

**RESISTANCE DURING THE ARMED CONFLICT IN THE  
CHOCÓ, COLOMBIA**

**A Case Study on the Development of Territorial and Cultural Resistance of  
Indigenous Communities since the 1980s**

**Robert Baumeister**

**Master's Thesis**

**Political Science and Master's in  
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**Department of Social Sciences  
and Philosophy**

**University of Jyväskylä**

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# **Resistance during the Armed Conflict in the Chocó, Colombia: A Case Study on the Development of Territorial and Cultural Resistance of the Indigenous communities since the 1980s**

Baumeister, Robert

Supervisors: Liisa Laakso and Heino Nyyssönen

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## **ABSTRACT**

This Master's thesis aims to study the resistance process of the indigenous communities of the Colombian department of Chocó and the development of this process into potential grass-roots peace initiative via a particular form of identity reaffirmation through ancestral territories. Particularly, this studies focus on the conflict territorialization and the consequential inclusion of indigenous territories into the conflict logic, which has promoted the development of an indigenous resistance process derived from a defense of territories as basis for identity construction. The thesis illustrates the change of the logic of conflict and the resultant development of an indigenous organizational structure as part of a resistance process that hence can be termed *territorial and cultural resistance*. Hereby, the theoretical concept of 'civil resistance' is critically discussed and enhanced to conceptualize this particular notion of resistance by the indigenous peoples.

This thesis follows a case study approach to qualitative analysis. Commencing with a regional analysis, the study's findings are linked to a wider theoretical context and numerous practical issues. The empirical data of the thesis is drawn from multiple sources, using 'triangulation' by analyzing academic literature as well as brochures of self-presentation, official denunciations, declarations and statements by the indigenous communities and their organizations. This data is complemented by several semi-structured interviews with representatives of indigenous communities, their organizations, as well as government and NGO representatives.

The study's findings suggest that the indigenous communities have developed a resistance process through identity reaffirmation and the development of an organizational structure based on a 'bottom-up-approach'. The organizational structure functions as an authority alternative and simultaneously integrates international advocacy networks to pressure the Colombian state. Hereby, the process has evolved into a potential grass-roots peace initiative to the Colombian armed conflict.

**KEYWORDS:** indigenous resistance, conflict territorialization, Colombian armed conflict, indigenous organizational structure

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACCU	Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá (Peasant Self-Defense Forces of Córdoba and Urabá)
AUC	Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia)
Camizba	Cabildo Mayor Indígena de la Zona del Bajo Atrato (Indigenous regional council of the Bajo Atrato region)
CRIC	Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca (Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca)
DANE	Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (Colombian National Statistic Institute)
ELN	Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army)
EPL	Ejército Popular de Liberación (Popular Liberation Army)
ERG	Ejército Revolucionario Guevarista (Guevarist Revolutionary Army)
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)
ILO	International Labor Organization
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
OAS	Organization of American States
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
ONIC	Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia (National Indigenous Organization of Colombia)
UBN	Unsatisfied Basic Needs
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UP	Unión Patriótica (Patriotic Union)
WB	World Bank
WGIP	Working Group on Indigenous Populations

## GLOSSARY

cabildo	indigenous council that can be considered as the representative body of all the domestic units within the resguardo
campesino	rural dweller; country man; peasant
resguardo	a territory owned collectively by indigenous communities on which communal as well as individual forms of ownership are currently present
hacienda	a large estate which contains subsistence and commercial agriculture

## PREFACE

After I accepted in July 2006 a four-month internship at the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Bogotá, Colombia, I decided that I would use this opportunity to carry out the field work for my master's thesis in development and international cooperation. Despite working at the foundation mainly with the Colombian 'political elite', I decided from the very beginning of my 8-month stay in the country that I wanted to do research at the local level. It was indeed a newspaper article about the peace communities in the Chocó, which raised my interest in resistance. After contacting the author, the process 'snowballed' until I finally decided to investigate specifically indigenous communities in the Bajo Atrato. Although I had never studied indigenous communities before, the ONIC gave me confidence and encouraged me to carry out this investigation. Initially, I wanted to focus more on *participación ciudadana* (*civic participation*) of indigenous communities. However, after my first interviews, I realized that this notion has no meaning to the majority of indigenous people. Instead of participation in the state institutional process, the development of own indigenous authorities is much more important. Hence, I changed my focus to the development of the resistance process.

Now, about 5 months after leaving Colombia, I look back to my stay in the Chocó as a very memorable experience during which I have learned so much about the incredibly difficult struggle to bring peace to this beautiful country. I will not forget the hospitality and openness of these people living under such extreme conditions. Despite all the horror experienced, they have not lost their smile, joy and hope. By means of this thesis, I hope to illustrate the daily struggle of survival and strive for peace, although from an academic perspective.

However, this endeavor would not have been possible without the support of so many friends and acquaintances. I would like to thank in particular the members of the community La Unión Embera-Katío for their hospitality as well as Victor from Camizba for patiently explaining me the meaning of indigeness. I would also like to express my gratitude to the ONIC; Eli Mar and Luis Evelis in particular. Moreover, I shall not forget to thank my good friend Sara and her family in Bogotá for showing me the gentleness and big heart of Colombia. Of course, I thank all those who have advised me and commented my work throughout the past months. However, last but not least, I want to express my gratitude to my parents who have encouraged and supported me at all times.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

For decades, indigenous communities have suffered from the violent conflict taking place in Colombia. In particular during the past ten years, the consequences of the internal conflict have impaired seriously. The indigenous population finds itself confronted with threats, torture, assassinations, forced displacement and neglect on the part of state institutions. Although academic research has paid attention to the Colombian armed conflict, the oppression of indigenous communities and constant violation of their basic rights has only recently gained recognition. The intensification of the armed conflict during the last decade and the escalation of violence against the civilian population have prompted researchers, especially anthropologists to refer to the repression in Colombia as an act of “genocide” or “ethnocide” (Zuluaga and Jones 2006:55). The expansion of the armed conflict into the indigenous territories – especially by paramilitary groups in northern Colombia – deteriorated the situation dramatically as the presence of illegal armed groups puts the territorial and legal autonomy of the indigenous populations at risk.

Since many of the most economically valuable resources in Colombia are found in areas inhabited by indigenous populations, these territories have historically been object to multiple and continuing incursions. This extends from the initial land colonization by Spanish soldiers and missionaries to a variety of commercial enterprises (multinational companies, drug traffickers, etc.) and the state itself. Whereas at the time of the Spanish Conquest the indigenous population of Colombia numbered approximately ten million, today it amounts to no more than 800,000 (Hristov 2005:93). Nevertheless, over the past half-century, indigenous territories that were lost after the country’s independence have been successfully recovered, due to a combination of agency on the part of rural communities and the organizational capacity of indigenous groups. These lands cover approximately 30 million hectares, or 28 percent of the Colombian territory (Hristov 2005:93). The total number of hectares held by indigenous communities might seem impressive but most of it is not suitable for significant agricultural production. Nonetheless, as the dynamics of the Colombian armed conflict underwent significant changes during the past decades, the territories of the indigenous people have become increasingly vulnerable to actors outside their communities who seek to control them, often by violence and annihilation. As a result, indigenous communities carry a high

risk for violence generated by forces such as narco-traffickers, military forces, multinational corporations, guerrillas, or paramilitaries. Many areas are also threatened by infrastructure projects and resource extraction activities. However, Colombia has coevally seen different forms of indigenous resistance accompanied by – and essentially formed through – the elaboration of development proposals based on grass-roots opinions and self-defined needs of the indigenous communities. While the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by an armed uprising under the leadership of Manuel Quintín Lame, the process resulted eventually in the formation of the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC) as a coordinating body of the now the non-violent struggle of various indigenous groups. Consequently, the indigenous resistance has evolved into a particular form of non-violent civil resistance. This development, however, does not represent a coherent and stringent process but, rather is subject to a complex variety of dynamics essentially determined by the internal armed conflict. Furthermore, the intricacy of this conflict and the heterogeneity of the country itself make a region-sensitive approach inevitable, as a broad generalization would consequently lead to a misconception of the inhering conflict logic and the understanding of the resistance process.

### ***RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND ITS RELEVANCE IN A WIDER CONTEXT***

To avoid the dilemma of a simplified generalization, this thesis will focus on the Bajo Atrato region in the department of Chocó in order to develop, on the basis of a case study a theoretical construction of territorial and cultural resistance of the concerned indigenous communities as a potential peace-promoting grass-roots initiative. As will be explained in the third chapter, the department forms a very interesting study subject as its geo-strategic value plays an important role in the dynamics of the armed conflict. Furthermore, the Chocó is home to various resistance processes by indigenous, afro-descendent and peasant communities. Despite these particularities, the department has rarely been studied in regards to its indigenous population and therefore this thesis enters a new sphere of academic research in the region. As I will focus the investigation strictly on the non-violent resistance process which is accompanied by the development of a strong indigenous organizational structure, I chose to limit this thesis on a time span analyzed of about 25 years – commencing in 1982, the foundation year the ONIC. However, since the implied changes of the conflict logic are best

visible when the paramilitaries entered the stage in the department of Chocó in 1996 – special attention will be paid to the last ten years.

Furthermore, this thesis follows three specific objectives:

1. To illustrate the altering conflict logic of an essentially political conflict which evolved into an armed struggle, primarily based on economic interests.
2. To identify the value of indigenous territoriality and its significance as a pillar of indigenous identity and eventually indigenous resistance.
3. To conceptualize indigenous resistance as a particular form of civil resistance and a potential grass-root peace initiative.

Academic research on non-violent resistance in the midst of an armed conflict is of special importance, as it shifts the traditional perspective of ‘constructing’ peace as a responsibility of political leaders, high levels of government and institutions towards experiences of peace-building within communities – as a transformation from the inside out. The image of Colombia outside the country is primarily one of violence, drugs and alternatives to warfare. But as this thesis will illustrate with the case of the indigenous resistance process, Colombians have, especially in the last ten years generated a wide variety of creative and tenacious initiatives for peace and non-violent conflict resistance. Without any knowledge of the pacifist proposals of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, or Mandela, the communities have generated, appropriated, and fashioned peace initiatives stemming from their own needs. Yet, these initiatives are virtually unknown and have not received the deserved advertence. Especially as these peace initiatives are not necessarily permanent achievements, but ongoing processes and subject to the wider context of the conflict dynamics, an analysis of these determining and influencing factors is necessary in order to strengthen and sustain the initiatives. As indicated above, this thesis will concentrate on the disentanglement of the intricate conflict logic and its influence on the indigenous communities in the Bajo Atrato region and eventually present their resistance as a potential grass-root peace initiative.

## ***HYPOTHESIS***

My argument is based upon the hypothesis that the gradually dissolving political element of the conflict dynamics – substituted by economical interests – has led to the inclusion of the indigenous peoples into the logic of conflict and hence essentially influenced the evolvement of an indigenous resistance process based on a particular notion of territoriality. Through the development of a strong indigenous organizational structure, the resistance process has turned into a potential grass-root peace initiative. This hypothesis emanates from a critical conflict reading focused on the gradual advance of economic interests superior to political considerations. Based on this interpretation, I argue that the indigenous communities in the Bajo Atrato were included into the conflict logic of the armed actors, focused on the geo-strategic and immediate economic value of their territories and resources. Coevally, the communities have developed a particular form of non-violent civil resistance, not based on moral or ethical principles, but rather on the value of the very territories for indigenous culture and identity construction. This process of reaffirmation of indigenous identity and the struggle to preserve indigenous values and customs has been made possible through the development of a strong organizational structure, which has the potential to evolve into a true grass-roots peace initiative.

## ***METHODOLOGY***

In this thesis I pursue the case study approach to qualitative analysis, which aims at gathering comprehensive, systematic and in-depth information about a certain case of interest. This case of interest – or case unit – is represented by the indigenous communities of the Bajo Atrato<sup>1</sup> region in the department of Chocó. I will attempt to analyze the case unit in a holistic and context-sensitive manner. This involves also taking external factors, such as national and international politics and events, into account, while at the same time not losing the focus on the region. As I will concentrate my investigation on the identification of patterns influencing the studied case unit, it is important to pay special attention to context-sensitivity. Throughout my analysis, it will become obvious that the Colombian conflict differs in its characteristics

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<sup>1</sup> A map of the indigenous communities in the Bajo Atrato region can be found in annex 1.

according to the region under investigation and generalizations are hardly possible. Consequently, I need to examine the case unit always in a wider context – from the local to national and vice versa – thus ensuring context-sensitivity.

Instead of drawing data about the case unit only from one primary source (e.g. interviews, journals, or essays) a multiple-source approach has been chosen. As Patton (2002) emphasizes, this process of “bringing together” – or “triangulating” – multiple perspectives, methods, and sources of information adds texture, depths, and different insights to an analysis and eventually can enhance the validity or credibility of the results. Therefore, this thesis is based on semi-structured interviews carried out in the studied region as well as in the capital city of Bogotá. After spending some months in the country, I began to realize that – although a fundamental part of the Colombia history – the knowledge of the indigenous population inside the country is rather low. Furthermore, the country itself, as well as the societal structure, is centred in the capital city of Bogotá and most remote regions receive hardly any attention. The Chocó is a very good example of this neglect on the part of civil state institutions but at the same time, a department of great military and economic importance. This fact raised my interest and, despite various security concerns, I decided to travel for about two weeks in February 2007 to the region. The preparation of the trip was carried out in close collaboration with the ONIC. To ease my field work, I received a letter of recommendation from the organization, however, due to security concerns the true research subject could not be mentioned<sup>2</sup>. The official letter from the ONIC made the process of finding suitable interview partners much easier and in the end I was able to carry out eight interviews, between 20 minutes and one hour each. Some of the recorded material will be quoted directly in the thesis, however, some interlocutors opposed to the use of the recording equipment due to security concerns. In order to prevent partiality, the interviews and several more informal chats were carried out with representatives of the indigenous communities and their organizations, representatives of the NGO-sector and government institutions, as well as members of the military.<sup>3</sup> This wide spectrum of data is important, as it will enhance the credibility and impartiality of the thesis.

