 'culture' which translates to "the result of living in harmony with the territory."²³⁷ The parallels between this and the statement "the earth... [as] the origin of our traditions and customs" from the Indigenous commission of the third ANUC congress with transnational Indigenous representation should not be overlooked.

Conclusion

How then can we understand the split between CRIC and ANUC beyond a simple struggle for autonomy? Of course, the Indigenous movement in Colombia was not unified under CRIC, nor even in Cauca did CRIC have influence over every single Indigenous community – though it did over many – and certainly, schisms between different organizations were present. However, CRIC has become the largest regional organization in Colombia and the country's largest and oldest regional Indigenous council. With its mottos of Unity, Land, Culture, and Autonomy, CRIC has helped lead a significant Indigenous movement that has reconstituted Indigenous resguardos and communities which had previously been thrown into the scolding heat of the mestizaje melting pot. The intellectuals behind CRIC documents and *Unidad Indígena*, intellectual leaders that were labeled revisionists, indigenists, anarchists, were struggling fundamentally for the respect and value of Indigenous traditions and customs, using the concept of 'Indigenous culture' to do so. This concept may have been introduced by anthropologists, but what it came to be articulated as – traditions and customs of communitarian labor and reciprocal social being originating from a relationship with *la tierra* – came as a result of pan-Indigenous conversations and was not decided by anthropologists.

²³⁷ Bolaños et al., *¿Qué Pasaría Si la Escuela...?* p. 92-3

In attempting to fight against homogenizing discourses that impose western concepts of development and provincialize Indigenous knowledge and traditions, Indigenous movements throughout Abya Yala have articulated new perspectives on development that do not rely solely on western conceptions of being and social organization. For the CRIC, Indigenous culture, nature and society/culture/conventions are not opposing forces. As they stated: “the Earth/land is our mother... the Earth/land is the base of our culture... if in her we work, from her we receive our education; with her we clarify our ideas.”²³⁸ Such ideas of treating the Earth as a relative are at the base of contemporary concepts such as ‘Buen Vivir’ advancing non-western understandings of what ‘development’ might look like. It is important to emphasize that this argument is not to give life to tropes of ‘noble savages’ in Indigenous Colombian culture. Rather, I intend to highlight the importance of CRIC’s struggles for organizational and political autonomy as an effort at provincializing Western concepts of being human. In struggling around an Indigenous culture instead of a ‘proletarian consciousness,’ CRIC and the Indigenous movement gave their communities space to articulate their own conceptions of being human that revolved around collectivity and reciprocity with neighbors including nature — *la tierra*.

With this, I do not intend to suggest that all Indigenous people in Cauca subscribe to the exact ideas posited by the CRIC leaders. Rather, I hope to point out those ideas present in the document trails left by the Indigenous intellectuals who led CRIC and *Unidad Indígena* during the important years of the 1970s. With these ideas, the CRIC leaders attempted to create spaces of organizational autonomy from which to develop autonomous articulations of cultural traditions. As Joanne Rappaport argues in *Intercultural Utopias*, CRIC is a pluralistic organization in which different communities and different people within these communities have

²³⁸ CRIC, “V Congreso del CRIC” in *CRIC: Diez Años de Lucha Historia y Documentos* P. 113

different politics and different social views.²³⁹ That said, as an organization, CRIC has placed its aims on the struggle to defend Indigenous land, culture, unity, and autonomy. The ideas that emerged in the 1970s from the CRIC were ideas that when read carefully are germinating the seeds that lead to a more developed struggle for culture. This struggle takes place largely through the Bilingual Education Program (PEB) that seeks to place the education of Indigenous communities in the hands of Indigenous organizations like CRIC. As Rappaport has shown, Indigenous intellectuals do not privilege academic knowledge production and instead seek the production of knowledge for the sake of social action.²⁴⁰ Their way of dealing with these large epistemic questions in the 1970s came as an insurgency against structures that sought to take autonomy away from their communities. When read carefully, their struggles for autonomy can be seen as discourses that challenge western illusions of universality much in the same way that Sahlins, Clastres, and Chakrabrty have. If we overlook Indigenous activists' struggle for autonomy within the national Colombian peasant movement, we run the risk of leaving unrecognized the profundity of the ideas these activists articulated in the 1970s that were just as pathbreaking as those by the mentioned authors.

Thinking back to the oral interviews of ANUC leaders and activists used in this essay, we can view the condemnation from Oscar Sanchez as to the 'retrograde' nature of Indigenous cultural claims as symptomatic of the racist structures that inhabited the minds of some non-Indigenous peasant leaders and the very structures which Indigenous intellectuals were struggling against. Why would Oscar Sanchez say something which today, to socially conscious readers, may seem off-handed and racist? Because at this point in the development of Colombian

²³⁹ Joanne Rappaport, *Intercultural Utopias: Public Intellectuals, Cultural Experimentation, and Ethnic Pluralism In Colombia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) p. 5-6

²⁴⁰ *Ibid* p. 11

culture, to be ‘Indian’ was not something that was necessarily respected. As Christian Gros has demonstrated in *Políticas de Etnicidad*, ‘Indian’ coming to be seen as something to be proud of resulted from the Indigenous movement's struggles, which included struggles against homogenizing discourses of organizations on the left. It is important to note that for many ANUC leaders, forming a class-wide consciousness of proletarians, rural and urban, was the primordial task of organizing revolutionary change. This, however, led to the homogenizing discourses from ANUC that we have encountered in this essay. What I hope to have shown is that the struggles of CRIC leadership to organize against these ethnocentric discourses were shaped fundamentally by the protection of Indigenous customs and traditions, Indigenous culture, from further humiliation and erasure, as well as for the rights of communities to develop their social being, their ways of being human, on their own terms. In highlighting that Indigenous cultures have understandings of collective landholding, collective work, and collective distribution of the products of labor, as well as deep connections with the Earth as more than just an object, the intellectuals behind CRIC documents and *Unidad Indígena*, posit critiques to anthropocentric ontologies²⁴¹ and individualist conceptions of the world, critiques which homogenizing discourses may have erased. ¡Guardia, Guardia! ¡Fuerza, Fuerza! Por mi raza, por mi tierra.

²⁴¹ With ‘anthropocentric ontologies’ I mean here that way of ordering the world that strips ‘non-humans’ of any agency or social being and views mountains, rocks, the climate, the land – in short, nature – as nothing more than the objects of study or labor for a ‘human’ subject.

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