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<sup>2</sup> Instead I purportedly studied indigenous cultural practices

<sup>3</sup> A full list of the interview partners can be found in annex 2.

The objective of the interviews during my fieldwork in the department of Chocó was to identify the meaning, as well as the inherent values, of the resistance process. Further emphasis was placed on the role of the indigenous organizational structure as it was seen as a crucial element of resistance. The interview strategy consisted of a combined approach in order to provide more flexibility. A conversational strategy was used within an interview guide approach as it left room to explore certain subjects in greater depths, or even to pose questions about new areas of inquiry that were originally not anticipated. In general, standardized questions formed the early part of the interview evolving into a more conversational talk at later stages. However, especially during interviews with representatives of the indigenous communities in the Bajo Atrato, knowledge questions regarding historical events and their chronology posed a great difficulty as indigenous' perception of time is very different to a European understanding.<sup>4</sup>

During the field work, I stayed about five days in Riosucio which is the only city in the region and the only urban centre that can be reached over land. In Riosucio, I carried out several interviews and informal chats with members from Camizba, the Defensoría del Pueblo<sup>5</sup>, as well as representatives from Oxfam. I also spent several days in two out of 25 indigenous communities in the Bajo Atrato region, which is home to five different peoples (Embera, Katíos, Wounaan, Chamí and Tules). All of them live in remote jungle areas – only accessible through the rivers – and without electricity and other 'modern' technology. My arrival marked, for the majority of the approximately 200 community members the first contact with a foreigner.<sup>6</sup> Each of the five people in the studied region has its own native tongue and communication amongst them is only possible in Spanish. Hence, interviews were carried out in Spanish which made me and the interviewee use a *lingua franca* in order to communicate. Nevertheless, this fact included a practical difficulty during data collection and potential misconceptions during the evaluation process. Firstly, interviews were carried out in

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<sup>4</sup> For example, "one day" consists of 12 hours and not 24, because the other 12 hours are night and not day.

<sup>5</sup> Created by the 1991 Constitution, the *defensoría del pueblo* (defender of the people) functions as an oversight institution and comparable to the European ombudsman.

<sup>6</sup> That I had come by plane from the other side of the world made hardly any sense to them. In order to comprehend the distance, I was asked to 'translate' my travel time and calculate how much time I would have needed in one of the indigenous kayaks to reach the community. Only after we 'agreed' that it would have taken at least four months to reach Germany in one of these boats, they acknowledged that I came from far away.

the majority with men, because women hardly speak any Spanish and secondly, the use of a *lingua franca* in interviews can lead to misinterpretations of certain terminologies due to different connotations in each language. Bearing this challenge in mind, I will interpret cultural and language sensitive terms – such as tradition, culture, territory, etc. – not solely on the basis of the interviews but alongside indigenous writings, such as brochures and academic literature.

Regarding the evaluation of academic literature and documents (e.g. brochures of self-presentation, official denunciations, declarations and statements by the indigenous communities and their organizations as well as reports by NGOs, and state institutions) I have aimed at a well-balanced selection, although English literature on the chosen case unit is rare. As mentioned above, the resistance processes have received only little attention in Colombia and even less abroad. The Colombian professor Esperanza Hernández Delgado is one of the few academics who have devoted their research to this topic. Her volumes published over the past ten years provide an excellent overview of the different forms of resistance by the indigenous, afro-descendent and *campesino* communities. However, while the latter two – especially in the framework of the *peace communities* – have received considerable advertence<sup>7</sup>, indigenous resistance processes remain, in general, unnoticed or solely focused on the department of Cauca. Although the Cauca is home to the first and today most known indigenous resistance process, examples of indigenous resistance also evolved in other regions of Colombia.

## ***ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND RESEARCH ETHICS***

Case study data analysis generally involves an iterative, spiraling, or cyclical process that proceeds from more general to more specific observations (Palys 1997; Silverman 2000; Yin 1994). In this case, data analysis began informally during interviews and observations in

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<sup>7</sup> In particular the *Comunidad de Paz de San José, Apartadó*, which has received international peace prizes and was also nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize 2007. The community was formed 10 years ago by mainly afro-descendent peasants. As *neutral* communities – meaning no collaboration with any, legally or illegally, armed actor – peace communities have received considerable support by the Colombian Church, as well as international NGOs.

the framework of field work carried out and continued during pre-writing process when recurring themes, patterns, and categories became evident. The subsequent discussion of the thesis will try to link these themes explicitly to larger theoretical and practical issues although a generalization is – as in most case studies – not appropriate or desirable. As Yin (1994) argues, data may be analyzed and interpreted through a variety of ideological lenses (e.g. positivist, poststructuralist, feminist, or critical). Despite the attempt to follow a critical and objective data collection and interpretation, a variety of challenges are posed to the researcher focusing on developing countries and indigenous populations in particular. The ESRC Research Ethics Framework Project has identified a number of special considerations for social science research in developing countries and contexts of which three are of particular importance in the framework of the thesis at hand (Brown et al. 2004:1):

- Greater differences in power between researcher and the researched are more likely to give rise to problems of bias, etc.
- The interpretation and analysis of findings consistently raise issues of ethnocentrism and elitism
- Vulnerable populations are poorly placed to exercise their right to choose and give consent to participation in research

As the project emphasizes,

“research always involves complex questions of identity and identification around ethnicity, education, class, gender and will necessarily have influence on the data generated. The greater these differences, the more like it is that findings will reflect artifactual considerations of the relationship between researcher and the researched” (Brown et al. 2004:6).

The authors continue that this might result in what, in social science parlance is commonly described as ‘positive bias’ or ‘extreme’ response styles. On the other hand, tensions in research relationship can give rise to hostile antagonism producing negative bias and a disinclination to collaborate with research.

In regards to researching indigenous communities the researcher’s sensitivity is fundamental. Studies on indigenous populations have raised much criticism and have been labeled as useless and unethical. As Judith Rae point out in her report:

“The majority of research on Indigenous communities fails to be conducted in partnership with Indigenous communities. The result is weaker research – as discussed, Indigenous peoples may see their history, reality and needs differently than outsiders – and a violation of Indigenous peoples’ collective intellectual property rights” (Rae 2006:89).

Blackstock and Bennett wrote about this problem from their perspective within a Canadian Indigenous peoples’ organization:

“Research has long been the domain of the ‘privileged Westerner’, the ‘elite scientist.’ Research has been conducted [...] by ‘outsiders,’ ‘experts,’ ‘authorities,’ who have all too often dissected, labelled, dehumanized Indigenous peoples while acting as helpers in the colonial dispossession of Indigenous land and cultural heritage. Volumes of research and data and theory on Aboriginal people in Canada have been generated, but there is relatively little research that Aboriginal peoples have been able to determine for themselves” (Blackstock and Bennet 2002:37).

In order to cope with these challenges and give considerations to these ethical principles, the research has been designed and carried out in close cooperation with indigenous organizations. The members of the visited communities voted upon arrival, in a democratic decision, whether to grant me access to the communities or not. Nevertheless, certain questions arise when researching indigenous communities. How does being a European influence the research process? Are community members more disposed to talk about their experiences than when speaking to a Colombian or another indigenous person? What are the expectations on the part of the indigenous communities when being visited by an outsider?

During my preparation process, I was told that being a foreigner should make the research process easier since community members will not fear I could be a member of the paramilitaries. But what about raising hopes that my research could have positive effects on the communities?<sup>8</sup> As common in field work, it is always difficult to avoid creating certain hopes and expectations. In order to address this problematic, I was open about the objectives of my research and the improbability that this kind of research will trigger imminent help and improvements. Bearing all these challenges and difficulties in mind, it is hoped that the presented research has been able to reduce the negatively influencing aspects to a minimum and follow a sensitive approach to qualitative social research on indigenous communities.

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<sup>8</sup> Such as finding and contacting international NGOs or money sources for development projects within the communities.

## **REPRESENTATIVITY OF THE DATA**

The members of the indigenous communities interviewed were between 32 and 64 years old and had lived their entire life in the region. All of the interview partners were old enough to have particular memories of the time-span studied. However, because indigenous women speak, in general, very few Spanish, all of the indigenous interviewees are men.

Nevertheless, as the main objective of the interviews was to hear narratives and stories about personal experiences, the willingness to talk about and divulge these memories was much more important than trying to collect a 'representative sample'. Because of the small amount of interviews, I focused my selection of the respondents on 'key informants'. I selected current members of the indigenous authorities as well as persons that had long experiences in working with the organizations. In order to also attain an 'outside perspective', non-indigenous people were interviewed as well. Still, the research should – and can not – be generalized, but rather should be considered as one possible point of view to understand the phenomenon under research.

Furthermore, Patton (1990) argues that the researcher – as the instrument – should include information about her or himself in order to improve the credibility of the investigation. Hence, I have explained my motivation and my background as a student of development and international cooperation in the preface of this thesis.

## ***STRUCTURE***

The thesis at hand is divided into six chapters, plus references and annex. The second chapter provides a discussion on the Colombian conflict by looking first at the used terminology to define the violence and continues to contextualize the armed conflict from a histo-political perspective. Furthermore, an analysis of the 'political' element of the conflict is presented followed by an overview of the conflict in a nutshell. On this account, this chapter is meant to serve as an introduction into the history of violence in Colombia and provide basic background information on the emergence and changing objectives of the respective armed actors. Furthermore, the reader is introduced to the divers and altering conflict logic which is a

major determinant for the conflicting resistance process as well as the ‘political’ of the Colombian conflict based on an analysis of the writings of Richani (2002) and Villa and Houghton (2005).

In the third chapter, I will look at the Bajo Atrato as a region of great geo-strategic importance and at the same time home to resistance processes by indigenous, afro-descendants and *campesino* communities. I will present the particular dynamic of the violence in the region and its severe consequences for the indigenous populations. The Bajo Atrato is a worthy case unit as it illustrates very well the superiority of economic interests on the part of all armed actors as well as the territorialization of the conflict – in particular after the arrival of the paramilitary groups to the region in 1996.

When interpreting indigenous resistance through a framework of civil resistance and the concept of non-violent action, as will be done in this thesis, a short review of these theories is necessary. Therefore, chapter four provides more of a theoretical discussion on civil resistance and the meaning of indigenosity by pursuing a number of specific questions that will provide a comprehensive and critical discussion. I aim to illustrate that the well known thoughts of Michael Randle on civil resistance as well as Gandhi’s and Martin Luther King’s underlying theories on non-violence, still need further enhancement to be applicable in the Colombian context. The chapter is meant to provide theoretical understanding of the presented processes and mechanisms in the framework and I shall eventually pinpoint indigenous territorial and cultural resistance as a particular form of resistance strategies.

In an attempt to merge the theoretical theories with empirical findings, chapter five conceptualizes indigenous territorial and cultural resistance based on a particular concept of territory and implemented through the development of an organizational structure on different levels. Hereby, the chapter pays special attention to the notion and development of a concept of indigenous territory as source of indigenous identity construction and therefore crucial for the evolution of the resistance process. Furthermore I will illustrate some of the strategies and mechanism of this indigenous resistance. In my conclusion I shall argue that the territorialization of the conflict can be seen as a critical determinant for the resistance’s development as a potential grass-roots peace initiative and hereby finally go beyond the local scope and interpret the resistance process in the wider context of development studies.

## **2 CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE INTERNAL ARMED CONFLICT – A REGIONAL, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

### ***CONFLICT TERMINOLOGY***

Riikka Kuusisto (1999) points out the necessity to construct and order events, actors and things in our human language before they become events, actors and things. Seldom do “facts speak for themselves” but instead they need to be given a name and a meaning in order to enable us to understand. We are only able to comprehend our world within “the framework of symbolically composed meaning” (Kuusisto 1999). Through discourses we shape our reality which is not just waiting there to be referred to. Language enables us to define not only our acts, but also our being. This ‘creative’ act of terming or naming is of special importance to political science. Indeed, Kari Palonen claims that naming is a true political act by creating realities through definitions (Palonen 1997). He advocates the “reading of the political” in terms as there is always the possibility for a different terminology which leads to a different political understanding and reality construction. Following the thoughts of Kuusisto, the most important action of modern politics is the struggle for symbolic power: “the winners at a given time get to impose their words, terms and language on the surrounding world [...]” (Kuusisto 1999:26). Rhetoric and reality can therefore not be distinguished as both are bound up with one another. Rather, rhetoric should be seen as constantly changing way of conceptualizing and interpreting our surrounding. Hence, concepts and conventions are all constructed and political and moreover only one amongst many possibilities to define a dynamic reality. That terminologies are being changed and hereby create different policy concepts will become particularly evident in the rhetoric shift by current president Uribe.

But already when reviewing the literature on the conflict in Colombia, a widespread controversy regarding its naming becomes apparent. The variety ranges from ‘war’ or ‘civil war’ to ‘armed (internal) conflict’ or even ‘terrorism’. The term ‘civil war’ as a political terminology to define the conflict – although still used by some authors of popular scientific

literature and especially non-Spanish media outside of Colombia<sup>9</sup> – is, in general, rejected. It can be argued that the Colombian society, as a whole, has not noticeably and massively divided into organized supports of either the insurgents or the government, and therefore, the terms ‘civil war’ or ‘civil conflict’ are not appropriate.

In 2002, then-President Pastrana as well as certain intellectuals and international organizations, referred – and continuously do so – to the conflict as a “war against civilians” or a “war against civil society” (Embassy 2006). This rhetoric already implies the degeneration of a conflict – as explained later in this chapter – to be considered increasingly devoid of any political or social meaning.

Until the September, 11 2001 attacks, President Pastrana desisted in labelling the guerrilla group FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*<sup>10</sup>) as terrorists but quickly adopted that terminology when ending the peace process with the FARC in 2002. In his rhetoric he followed the United States, which had included the FARC on the ‘List of Terrorist Groups’ shortly after the attacks (U.S. Department 2005). The controversy and complexity over the terminology increased when current President Álvaro Uribe argued that he considers the Colombian conflict to be neither an armed conflict nor a civil war, rejecting both labels and instead focusing on what he calls the ‘terrorist threat’ (Kirk 2004). Hereby, President Uribe introduced a new understanding for the decade-old internal armed dispute in the framework of the newly promoted expression of a ‘global war on terrorism’. As Kirk (2004:23) points out, the objectives of the application of the terminology are obvious: “it allows Colombia to reposition its conflict as worthy of international attention and, with it, financial and military support for government efforts to combat the violence.”

This position has raised much criticism inside and outside of the country and is being rejected by most national and international media as well as organizations. Because besides assuring the government significant financial aid by the U.S., it also influences the potential policies since labelling the guerrillas as terrorists eliminates the possibility of solving the

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<sup>9</sup> Main news agencies such as BBC, CNN and also the German ‘Deutsche Welle’ which is also broadcasting in English and Spanish continuously refer to “civil war” when describing the Colombian conflict. See as an example:

BBC: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4675485.stm>

CNN: <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2000/colombia.noframes/story/reports/overview/>

Deutsche Welle: <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,2372844,00.html>

<sup>10</sup> Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia

conflict on the negotiating table. In this case, rhetoric is thus not only used to construct and politically define a 'reality' but also to justify the government's military strategy towards the guerrilla. However, the question arises to what extent this rhetoric shift follows political populism and/or international pressure. Therefore, I chose to use in the framework of this thesis the terminology 'armed (internal) conflict' – also widely used in academic circles<sup>11</sup> –, as I am convinced that neither the criteria for a 'civil war' are fulfilled, nor should academic work follow populist rhetoric.

During the development of the conflict not only its terminology changed, but also the conflict's perception altered according to the international conceptions of world politics. While it was interpreted during the 60s and 70s by external actors and the government under the framework of the Cold War and the collision of the western capitalistic thinking with communist ideologies, the perception has changed under the backdrop of the September 11 attacks. The steady renunciation from political ideas by the insurgents and the increasing importance of finances from drug trafficking alongside the political change caused by the terrorist attacks in the United States, have given floor to a new interpretation of the conflict. Depending on the political point of view, the guerrilla can be seen as an armed actor with political ideologies or, on the other hand, as an illegal armed group with criminal and terrorist motivation. Apart from the fact that the chosen terminology involves the question of legitimacy of violence as well as the strategies for its abatement, it moreover shows the complexity of the conflict. Analyzing the conflict in Colombia requires a region-sensitive approach that will accordingly bring forward different chains of causation and constellations of actors. However, those developments are not new, but rather have their roots deep in the history of the country. Kurtenbach (2004) argues that in order to provide a comprehensive reflection of the conflict dynamics, a well-grounded historic conflict analysis is necessary which can not be reduced only to cyclical aspects of the war or its symptoms. Following Kurtenbach's arguments, I will provide a comprehensive overview on the development of the conflict by taking into account the element of consistency and also the dynamics causing the conflict. Hereby, a regional perspective has to give consideration to the national and international context as well in order to provide a holistic case study.

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<sup>11</sup> Almost all academic literature referred to in the framework of this study follows this terminology.

## ***HISTORICAL OVERVIEW***

### **CONQUEST AND COLONISATION – THE BEGINNING OF CONTINUOUS CONFLICTS AND DISPUTES**

In 1563, the region called Chocó was an area inhabited at first contact by a multiplicity of indigenous groups, a native population that was, at least initially, for the most part fiercely hostile to outsiders (Williams 2004:1). But the region along the pacific coast contained gold, which ensured that the Chocó was did not experience the neglect associated with other similarly inaccessible regions of the empire. Instead, the region suffered from repeated Spanish incursions. From the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, armed expeditions of conquest, peaceful penetrations by secular priests and prospective settlers as well as Jesuits and Franciscan missionaries all attempted – with varying degrees of success – to extend Spanish control over the area. Colonization of the Chocó proved, however, to be a difficult and lengthy undertaking for the Spaniards. Each expedition of exploration and conquest launched from the Pacific coastal stretch and the New Granadan interior between 1510 and 1570 was violently resisted and successfully repulsed by the indigenous population. More than a century lapsed between the first sustained settlement, which took place between 1573 and 1593, and effective domination achieved in 1693 (Williams 2004). Thereafter, the Chocó was converted into a major mining district. However, colonization led neither to large-scale Spanish settlement and development, nor to the conversion of native peoples to the Christian faith.

Despite episodes of rebellion, the desire to trade – “to exchange local resources and labor for tools, cloth, and trinkets of various kinds” – led the indigenous people into an increasingly frequent, and often peaceful, relationship with Spaniards inside and outside the Chocó (Williams 2004:4). However, when the presence by the Spaniards increased, the balance between natives and Europeans shifted in favor of the latter. By the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Spaniards effectively dominated the Chocó. Instead of succumbing to the European pressures, the indigenous communities devised strategies to resist. Many indigenous reconstituted their communities in territories distant from and still largely unknown to Europeans. Where fighting was not a viable option, the indigenous learned to use Spanish

legal channels to defend resources essential to survival and to protect the interests of the indigenous communities (Williams 2004). “Spanish conquest was a biological and cultural disaster for many native peoples”, Guy and Thomas point out, “but those who survived manipulated the symbols, material items, and even the legal system of the conquerors to protect their communities and pursue their own goals within the empire” (Guy and Thomas 1998:13).

Right from the beginning of Conquest and Colonization, several rebel movements against the Spanish rule emerged. However, most of them were either crushed or remained not powerful enough to change the overall situation. In 1810, a rebellion under the leadership of Simón Bolívar sought outright independence from Spain and finally succeeded in 1819. The territory of the ‘Viceroyalty of New Granada’ became the ‘Republic of Greater Colombia’ organized as a Confederation along Ecuador and Venezuela (Panama was part of Colombia). In the following years, political and territorial disputes lead to the succession of Venezuela and Quito (nowadays Ecuador) in 1830.

After a two year civil war in 1863, the ‘United States of Colombia’ was created, which lasted until 1886, when the country was named ‘Republic of Colombia’. In the following years, internal divisions between the bipartisan political forces occasionally erupted into very bloody civil wars. The most significant was the Thousand Days civil war (1899 - 1902) which led – due to severe interests of the U.S. in the Panama Canal construction and its control – to the separation of the Department of Panama and the establishment of it as a nation in 1903. For the next forty years, Colombia was to experience a relative degree of political stability.

## **THE 1950s, 60s, 70s - ‘LA VIOLENCIA’ AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE GUERRILLA GROUPS**

Although many academics set the beginning of the current conflict in Colombia in the year 1966 – the foundation year of the biggest guerrilla group FARC<sup>12</sup> – the origin of the continuous internal conflict can be traced back to the bloody violence that marked, in 1948,

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<sup>12</sup> A tabular presentation of the conflict actors can be found in annex 3.

the end of the period of peace and political stability. This year *Bogotazo*<sup>13</sup> – an outburst of urban riot killing in the capital city of Bogotá – provoked by the assassination of the presidential candidate Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, took the lives of more than 4000 people. The triggered violence continued during the following ten years and also spread to rural areas. As a clash between the Colombian Liberal Party and the Colombian Conservative Party – the period became to be known in history as ‘*La Violencia*’ (The Violence) in which more than 200,000 people lost their lives (Zelik and Azzellini 1999). To find a solution to the decade of brutal violence, the two main parties – Conservatives and Liberals – created in 1958 an exclusively bipartisan political alternation system, known as the *Frente Nacional* (National Front) which remained in effect until 1974.

During ‘*La Violencia*’, the Colombian Communist Party together with liberal and radical peasants founded so called *repúblicas independientes* (independent republics) inside the country. In 1964, the Colombian army seized the *República de Marquetalia*. The survivors led by the dwellers Manuel Marulanda and Jacobo Arenas founded on July, 20 of the same year the guerrilla organization *Bloque Sur*. Two years later, in 1966, the *Bloque Sur* merged with the FARC and officially became the military arm of the Colombian Communist Party (Molano 2000). The FARC defined itself as a peasant self defense group, against squires and the military, while aiming for revolutionary land reform. Up until today, the FARC sees itself as a Marxist, Leninist and Bolivarianist movement. (Livingstone 2004). In addition to the foundation of the FARC, also various independent guerrilla groups with some indigenous members emerged in the 1970s. As the indigenous communities came under severe pressure, due to an influx of displaced peasants fleeing from political violence, an increasing amount of indigenous people joined these groups. Furthermore, the period was characterized by the increasing agricultural cultivation and the promoted colonization by peasants from other region. In an effort to cope with these threats, the indigenous people themselves formed an armed group called “*Quintín Lame*<sup>14</sup>”, which was finally re-assimilated into civilian life through an agreement signed with the government in 1991 (OAS 1999). Other indigenous integrated in peasant mobilizations, which for about a decade viewed the recovery of lands as

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<sup>13</sup> Microsoft Encarta Premium Edition 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Named after *Manuel Quintín Lame Chantre* who was an indigenous rebel from the early 20th century who tried to conform an independent indigenous republic.

a political alternative. The motivation was based on the recovery of the original *resguardos* lost through law 11 of 1821<sup>15</sup> or simply on the satisfaction of alimentation needs. In this respect, the indigenous population took advantage of the increasing guerrilla fighting to preserve the dynamics of expansion and recovery of indigenous territories.

The second largest group, the ELN (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*<sup>16</sup>), has its origin in the student protest movements of the mid 1960s and tends to follow a small group of charismatic leaders, including Camilo Torres Restrepo. In the first phase of the conflict, the guerrilla operated primarily in rural and peripheral regions without state presence. As Kurtenbach (2004) points out in her analysis, the existence of the guerrilla stabilized, as opposed to threatened, the political system. Although the United States was supporting the guerrilla movements, international interest was low, if not almost inexistent; in addition, none of the warring parties did receive any considerable financial support.

## **THE 80S: INTEGRATION OF THE STRENGTHENED GUERRILLA INTO THE POLITICAL SYSTEM FAILS**

After a period of expansion of the guerrilla activities during the 1970s and a repressive policy by then-president Turbay Ayala (1978-82), the armed fight of the guerrilla had gained wide acceptance amongst the population. This was due to the work of the civil opposition as well as symbolic actions of the M-19 (*Movimiento 19 de Abril*<sup>17</sup>) which brought the conflict to the awareness of the Colombian and international public.<sup>18</sup> The M-19 traced its origins to the allegedly fraudulent presidential elections of April 19, 1970 (Zelik and Azzellini 1999). During the elections, the National Popular Alliance (ANAPO) of former military dictator

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<sup>15</sup> Which ordered the dispartment of *resguardos* as part of paternalistic civilizing of the indigenous savages.

<sup>16</sup> National Liberation Army

<sup>17</sup> 19th of April Movement

<sup>18</sup> Kurtenbach mentions in this regard the theft of one Simón Bolívar's swords from a museum, an event which was used by the group in order to symbolize what they termed as a civilian uprising against a regime perceived as unjust. The group is also recognized for other high profile activities, such as the Dominican embassy siege. The guerrillas stormed the Dominican Republic's embassy during a cocktail party on February 27, 1980. They took the largest recorded number of diplomats held hostage to date in Colombia, which accounted for 14 ambassadors, including the United States'. Eventually, after tense negotiations with the government of Julio César Turbay Ayala, the hostages were peacefully released and the hostage takers were allowed to leave the country for exile into Cuba.

Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, was denied an electoral victory. The ideology of the M-19 was a mixture of populism and nationalistic revolutionary socialism. By mid 1985, the M-19 was after the FARC the largest guerrilla group in Colombia, when the number of active members was estimated at between 1,500 and 2,000, including a more noticeable urban presence (Microsoft 2004).

When looking at the department Chocó, this period marks also the beginning of guerrilla's violence against the indigenous communities. At the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, the guerrilla organizations FARC, ELN, EPL<sup>19</sup>, and ERG<sup>20</sup> used the Chocó as a strategic territory for arms and troops supplies and also as a sector for refuge (Tempranas 2005). The FARC was the first group which made use of the area's geography as a territory with easy access to the two oceans, but at the same uncountable hiding places in the jungle. The examples of the FARC's Fronts 5 and 34 were followed quickly by the much smaller guerrilla groups ELN, EPL and ERG. The "peace adviser" of the departmental government of the Chocó, Ventura Díaz, affirms that the guerrilla groups have for years used the Chocó as a territory for replenishment of weapons, as hideouts during combat times, and as refuge for recreation (Defensoría 2005).

Meanwhile, the country saw the first period of negotiations with the insurgents. However, the talks, led by then President Balisario Betancur (1982-86), were not successful and only resulted in further expansion and an increase of fighting (Fischer 2006; Kurtenbach 2004). The end of the talks marked a bloody fight inside the Colombian Palace of Justice. On November 6, 1985 the M-19 stormed the building and took the Supreme Court magistrates hostage. The operation ended with 120 deaths – amongst them 12 Supreme Court Judges and most of the guerrilla members – as result of the military's reaction (Livingstone 2004:34).

In 1985, members of the FARC as well as members of the Colombian Communist Party (PCC) founded the political arm of the guerrilla organization named Unión Patriótica (UP)<sup>21</sup>. Almost a decade later, towards the early 1990s, the PCC ended its affiliation with the

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<sup>19</sup> *Ejército Popular de Liberación* – Popular Liberation Army

<sup>20</sup> *Ejército Revolucionario Guevarista* – Guevarist Revolutionary Army

<sup>21</sup> "The Patriotic Union or UP (In Spanish, *Unión Patriótica*), was a leftist Colombian political party founded by the FARC in 1985, as part of the peace negotiations that the guerrillas held with the Belisario Betancur administration. The party was subject to political violence from drug lords, paramilitaries and rogue military

FARC, and the FARC's current political structure became a separate body, known as the Clandestine Colombian Communist Party. During the 1980s, the UP's ideology was openly communist and Marxist, but the main platform initially consisted of promoting itself as a legal and democratic alternative to the two main Colombian political parties. By the end of the 1980s, the UP had become the fourth most voted party in Colombia gaining several mayoralties (direct popular election of mayors was introduced that same year). However, the success was short-lived as violence against party members increased and extinguished the party little by little (Zelik and Azzellini 1999).

At the same time, the drug cartels entered the stage of conflict. While the number of paramilitary groups rose steadily also the violence continuously destabilized the political system. Many researchers insist, that access to new financial resources – especially cocaine, protection money as well as diverted funds from public budgets at local levels – promoted the insurgents upsurge (amongst others Eaton 2005; Kurtenbach 2004). Kurtenbach further points out that the peace initiatives of the government of Betancur have indeed fostered the conflict. Which seems paradoxical is caused by the decentralization process - initially aimed at increasing political participation at the local level and thereby depriving the support of the violence within the society. Despite these good intentions and various real advancements, the process gave the armed groups access to new financial sources. Especially the financial transfers from the central government to its local institutions have transformed these local governments to lucrative sources of income to armed groups. As the illegal actors followed a policy of territorial control also violence increased due to the new concept of 'armed clientelism' defined by Rangel as the "private appropriation of public goods through violence or the threat of violence" (Rangel 1997:33). In his essay called "Armed Clientelism: How Decentralization Complicated Colombia's Civil War", Kent Eaton argues "that decentralization in fact financed the expansion of armed clientelism by illegal groups on both the left and right" (Eaton 2005:1). He blames the weakness of the police in much of the national territory for the guerrillas' and paramilitaries' potential to use decentralized resources to destabilize the state. This fact led eventually to the limitation of the state's monopoly on the

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agents during the mid-1980s (3000-4000 party members and functionaries were killed), leading to its eventual decline and virtual disappearance" [Microsoft Encarta Premium Edition 2004.].

use of force. Following Eaton, this effect has created “parallel states on the left and right” (Eaton 2005:1). The decentralization process can be used to explain the surprising gains by the two main guerrilla groups in the mid to late 1990s by quickly applying the strategy of controlling subnational offices. Their policy has changed from a “fight for land reform” (*lucha por tierra*) during the Cold War-era to the more successful “fight for territory” (*lucha por el territorio*) (Cubides 1999:162). Coevally, the constituent assembly elaborated a new constitution which was put in force in 1991, giving more room to civic participation but also setting the guidelines for decentralization process which – as illustrated earlier – contributed eventually to the increase of violence.

### **THE 90S: INTENSIFICATION OF THE CONFLICT THROUGH DRUG CARTELS AND PARAMILITARY GROUPS**

During the 1990s, the FARC continued to grow in wealth from both kidnapping and drug related activities as well as misusing local funds. In its intensified military attacks, the FARC’s aspiration for hegemony amongst the insurgents became evident (Fischer 2005). The guerrilla protected many of the coca growers from eradication campaigns and allowed them to grow and commercialize coca in exchange for a “tax” – either in money or in crops. As a result, the FARC managed to increase its capacities by training more fighters and could therefore carry out concentrated attacks in a novel and mostly unexpected way (Livingstone 2004).

Because the Colombian army could not provide any convincing strategy against the newly escalated violence, new paramilitary groups emerged. They represented mainly the interests of the middle and big landowners as well as drug lords. With the criminal and violent methods they exercised – comparable to the guerrilla – power at the local level (Fischer 2006:201) and especially the violence of the merging groups that formed the AUC (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*)<sup>22</sup> began to encroach upon the economy as well. Throughout the country paramilitary activities increased: both illegally as well as legally. The

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<sup>22</sup> United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia

creation of the neighborhood watch group CONVIVIR<sup>23</sup> which was officially authorized by Congress and the administration of President Samper turned out to be a quasi legal organization for paramilitary members. The Colombian Constitutional Court was forced to intervene to demand stricter oversight and the prohibition of military weapons for the groups, which were given to them by the armed forces. However, many members refused to hand in their weapons which led to the revocation of their licences and, according to Human Rights Watch (HRW 1998), many of them joined in creating the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia. It should be noted that then-governor of Antioquia and current president of Colombia, Álvaro Uribe, gained notoriety for his open support and promotion of the CONVIVIR at the time.

Founded as an umbrella organization, the AUC declared as its official goal the military defeat of the FARC and ELN as well as the filling of the power vacuum in big parts of Colombia (Zelik and Azzellini 1999:46). However, the fight was also directed against parts of the civil population that they believed to be the social basis of the guerrilla groups. The AUC is blamed for many massacres in Colombia – such as the July 1997 operation against the village of Maripipán, Meta, which left between 30 and 49 civilians dead (Amnesty International 2002). Very often human rights organization were able to collect information leading to the conclusion that the Colombian armed forces or the police had been either passively permitting these acts, or directly collaborated in executions (HRW 1998).

Kurtenbach (2005) connects the emergence of the paramilitary groups closely to the lacking monopoly of use of force on the part of the Colombian state and the consequently created parallel structures. She further differentiates the paramilitary groups that emerged in rural and urban areas. In rural areas, the paramilitary groups were formed by regional elites as a consequence of the decentralization which endangered their supremacy and therefore created armed groups to fight the opposition. In the city they emerged from youth gangs controlling whole quarters with ties to petty and organized crime (Kurtenbach 2005:15). In regions with

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<sup>23</sup> CONVIVIR (*Spanish for 'to coexist'*) was a national program of cooperative neighbourhood watch groups created by a February 11, 1994 decree of Colombia's Ministry of Defense and a law passed in the Colombian Congress, in response to growing guerrilla activity. Reports argued that some CONVIVIR groups achieved results in providing security to communities and intelligence coordination to military forces, but apparently numerous members committed abuses against civilians, without a serious oversight over their operations and organization. [Microsoft Encarta Premium Edition 2004.]

strong guerrilla presence the motivation goes to back to – as described earlier – the idea of ‘self-defence’ with the central goal of expulsion of guerrilla groups. During the 1990s, the paramilitary groups underwent a process of centralization and politisation with a self-conception as a ‘self-defence group’ not in opposition to the state or the political system as a whole. Nevertheless, all groups have proven ties with parts of the military (Kurtenbach 2005:16).

Turing again to the department of Chocó in the framework of this case study, the arrival of the paramilitary groups to the Bajo Atrato had severe consequences for the civilian population. In December 1996, the paramilitary *Bloc Élmer Cárdenas*, under the command of Alfredo Alemán and Hermógenes Maza and part of the newly founded AUC, started an offensive to gain control over the Bajo Atrato region. After its arrival to and consolidation inside the city of Riosucio, the group made its way up the river deeper into the department. The civilian population of the Bajo Atrato region found itself now in the middle of an armed dispute over a region of great strategic importance for the protagonists of the conflict. The forced displacement of the region’s inhabitants, that came along with the intensification of the armed conflict, has been one of the most dramatic consequences in putting the Chocó in 2002 amongst the four departments most affected by the phenomena (Observatorio 2003). Increasingly, civilians became victims of massacres, selective assassinations, kidnappings, torture, as well as forced disappearances and displacement. The national and international aid agencies registered hundreds of thousands internally displaced people that had to flee to the urban centres. The UNHCR estimates that from 1985 to 2003 about 2 Million people were internally displaced. More than 50% of them were women and about 43% under the age of 18 (UNHCR 2005). However, it should be noted that the numbers published by NGOs are considerably higher while official numbers from the government are much lower.

When looking at the conflict from this regional perspective it becomes clear that the Colombian internal conflict, as many other internal wars in the world, has entered into a process in which the victims of the violence are mainly to be found amongst the civil

population and not the warring parties.<sup>24</sup> This fact stands in contrast to the classic concept of war in which the confrontation is carried out between the warring parties that occupy the central sphere in the evolution of the conflict. This concept supposes confrontations between the actors and a repetition of the fighting with the aim to extinguish or paralyze the enemy to win the conflict. However, during the last 50 years these characteristics changed and the civil population, as backing of the economy, policy, moral and logistics, has been converted into serving, at same time, as mean and objective of the armed confrontation. The civil population has become of military worth for the warring parties.<sup>25</sup> In conflicts that follow this logic of war, as with the case in Chocó, the civilians are being attacked and threatened as form of gaining local power and to weaken the enemy (Observatorio 2003).

### **THE NEW MILLENNIUM: STRONG HOPES FOR PEACE ARE BEING DISAPPOINTED**

Once again, hopes were high among the population when Pastrana took office in 1998. Colombians hoped for an ending to the economic crisis and armed conflict. These hopes for a peaceful solution to the conflict were also created by footage that appeared after the first round of presidential elections showing presidential candidate Pastrana with FARC's main leader Manuel Marulanda. To hold peace talks, Pastrana began to withdraw troops and created a demilitarized zone in Caguán – as big as Switzerland – shortly after winning the elections. To the surprise of many experts, the president did not make a ceasefire a precondition (Diehl and Helfrich-Bernal 2001; Fischer 2006). Under the eyes of many international and national media representatives, talks began at the beginning of the year 2000. The FARC demanded extensive reforms relating the economy, society and state without making advances to the government. Fisher argues that the FARC didn't see any need to admit or recompense for any mistakes, least of all human rights breaches (Fischer 2005:93). Instead, the fighting continued outside of the demilitarized zone and inside the FARC took over the control and continued their illicit activities. Two years later in February 2002, Pastrana broke up the deadlocked talks after the FARC kidnapped a congressman and other politicians and sent immediately troops back into

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<sup>24</sup> For further reading on the theory see: Kaldor, Mary. 2001. *Las nuevas guerras. Violencia organizada en la era global*. Barcelona: Tusquets Editors.

<sup>25</sup> See also: Lair, Eric. 2003. Reflexiones acerca del terror en los escenarios de la guerra interna. *Revista de Estudios Sociales* (Nº 15):88-108.

the zone. For the time being, this marked the end to negotiations with the FARC and resulted once again in a policy of confrontation and war against the guerrilla.

In the mean time, the entrance of the paramilitary in the Bajo Atrato started a progressive wave of brutal violence that ran through the region and eventually the whole Chocó. The paramilitary offensive was followed by a military operation of the Colombian armed forces which arrested various members of the municipal administration accused of being *guerrilleros* or collaborating with their armed structures. Many of the community leaders disappeared or had to leave the region in order to protect their lives.

As could be observed in the Chocó, the conflict strategies of the illegal armed actors aiming at the civilian population in combination with the arrest of various community members by the Colombian authorities resulted in the impairment of the grass-root organizations which had severe consequences at the moment of intensification of the violence. Without being able to organize themselves or call for assistance, massive displacement among the communities – especially afro-descendants – was the result. Under the eyes of the civil and military authorities a series of murders and forced displacement started to strike the Bajo Atrato.

On January 9 in 1997, the FARC tried to recapture the control of the urban centre of Riosucio. This attempt was pushed back by a joint action of Colombian armed forces and the paramilitaries. During January and February, the 17th Brigade of the Colombian Armed Forces and the Air Force initiated the operation “Genesis” to defeat the guerrilla blocs of the FARC. However, “Genesis” was, at the same time, an operation with many civilians amongst the victims due to an indiscriminate bombardment of various communities along the river basins of the Salaquí and Cacarica – supposedly hideaways of the guerrilla. Many communities had to leave their territory and abandon everything in order to save their lives.

But not only the logic of conflict saw a turnaround through the steady process of territorialization but also the rhetoric in regards to the conflict changed. While the political element of the conflict gradually seemed to dissolve the conflict terminology followed a different political reading. The rhetoric about the *fight against international terrorism*

launched by U.S. President George Bush in the wake of the attacks on September 11, 2001, played into the hands of presidential candidate Álvaro Uribe with his election campaign centred on the defeat and destruction of the terrorists in Colombia. It was clear to the majority, that when speaking about terrorists he was actually referring to the guerrilla groups. This rhetoric change influenced the entire logic of the Colombian conflict as Uribe denies the insurgents any legitimacy by stating that Colombia is neither a totalitarian dictatorship nor an authoritarian regime and therefore any armed upheaval lacks justification. He continues in his argumentation that since the fall of the Berlin Wall, all social revolutionary groups have become stunted and remain only as groups of organized crime and terrorism (Fischer 2005:94). Following this logic, the policy towards the guerrilla must be military since by labeling them as terrorists the door to negotiations remains closed. During his election campaign, Uribe had set the stage for a turn-around in Colombian politics heralding a new era of the Colombian conflict.

### **MANO FIRME, CORAZON GRANDE – PRESIDENT URIBE INTRODUCES A NEW POLITICAL RHETORIC**

Uribe picked up the voters' frustration about the failed negotiations and arrogance that the FARC had shown during the peace talks with the Pastrana administration (Blumenthal 2001:16). Furthermore, he presented himself as the strong force against the guerrilla and as someone listening to and caring for the lower social classes as well. His election campaign of the "*mano firme, corazon grande*" (strong hand, big heart) was supposed to synthesize his decision to wage war against the guerrilla on the one hand and his social commitment on the other (Blumenthal 2001:16).<sup>26</sup>

Backed by persistently high domestic approval ratings and strong U.S. support, President Uribe has redefined the nature of the conflict and the strategy to overcome it. This aspect – already hinted in his campaign slogan – finally became evident in his political doctrine presented in 2003. Under the title "Democratic Security Policy" (DSP), Uribe promised a long-term strategy with focus on retrieving control over all rural areas by

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<sup>26</sup> Some critics might argue that the big heart actually symbolizes his affiliation to the paramilitary and the demobilization process as Uribe is more and more associated with waging war against the guerrilla as opposed to social matters.

increasing the number and capacity of troops and police units and by deploying them across the country to challenge the guerrillas. This has been accompanied by a major increase in the eradication of illicit crops, aimed as much at denying revenues to the guerrillas and paramilitary groups as at reducing coca and opium poppy production. At the same time, the government increased the protection of oil and natural gas pipelines because illegal armed groups had become accustomed to extorting payoffs by threatening attacks against those facilities (Crisis Group 2003).

In his essay Fischer argues that Uribe's "Democratic Security Policy" goes way beyond a security doctrine but rather can be seen as a discourse (Fischer 2005:95). With his terrorism-rhetoric Uribe is polarizing and dividing the nation into 'good' and 'bad' - in those 'in favour of Colombia' and 'those against the country'<sup>27</sup>. This aspect is also reflected in the government's initiative to use the population as informants. Uribe initiated a network of more than one million civilian collaborators and informants who are paid to provide information about the insurgents. This has raised concerns that the collaborators may use their power to pursue personal vendettas instead of contributing to the communities' security (Crisis Group 2003).

The second turnaround in Colombian politics initiated by President Uribe was to start talks with the paramilitaries meant to lead to subsequent demobilization process. In December 2002, the AUC declared a unilateral cease-fire, thus meeting a significant pre-condition for entering into formal peace talks with the Colombian government. Shortly thereafter, the Colombian government announced that it had reached an agreement with AUC leaders that would result in the demobilization of its members by the end of 2005<sup>28</sup>. The first demobilization took place in November 2003 when 855 members of the Cacique Nutibara Bloc, which operated in Medellín, laid down their arms. The Bananero, Cundinamarca, Catatumbo, and Calima blocs also demobilized by the end of 2004, totalling approximately 32.000 paramilitaries since the first demobilization in late 2003.

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<sup>27</sup> In this case referring to those in favor of the guerrilla.

<sup>28</sup> Later to be extended to April 2006

As part of the government's attempt to provide incentives for the demobilization process, legislation has been proposed that would grant conditional amnesties to illegal combatants. The legislation has been widely criticized and is seen as a violation of Colombia's commitment under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights<sup>29</sup>, which requires states to ensure that violators are brought to justice.<sup>30</sup>

### ***THE 'POLITICAL' IN THE INTERNAL ARMED CONFLICT***

So far, this chapter has presented a historical overview of the conflict development as well as a brief introduction to the used conflict rhetoric. Nevertheless, in order to provide a true histo-political contextualization of the Colombian conflict, a discussion on the 'political' element of the armed conflict is necessary. It has already been adumbrated that the political element appears to have gradually dissolved, especially in the context of the guerrilla movements. Therefore, it is essential to analyze to what extent the conflict can be characterized as political or simply based on economic interests.

According to the central hypothesis in the writings of González, Bolívar and Vásquez, the Colombian conflict is determined in a critical relation between material interests and political motivations of all actors. The authors present a complex interpretation of the conflict and its structuring characteristic of the Colombian statehood (González, Bolívar, and Vásquez 2002). They argue that the political character of the conflict is expressed in the violence's role on the structure of the Colombian state and its civil society, the definition of territory and the type of economy as well as the character of the societal model in urban and rural areas. The theory, furthermore, emphasizes the facilitating function of the social, political and economic conditions<sup>31</sup> for the conflict, although not in a causal connection. According to the authors point of view, the war is not inevitable or arbitrarily and the territorial expansion of the armed actors responds neither to the simple economic usability of the territories nor to military

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<sup>29</sup> Can be found online at: <http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/ccpr.htm>

<sup>30</sup> The process is being heavily criticized not only because more than 32,000 have by now demobilized (Government estimated only 17,000 existing paramilitaries) leading to the conclusion that incentives of the demobilization are being heavily misused but also for its high rate of impunity.

<sup>31</sup> Which can be described – especially in rural areas – as essentially polarized due to social discrimination, an exclusive political system, and extreme economic inequality.

longings. Instead, the conflict entered into a stage in which its essentially political character is no longer expressed in the actions carried out by the actors, but in its modifying role of the social, political and economic structures of the country, normally defined and constructed by the state. However, this characterization as an ‘essentially political’ conflict not only determined by immediate economic interests of the armed actors – which is also the conflict reading followed by myself – is still not sufficient to answer the existing relation between the political core of the conflict and the reality of apparently arbitrary violence against the civilian population. The question how this originally politically motivated conflict has transformed into an armed dispute concentrated on economic resources and violence against the civilians – putting the political character of the actors into question – deserves, therefore, special advertence. Two components are especially relevant in this respect: the prolonging duration as a latent conflict and the rapid transformation and intensification of the same during last two decades (Villa and Houghton 2005).

The marginal character of the Colombian armed conflict throughout many years has produced a tendency of coexistence between the armed actors with a predomination of military actions of low intensity (e.g. violent harassment) in which the guerrilla was neither by the government nor by the United States considered as a challenge for the establishment (Villa and Houghton 2005). As a consequence of the prolongation of the conflict which put the principal actors for decades into a “*comfortable impasse*” – as Villa and Houghton (2005:25) describe it – the actors were able to grow and gain strength without putting each other at risk. These conditions created a “system of war” which inherits a logic beyond intentions and interests of the actors, but rather refers according Nazih Richani (2002:41), to<sup>32</sup>:

1. the failure of the institutions and the prevailing channels and political mechanisms to mediate, arbitrate and solve conflicts between social groups and political opponents;
2. the level of success to which the opponents have adopted to the conflict by establishing a ‘positive political economy’ by means of applying economic and political activities that make the war the best possible option, provided a power-balance and high costs for peace

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<sup>32</sup> These characteristics by Richani form the basis for the concept of low intensity conflict first phrased as such by Frank Kitson in 1971 [Kitson, Frank. 1971. *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency, Peace-Keeping*. London: Faber]

3. a balance of force between the groups or actors in the conflict which results in the 'comfortable impasse'

However, as stated earlier in this chapter, the incorporation of drug trafficking and paramilitary groups into the conflict during the 1980s facilitated the intensification of violence and the shift to a new interpretation. In this new context, the entire conflict logic underwent a significant change in the valuation of conflict resources: neither economic resources nor the civilian population could be left unused or independent. The political convenience and strategic interests of the armed actors have become subordinate to economic interests and needs. While the aim – the defence or destruction of an economic model and power constellation – is maintained, the dynamics do not correspond to the intent anymore. In fact, a contradiction can be observed as these strategies put at risk the models to be defended (Villa and Houghton 2005). The political reading shifts towards a military perspective which subordinates the protection of the armed actor's backing groups to the destruction and neutralization of the possible social basis of the enemy. Under this backdrop, the attacks on the civil population make sense when seen as an obstacle for the group's interests (Richani 2002).

Following this conflict logic, political considerations become secondary to the military perspective: "the only form to achieve the social and political objectives is to win them with military means" (Richani 2002:27). As the armed actors follow this exclusive military conflict rhetoric, their strategies are narrowed to the recruitment of men and arms, the control and neutralization of the enemy's power, logistic supplies, the control over strategic access corridors as well as debilitation of enemy resources. The armed groups resort to taxation, recruitment, assassinations and intervention in governmental spheres which consequently results in the disregard of human rights and international humanitarian law.

### ***THE CONFLICT IN A NUTSHELL***

Although the guerrillas' emergence as peasant self-defense group still dominates the rhetoric while the political reality has changed during the last 40 years, it is in fact the lack of

effectively addressing the socio-structural conflict causes on the part of the state that still permits the groups to recruit new members, be it permanently or temporally. As mentioned above, and as Blumenthal (2001:1) points out in his analysis, political motivations have given way to financial, institutional and territorial interests. Still the guerrilla enjoys in its dominated territories a fragmented social basis but is no longer representing a spectrum of social interests. Blumenthal continues by arguing that drug trafficking and drug cultivation are not the cause of the conflict – as believed by many people especially in Europe – but function as a “promoter, engine and fuel and are at the same time biggest beneficiaries of the conflict” (Blumenthal 2001:1). These illicit activities make the guerrilla, as well as the paramilitary groups, independent from the interests of the population or international support, consequently resulting in the loss of the political program. Instead, the control of strategic corridors which are important for the control of economic resources, the access to weapons and retreat areas is moved into the centre of the conflict at national level<sup>33</sup>. In some regions the direct control of strategic resources (oil, bananas, and coca) has become the centre of direct dispute between guerrilla and paramilitary (Kurtenbach 2004).

In her conflict analysis Sabine Kurtenbach (2005:10) identifies three main driving forces for the Colombian conflict. However, especially when talking about the department Chocó in the framework of the case study at hand, a fourth point can not be disregarded. As will be argued and elaborated further in the thesis, the practices of multinational companies have also contributed to the ongoing violence in the region. Therefore the driving forces can be defined as follows:

- the high – and since the mid 90s perpetual increasing – social injustice and social gap which permits all actors to recruit new members;
- the immense profits from drug cultivation and drug trafficking as well as the international financial support which serves as financial source for all actors of the conflict;

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<sup>33</sup> The aspect becomes important and will be elaborated when speaking about the department Chocó as a geo-strategic sector.

- the increasing participation and involvement of the USA which has started as cooperation in the fight against illegal drugs but since September 11, has been extended and rephrased as fight against international terrorism
- the presence of multinational companies exploiting the immense natural resources and cooperating with illegal actors to increase profits

As has been explained briefly in this chapter, the history of the conflict involves a complex setting of causes and consequences which form an interconnected causality system. The dynamics that determine the feasibility of peace underlie a similar multifarious scenario; however, the development of three rather specific topics will influence the conflict and will play an important role in the elaboration of peace strategies (Kurtenbach 2005:14):

- The development of the political system and the organization, articulation and influence of social interest groups<sup>34</sup>
- The question of dealing with impunity and the prosecution of human and international rights violations<sup>35</sup>
- The positioning and influence of international actors regarding the conflict<sup>36</sup>

The thesis touches in particular Kurtenbach's first and third point. The findings of my investigation suggest that the organizational structure of the indigenous peoples has developed as a social interest group. However, this development has taken place outside of the state institutional system and therefore the process has been able to mainly escape the authoritarian tendencies of the government. Furthermore, as I will argue in chapter five, indigenous resistance has integrated in an international advocacy network and consequently developed a new mechanism of pressuring the Colombian government. Hence, the indigenous resistance process touches two of the most important aspects of peace development inside the country.

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<sup>34</sup> The development of the state system in Colombia always has been a tightrope walk between democracy, security (or "democratic security" as President Uribe puts it) and authoritarian tendencies.

<sup>35</sup> This is especially important for potential impunity of demobilised paramilitary or politicians involved in the new scandal concerning "parapolitics".

<sup>36</sup> As seen in the history, and still today, in particular the United States has exerted strong influence on the Colombian government. However, also the European Union is also an important actor and could take a stronger lead in the struggle for democracy and peace.

On this account, I will continue to further conceptualize the indigenous resistance process as a peace promoting grass-roots peace initiative.

### **3 THE BAJO ATRATO REGION – AN EXAMPLE OF CONFLICT TERRITORIALIZATION**

*“The plundering of the Chocó’s natural resources is continuing for decades without respects for its population. After the mining and logging now multinationals are exploiting the biodiversity and paramilitaries are growing coca.”  
Gordito, Ex-governor of indigenous community*

#### ***THE BAJO ATRATO IN THE CHOCÓ – AREA OF GEO-STRATEGIC VALUE***

The Chocó is one of the 31 Colombian departments. With an estimated population of only 400.000, it is, despite its size of about 46.000 km<sup>2</sup>, one of the lowest populated departments in Colombia: Population density of 0.1 people per km<sup>2</sup> - Colombian mean: 36 people per km<sup>2</sup> (Defensoría 2005).

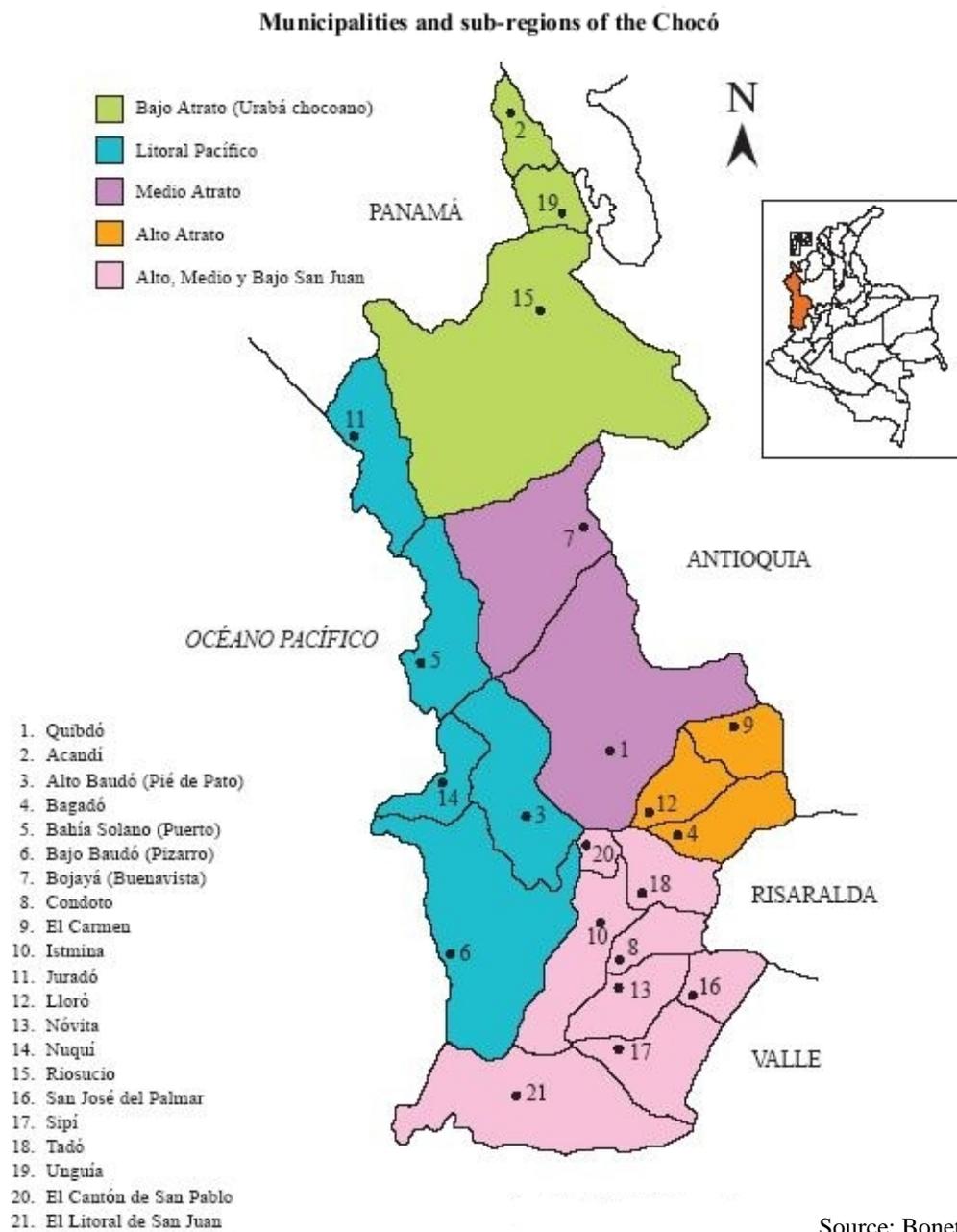
The region of the Bajo Atrato is named after the river Atrato and *bajo* – meaning *low* in English – refers to the part of the river close to its mouth. The Bajo Atrato is limited to the north with the Gulf of Urabá, to the northwest with the border of the Republic of Panama, in the east with the Cordillera Occidental and in the south with the Medio Atrato. It is a heterogeneous, multiethnic and multicultural region with varied and extensive natural resources and impressive biodiversity (5% of all species existing on the planet). The population consists of about 320.000 afro-descendants, indigenous people – about 20.000 belonging to five different tribes: Embera, Katíos, Wounaan, Chamí and Tules – as well as *colonos* (settlers or peasants – mainly mestizo<sup>37</sup>) coming from the Urabá region in the department of Córdoba (Defensoría 2005).

The only way of accessing the region is by boat and generally through the river Atrato and its tributaries, which is at certain times of the year quite difficult due to the low water level and sedimentation. The economic activities of the communities are reduced to fishing,

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<sup>37</sup> People of mixed European and indigenous non-European ancestry

hunting and exploitation of the tropical timber. Agricultural activities are characterized by the cultivation of corn, rice, yuca (root crop) and plátano (green banana) which are cultivated mainly for the communities' own subsistence because commercialization is connected with enormous difficulties due to transport and the armed conflict.

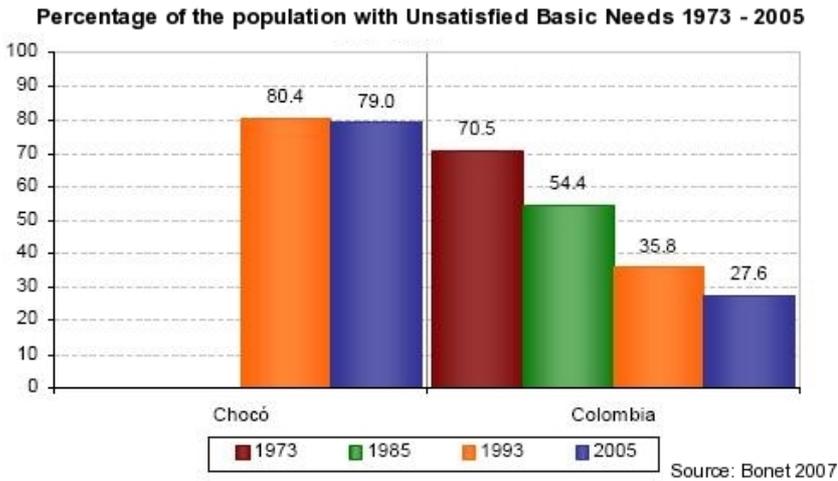


**Figure 1** Municipalities and sub-regions in the Chocó

Likewise the development of the region is hampered by the conflict and can be characterized as discontinuous and frivolous on the part of the state institutions, which has led to the fact that the department shows the lowest levels of life conditions compared to other departments of the country.

**NATURAL RESOURCES IN ABUNDANCE – POPULATION IN POVERTY**

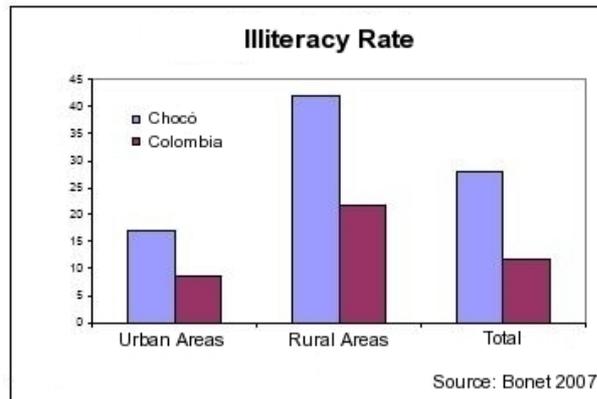
In 2005 the Colombian National Statistic Institute – DANE – carried out a new census after the last had been done in 1993 (DANE 2005). One indicator looks at the “unsatisfied basic needs” in order to measure and compare the living standard of the population. Hereby housing, access to public services, economic dependence as well as other indicators were investigated.



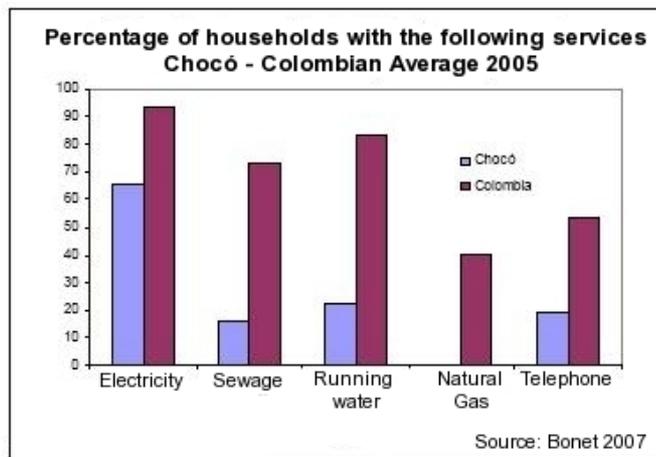
**Figure 2 Percentage of UBN Chocó - Colombia**

Looking at the figure above, it shows that, while Colombia on average has continuously been able to reduce the percentage of the population living with unsatisfied basic needs (UBN), the percentage reduced only by 1.4 points in 12 years in the Chocó. This means that the percentage of the population in the Chocó living with UBN was 190% of the national average in 1993 and increased in 2005 to 310%. That year the proportion of the population living with unsatisfied basic needs in the Chocó was three times the Colombian average and the highest in the country (Bonet 2007).

Following the results of the 2005 census, men in the Chocó have a life expectancy of 63.6 years and women of 70.1 years. Compared to the Colombian national average the life expectancy in the Chocó is about seven years less (70.3 and 77.1 years) (DANE 2005). This grave situation is also reflected in the infant mortality which is about three times the national average. Moreover, during the past 20 years infant mortality reduced at half the speed in which infant mortality was reduced on the national average (Bonet 2007).



**Figure 3 Illiteracy rate Colombia - Chocó**



**Figure 4 Percentage of available services**

As the graphs above indicate, the illiteracy rate in the Chocó is double the national average and above 40% in rural areas. Moreover, much fewer households are equipped with energy, sewerage, drinking water, gas and telephone than on the national average. The

municipality of Riosucio, which forms the main part of the Bajo Atrato region, belongs to the poorest municipalities in the already very poor department Chocó<sup>38</sup>.

The permanent exploitation of natural resources such as minerals, timber, fish as well as the agricultural cultivation has not contributed to local wealth accumulation. Neither did the periods of economic boom in the country show a positive affect on the basic infrastructure, public services and sustainable development of the region. Instead, the Chocó has drawn the attention of armed actors and foreign companies. As a region bordering with Panama and providing access to the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea, the area changed into a territory of dispute by the different armed actors and is a strategic corridor for the flow and commerce of illegal arms and narcotics. The armed actors – which are composed by the Fronts 5 and 34 of the FARC, the Bloc Élmer Cardenas of the Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá – ACCU (officially demobilized in 2006<sup>39</sup>), the 17th Brigade of the National Army and the Police of Urabá – are seeking control over the Atrato and the corridors between Mutatá-Dabeiba as well as the municipality Juradó through the rivers Jiguamiandó and Salaquí.

### ***THE DYNAMIC OF THE VIOLENCE***

*“I accept, that I kill guerrilleros outside of combat.  
That is the only thing which I accept. However, it does  
not concern innocent peasants, but guerrilleros in plainclothes.  
Yes, these killings are well planned. [...] I do not leave behind misery and death.  
I advance with guns, followed by bulldozers.”  
Carlos Castaño in 1997 (ex-leader of the paramilitaries)  
(Cadavid Marín 2004:24)*

At the beginning of the 1990s the Bajo Atrato saw a short period of post-constitutional recovery which, however, ended in 1997, when another strong wave of political violence swept across the country. While in 1996 only 14 municipalities in nine departments were

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<sup>38</sup> For a detailed overview see graph in the annex 4.

<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, various testimonies exist that big parts of the group still exist or that ex-members have joined newly emerged groups.

affected by the violence the number increased to 44 municipalities in 16 departments during the following year.<sup>40</sup> Threats against individual community members represent a considerable share of the political violence since 1997. The shift towards this form of violence can be explained as threats against individuals, which are used as a mechanism to gain territorial control and exercise power over its population. Furthermore, it ascribes to the conflict transformation in which the subordination of indigenous leaders and its authorities becomes an important conflict objective.

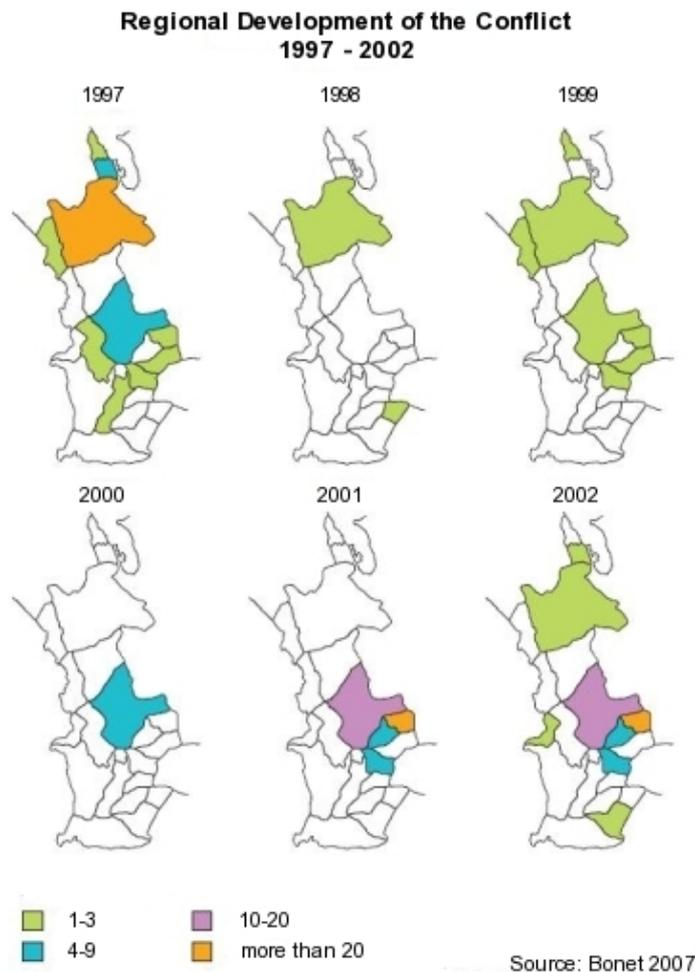
The department of Chocó is the first in which the majority of violent acts are assigned to the Colombian Armed Forces and the paramilitaries (Villa and Houghton 2005). This fact demonstrates the shift from a dispute to gain the support on a societal basis – taking place, for example, in the department of Antioquia where the responsibility of violence is divided between insurgents and paramilitaries – towards the creation of terror and a policy of retaliation with an objective to destroy the territorial hegemony of the insurgents. From a geographical perspective, Gonzalez et al (2003) further demonstrate that the geography of this new tendency of political violence against indigenous communities and political violence in general shows a clear analogy. They identified two strategic corridors that emerged during the past years (González, Bolívar, and Vásquez 2002). One of them is the *Great Urabá*, which also touches the Bajo Atrato and from where the paramilitaries advanced into the Chocó.<sup>41</sup> Villa and Houghton show that four fifths of the violations of human rights and breaches of international humanitarian law against indigenous peoples occur in these corridors, which corresponds at the same time to the geography of the majority of political violations and bellicose actions on a national scale. It becomes clear that the geo-strategic value and consequent conflict territorialization in the Chocó contribute to the violence against indigenous communities in this strategic corridor. This fact requires a conflict interpretation connected to the pre-eminence of national dynamics affecting these particular territories. Thus, it strengthens the hypothesis that the indigenous peoples are immersed in the conflict logic and do not constitute an exceptional case, apart from the intensity of the violence's impact, due to the particularity in demography and culture and the counteractions taken.

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<sup>40</sup> For an overview of the regional development of the violence against indigenous communities see annex 5.

<sup>41</sup> The second strategic corridor is located further southeast with centre in Putumayo.

The curve of the armed conflict (including the armed actions initiated by the guerrilla and the confrontations with initiative by the Colombian Armed Forces) shows an increase at the beginning of 1996 with peaks in 1997, 2001 and 2002. As the following maps indicate, the majority of the violence was registered in 1997 in the Bajo Atrato region but the centres of violence shifted to the south during the following years.



**Figure 5 Regional development of the conflict 1997 - 2002**

In 1999, an increase of armed action is notable in the Medio and Alto Atrato. It is worth mentioning that although in some regions only a low number of armed actions were registered this does not imply that it was peaceful or safe, but rather the opposite as isolated massacres and sporadic attacks took the life of many civilians in these regions. The peak in 1997 can be explained with massive military operations, such as the above mentioned

“Operación Genisis”, which included bombing and shellfire aimed at the Fronts 57 and 34 of the FARC. The operations were concentrated in the north of the department, especially in the municipalities of Riosucio, Unguía and Acandí. This region was used by FARC since the beginning of the 1990s to position rearguard troops and also served as refuge after the emergence of the first paramilitary groups (Observatorio 2003).

The pressure that was exercised by the paramilitaries and the guerrilla against the population, the combats between the military and the FARC, as well the armed confrontation between paramilitaries and guerrilla, caused a wave of internal displacement of the civil population. Many families fled for fear of retaliation or being accused as collaborators of the enemy. After the paramilitary, in form of the Bloc Élder Cardenas, took control over the town and most of the municipality of Riosucio, they forced alleged guerrilla supporters to provide information or threatened to kill them. The guerrilla, on its part, was looking for these “traitors” to assassinate them. This situation caused terror and fear amongst the population as it started a vicious circle with no escape as providing assistance or information to one of the groups would eventually evoke retaliation and not collaborating would be punished immediately. This feeling of helplessness and hopelessness triggered even more displacement.

However, the returning to the places of origin – be it after a short period or after some years – has been mostly traumatic and just as little a guaranty for a solution of the community’s problems. On the contrary, the situation continued to be very difficult as most of the communities are located in strategically important corridors. Between 1996 and 2002, many incidents were registered when guerrilla or paramilitaries entered communities killing about 106 inhabitants and disappearing at 19 (Defensoría 2002). Likewise, many family houses or school building were burned or the population’s movement was limited due to economic blockades which hampered food supplies. This posed a big threat as especially the indigenous communities – located close to the rivers’ heads and therefore far from urban centers – were often literally paralyzed or their supplies blocked and seized by the illegal armed groups.

## ***ECONOMIC INTERESTS FEED THE VIOLENCE***

As mentioned, the department Chocó constitutes a geo-strategic sector which is subject to the interests of different actors on a national and international level. The groups follow, in general, a development model which leaves aside the interests of the region's inhabitants. In the following I will look at three particular interest groups that foster the continuation of violence in the region.

### **Infrastructural interests**

The dynamic of economic globalization under neo-liberalistic ideologies, demand the opening of markets, so 'western' products can easier be exported to the south. Through this process, channels for transnational companies are also being created. The Chocó is of special importance when it comes to infrastructural routes that are necessary for the opening of the market. Big projects such as hydro-electric power plants and the inter-oceanic channel pose a severe threat to indigenous territories.

### **Interests in biodiversity**

As mentioned earlier, the Chocó is immensely rich in biodiversity. In only one hectare land, exist up to 400 different kinds of trees and 800 species of vertebrates exist. However, for years food companies and biotechnological research centres have illegally extracted organisms to export and investigate them. In 1996, an illegal shipment of 300,000 insects sent to a research centre in the USA was discovered. Companies such as *Shaman Pharmaceuticals Inc.* profit from knowledge of indigenous communities, without paying adequately (Nizkor 1996).

According to the Colombian institute for biodiversity (*Instituto Humboldt*), the market of medical plants in Colombia exceeds 10 million US dollar annually, without indigenous communities profiting from it (Cadavid Marín 2004). Furthermore, national parks are not only created in order to protect the nature but also due to pressure from the United States. On the hand, they serve the unhindered and unnoticed access of biotechnological companies and make it easier to control drug traffic routes towards Panama on the other hand. However, as

'living' in the park is prohibited; indigenous communities such as the *Embera-Katíos* are once again victimized through displacement.

### **The interests of the agricultural industry**

In the past ten years, the region has seen a massive advancement of agriculture. The most important branches in the region are bananas and the African oil palms. On many occasions, peasants, afro-descendants and indigenous people have been forced to leave their lands and found them later occupied by oil palm cultivations. "These tactics range from the buying of the land, intimidation to poisoning crops in order to force people of their lands" (Escobar 1996). Prior to big projects, such as those of *Urapalma S.A. Company*, the required consultation process with the ethnic communities is lacking (World Rainforest 2002). Many companies interpret collective community landholding of the territories in the zone as an obstacle to further expansion. In many cases it has become known, that paramilitary groups have served the purpose of these companies (World Rainforest 2002). The Inter-church Justice and Peace Commission has denounced that "it is evident that no state intervention is taking place to structurally face concealed armed action through paramilitary forces, while the community rights are ignored and the illegal sowing of oil palm continues to enjoy armed protection" (Justicia y Paz 2002). Furthermore, international interests are involved as the technology for the further processing of the oil palms comes from abroad. But not only in regards to the African oil palms, the interests of transnational companies become evident. At the beginning of 2007, the banana company Chiquita made headlines concerning their connection to the paramilitaries. The Cincinnati-based fruit company has admitted to have paid between 1994 and 2004 about 1.7 million USD to the AUC. In a lawsuit against the company held in the U.S., Chiquita has agreed to a \$25 million fine on the condition that it doesn't have to reveal the names of the executives involved. United States' prosecutors said that after a 1997 meeting between Castaño (the then-leader of the paramilitary group) and a Chiquita's general manager (unnamed), the company made about 100 payments, mostly to a local Convivir. As described previously, the Convivir were legal vigilante groups that were encouraged by now-president Uribe (Forero 2007). According to U.S. court documents, the AUC used the Convivirs to collect money from businesses to finance their illegal activities.

Furthermore, the documents prove that payments continued even after the group was officially labeled a terrorist organization amounting to about 900,000 USD after the year 2001 (Forero 2007). Iguaran, the Colombian attorney general, said in an interview with the media station RCN, that the evidence shows that Chiquita, as well as other companies, have paid the AUC “conscious of what they did – and what these groups did, amongst other things, was to assassinate. The companies took advantage of a lawless region to support paramilitaries who not only focused on liquidating rebels but also organized labor” (Forero 2007). Chiquita has declared the payments as extortion, paid in order to help protect banana workers. However, the violence continued during the time of the payments. Between 1997 and 2004, paramilitary forces are blamed for 22 massacres leading to the death of more than 137 people in northern banana region alone (Brodzinsky 2007). Alberto, an ex Chiquita worker, personally witnessed at least 10 murders on one of the company’s plantations where he worked for eleven years.

“When I and my coworkers arrived on the plantation, we saw two men known to be paramilitary standing menacingly near the packing plant. The thugs waited until everyone took up their workstations then went into the field where one of my coworkers was climbing a ladder to bag a banana stem. They cut off his head with a machete, dumped the weapon, then calmly walked to their motorcycle and drove off, without saying a word," says Alberto (Brodzinsky 2007).

The interests of transnational and multinational companies in the region have further promoted the violence. Over the past, many proofs have been found, that these companies have supported illegal groups out of personal interests. Various experts assume that Chiquita paid the paramilitary to protect the companies’ transportation routes and put the peasants under pressure to sell their land.

## **SUFFERING OF THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES**

*“Because we are being denied the right to enjoy our culture and life, to develop and transmit it, we say that we – our peoples and cultures – are subject to a slow process of death. [...] especially in this war, which is about stealing natural resources such as wood, gold, oil and genetic material from our territories.”*  
(Cadavid Marín 2004:20)

The indigenous people in Colombia have experienced some kind of revival in the past due to the restoration of their ancestral territories and their advancing integration into the authorities of the country as well as the development of indigenous organizations devoted to the defense of their rights and leaders that are capable of establishing concepts of self-development and autonomy. Furthermore, the country has established a constitutional protection of indigenous' people individual and collective rights. Despite the decade-long waging violence in Colombia, indigenous regions were, until the end of the 1970s, relatively untroubled from the internal armed conflict. Then, however, the guerrilla and paramilitaries began to increase their operations into indigenous territories as they became involved in the cultivation and processing of illicit crop in the respective areas. Also the increased attacks by the military forced them back in the remote indigenous territories. Today, the indigenous population of the country finds themselves in “serious, critical and profoundly worrisome human rights situation” (OHCHR 2004:5). The fight over the control of territory came along with an intensified armed conflict, disturbance of the daily life of the communities regarding the social well being, perseverance of the traditional economy, nourishment and identity. 2,660 cases of violations of human rights aimed at the indigenous populations have been registered by the OHCHR. This tragedy remains largely invisible as indigenous territories are usually found in remote and strategically important areas with heavy presence of armed groups. The ONIC reports that more than 1,600 indigenous people have been killed in the past twenty years – 60% of them during the past five years (ONIC 2006). Rodolfo Stavenhagen sees the “actual physical and cultural survival of some of the more vulnerable indigenous communities [...] threatened” (OHCHR 2004:5) In an interview Darío Mejía, member of the ONIC's executive committee, expressed his deprecation of the government's policies:

“Over 100 forced displacements of our people in four years, nearly 600 political assassinations of indigenous peoples in the same period and 423 illegal

detentions. In this war, we understand that the government has an anti-insurgency policy and we understand that the government has an anti-narcotics policy, but we must ask, what is its policy against indigenous peoples – a policy of extermination?” (Romoser 2007).

The rule of law is undermined by the continuous patterns of breaches of the human rights of the indigenous people, imputable to the conflict dynamics, the dominance of illegal armed groups with connections to drug trafficking, local and regional power structures as well as the economic interests of big national and international companies associated with the exploitation of natural resources.

In regions with presence of several armed groups, the population finds itself literally in the crossfire. As the civilians are increasingly viewed as military objectives, they are forced to work for one or the other of the groups, which eventually exposes them to reprisals. The armed actors are to forcefully find out information from community members about the other parties involved in the conflict (using them as informants).

As Roldan Ortega explains:

“One day, a community is paid the unwelcome visit of an armed group. Intimidated by the convincing threat of their machine guns, the natives are compelled to provide the intruders with food, firewood for their kitchen, and pathfinders for their trekking. The natives must eventually vacate their homes so that they can be used as barracks by the newcomers. Once the trespassers leave, they are replaced by their adversaries, who also arrive without asking for lodging. Through their usual methods of death, fire and displacement, the new unwelcome guests demand that the community provide the hospitality allegedly extended to their opponents. Down the road, the initial intruders will return and ask questions as to whether their enemies were paid any special attention. Then they take revenge in the usual way” (Roldan Ortega 2000).

Several testimonies exist regarding the selective killing of indigenous leaders, spokespersons or members of the traditional authorities. Moreover, the strategies of the armed actors include intimidation, threatening of selective members of the community, placing of explosives (mines) in traffic routes and near cultivation areas, reduction of working areas (agricultural lands) and forced displacement. Stavenhagen’s reports speaks of “true acts of genocide and ethnocide against the indigenous peoples” (OHCHR 2004:9). Ignorance of the problems by the state lead to greater damage caused by the armed conflict in regards to health

service, education, preservation of the indigenous culture and identity, exercise of autonomy, free movement and utilization of the territory as well as food security. Threats against the life of community members are common (by both sides: guerrilla and paramilitary) because the communities do not want to collaborate or provide information. Until recently, in all the river basin controls existed by the illegal armed groups of food transports and medicine with a limit of 10.000 pesos per family (about 4 euros) – transporting more resulted not seldom in threatening and torture. In some regions, a list of approved items existed – the armed groups confiscated items not on the list. Economic blockades and the lack of medical supplies contribute directly to the deaths within small communities.

“10.000 Pesos are not enough to buy sufficient foodstuff for the family [...] someone with several children has no chance to support the whole family [...] Children often suffered from malnutrition. Only after long negotiations with we could raise it later to 50.000 pesos for a family” (Interview 2007d).

Oftentimes, the violence and insecurity have also resulted in mass displacements. According to the Centre of Indigenous Cooperation, around 12% of the displaced population in Colombia is indigenous. Incidents of mass occurred in 63 municipalities between 1995 and 2003 which affected more than 28,000 people (CECOIN 2006). Some of the forced displacements have coerced communities into neighboring countries. The UNHCHR expressed “deep concern” over the effect of the country’s violence on the indigenous population (UNHCHR 2006). In March 2004, clashes between the paramilitaries and FARC displaced about 1,300 Embera from their territories along the Napipi River, close to the border of Panama (Jeffery 2005). Due the inadequate foodstuff and health supplies in their place of refuge, the majority returned. However, the UNHCR continued to express concern for the safety of the returns. The consequences of displacement strike indigenous communities particularly hard. Forced displacement leads to the “erosion of culture, the break with traditional systems of agricultural production, and territorial fragmentation” (CODHES 2004). Furthermore, the report by the organization point out that displacing to urban centers in which individualism, consumerism, and crime dominate threatens and eventually destroys indigenous identity as community cohesion and family structure disintegrate. Displacement and confinement also hamper the transmission of traditional knowledge, customs and skills to the future generations which undermines indigenous autonomy and the identity reaffirmation. Therefore indigenous communities resist forced displacement as long as possible. In the Bajo

Atrato region, many afro-descendent communities had already displaced to the urban centers of Riosucio, Turbo, Quibdo or Medellín while indigenous communities still resisted in their territories. As Victor, member of executive committee of Camizba, explained to me:

“We are not leaving our territories. [...] We say no to displacement, because if we leave we will lose our territories. There [urban centre] we have no water, not the food we need, our children will get sick and our women have to go into prostitution [...] and we lose our identity” (Interview 2007c).

Consequently, displacement is the very last alternative indigenous people see. If it seems inevitable to leave their ancestral territories, they prefer to move to further remote areas in the jungle or displace entirely to other indigenous communities. Displacement of individual persons or families is rather seldom.

The psychological and social trauma that are caused by the violence and suffering experienced is incalculable with children, women and the elderly at particular risk. The armed conflict and the exploitation of the natural resources have changed the reality of the indigenous lifestyle. Moreover, armed groups arrive to the communities and steal livestock, foodstuff and other important items for survival justifying their actions by accusing the owners of collaboration with other armed groups. Out of this misery a group of indigenous women published a letter titled “Like this we have no desire to live”<sup>42</sup>. They wrote:

“We call upon the armed actors to leave our territories and *resguardos*, respect our autonomy, respect our traditional indigenous authorities, and do not involve us in the conflict.”

The letter was meant to ask for support, assistance and urgent action on the part of the state institutions and national as well as international organizations and to pressure them not to close their eyes and ignore the grave situation in the Bajo Atrato. However, this outcry for help triggered in 2003 a shocking wave of suicides amongst teenagers. The suicides and suicides attempts were later attributed to the collective depression caused by the horrors of the armed conflict, although indigenous groups still speak of *la Gran Feira* (the great beast) or other spiritual evil. The Red Cross and other agencies sent psychological assistance to the region, however: personnel trained with indigenous groups were not available. In 2003 alone, ten teenagers between 12 and 22 committed suicide and six attempted to do so.

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<sup>42</sup> Así no dan ganas de vivir

It can be said that the indigenous peoples are suffering from the consequences of grave breaches of international humanitarian law by all armed actors (army, guerrilla, paramilitaries as well as officially demobilized groups). This fact has been confirmed by an International Verification Mission on the Humanitarian and Human Rights Situation of Indigenous Peoples in Colombia<sup>43</sup> (Int. Verification Mission 2007) as well as the OHCHR. Violations occur against the respect for their autonomy, customs and territories. The final statement emphasizes what I was able to observe as well: “Police posts, garrets, trenches and advance posts are constructed by the public forces in territories belonging to indigenous people” (Int. Verification Mission 2007:2). This puts in risk the entire communities as it makes the region a target for attacks by the guerrilla. Furthermore, the mission confirms the above mentioned problems with large-scale development projects (dams, major hydroelectric projects, road, river and maritime infrastructure projects, etc.) which are

“being implemented in indigenous territories without respect for the consultation process and the criteria for this process established through international agreements from the ILO, the United Nations, and the very national mechanisms agreed upon by the Colombian State and indigenous authorities” (Int. Verification Mission 2007:3).

In an interview Luis Evelis Andrade, the President of ONIC, revealed:

“The violations of our rights, the threats, the selective murders and destruction of our holy places and our culture are closely connected to the neo-liberal logic of the economy. Many indigenous territories [...] are rich in minerals, oil, biodiversity and timber. On this account the economic powers – with links to the state and the current government – have neither interest in our survival nor in the demand of our rights. This complicates only the exploitation of resources. They are using the conflict to deprive us of our territories” (Interview 2007f).

As explained, these projects go often hand-in-hand with paramilitary intimidation, threats, blockades and violence. Although the government insists that all paramilitary groups in the region have officially demobilized, incidents with paramilitary involvement still occur. During my visit in February at the headquarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the Colombian Armed forces near Apartadó, its commander General Luis Alfonso Zapata Uribe assured me and other

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<sup>43</sup> The Mission was made up of human rights and civil society organisations from Europe, Latin America, United States, and Canada, with observers from United Nations agencies, the Swiss Embassy, the German Embassy, the European Commission delegation, and MAPP-OAS.

members of the delegation I was part of, that all paramilitary groups in the region would have demobilized. However, I was able to listen to many stories by indigenous, afro-descendants as well as *campesinos*, that some structures have remained or that even new groups, such as “*Águilas negras*”<sup>44</sup> have emerged (amongst others Interview 2007a; Interview 2007b; Interview 2007f). This fact was confirmed by the International Crisis Group<sup>45</sup> as well as the International Verification Mission in its statement: “paramilitaries have created new armed groups and carry out the same previously mentioned practices against the communities” (Int. Verification Mission 2007:3). Being asked about these incidents, General Zapata replied that these were felonies of some “small criminals and bandits”.

The Verification Mission concludes:

- That, since the visit by the Special Rapporteur in 2004, the situation of indigenous peoples in Colombia has worsened to the point of not only creating a grave human crisis, but also of threatening certain extinction. [...]
- That the systematic nature of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law – and the crimes against humanity – subjected upon indigenous peoples in Colombia prefigure a genocide against these peoples, which the precautionary and provisional measures issued by the Inter-American Commission and Court of Human Rights have not even been able to detain (Int. Verification Mission 2007:8).

Furthermore, I want to mention some conclusions by the mission of the OHCHR which also illustrates the grave situation of the indigenous population in Colombia:

- The precarious human rights situation [...] reflects the gap between progressive domestic legislation and the effectiveness of the institutions responsible for protecting these peoples [...]
- Some economic development programmes, including certain commercial farming, forestry, mining and oil-drilling activities, have had adverse effects on the living conditions [...]
- The social and human development indicators of the indigenous peoples are still below the national average. The various state social programmes for indigenous peoples have had little impact [...]

Based on the findings of NGOs, international organizations, verification missions as well as my interviews, the terminology ethnocide or genocide does not seem to be exaggerated or inappropriate. In particular between 1996 and 2004, the indigenous communities have suffered

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<sup>44</sup> Black Eagles

<sup>45</sup> International Crisis Group. 2007. *Colombia's New Armed Groups* [Report]. 2007 [cited 25.06. 2007]. Available from [http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/latin\\_america/20\\_colombia\\_s\\_new\\_armed\\_groups.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/latin_america/20_colombia_s_new_armed_groups.pdf).

tremendously from the internal armed conflict. Being confronted not only by armed actors but also economic aspirations of multinational companies, the indigenous communities have resorted to non-violent resistance strategies in order to preserve their territories and culture.

## **4 THEORETICAL APPROACH TO NON-VIOLENT CIVIL RESISTANCE AND INDIGENOUS TERRITORY**

The Colombian armed internal conflict follows diverse dynamics which lead to a constantly altering conflict setting. This fact consequently implies that an equally complex process of resistance can be expected. The following questions have been identified to lead and guide the successive discussion on resistance and civil resistance in particular:

1. Where does civil resistance have its roots?
2. Against what and whom is civil resistance being exercised?
3. Can civil resistance be defined as a process or does it refer to collective spontaneous actions?
4. Is civil resistance without an organizational structure focused on explicitly shared principles or a political credo at all possible?
5. Can civil resistance be seen as an action 'by and for' the civil society?
6. Does civil resistance pursue a politically proactive strategy or rather, should it be seen as a new mechanism of civilian-based defense?

### ***UNDERSTANDING CIVIL RESISTANCE***

In order to narrow and focus this discussion, a limitation of the broad terminology 'resistance' is necessary since the notion could be deceiving, as historically many expressions of armed civil resistance and political processes aiming at institutional change, supported by armed groups or the military, can be identified. Especially the 20<sup>th</sup> century has seen many examples in which civil resistance has been closely connected to armed struggle: in the context of foreign occupation (e.g. France during Nazi occupation or Palestine under Israeli occupation); liberation and independence wars against colonial oppression and, last but not least, national uprisings and revolutionary 'wars' orientated at regime changes. According to Marcela Salazar Posada (2003), these types could – despite being connected to armed fighting – still be called 'civil' because they do not *sensu stricto* constitute only combatants or soldiers, but members of the civil society which, according to certain necessities and dynamics of

political struggle, could see themselves obliged to transform into armed citizens (militia). She calls, therefore, for further clarification and the appliance of the terminology ‘non-violent civil resistance’, as part of the wider concept of *non-violent actions* of social and political struggle (Salazar Posada 2003:33). Nevertheless, others would argue that the term ‘civil resistance’ already applies non-violent forms of action (Roberts 2007).

This thesis, for its part, focuses strictly on non-armed and non-violent forms of resistance in the theoretical framework of the concept of non-violence, while still acknowledging the above mentioned violent examples of civil resistance and therefore rejecting an inherent notion of non-violence in the concept.

It can not be said that the non-violent resistance is a modern phenomena, but a mechanism constructing peace still widely unknown, left aside and little studied. So far, attention has been paid traditionally to the concept of violent and armed resistance. However, civil resistance has emerged as valuable alternative towards the violence of the state, foreign occupations, arms race and war. As a political strategy or moral philosophy, non-violence seeks to achieve social or political change while refraining from the use of violence. Instead, it promotes different forms of political struggle such as civil disobedience<sup>46</sup>, non co-operation<sup>47</sup> combined with persuasion as well as civil resistance studied in this thesis

The non-cooperation campaign for Indian independence, led by Mohandas Ghandi, is often referred to when talking about the concept of non-violence, but the struggle fought by Martin Luther King Jr. to attain civil rights for African Americans is also frequently mentioned. However, it should not be assumed that the avoidance of violence is necessarily based on any absolute ethical principle, but might spring from a “society’s traditions of political action, from its experience of war and violence, from legal considerations, or from calculations about the improbability of achieving success by violent means” (Roberts 2007:2). Salazar Posada refers to this fact, as civil resistance based on two distinctive foci: *the pacifistic*

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<sup>46</sup> Civil disobedience encompasses the active refusal to obey certain laws, demands and commands of a government or of an occupying power without resorting to physical violence.

<sup>47</sup> Sharp Gene has identified 193 methods of non-violent actions and sub-classifies non-cooperation into: economic (e.g. strike) and political (e.g. boycott of elections) non-cooperation [Sharp, Gene. 1973. *The politics of nonviolent action*. Boston: P. Sargent Publisher.] The list is also available online: <http://peacemagazine.org/198.htm>

*focus* – rooted in moral and ethical principles that rule out violence in any circumstances and the *pragmatic focus*, under which non-violent actions are applied because they seem under given circumstances most appropriate to achieve a certain aim without elevating these actions to a moral or ethical principle in general (Salazar Posada 2003). As Christian Mellon and Jacques Semelin (1994) point out in their writings, the sources of inspiration (pragmatism, religious traditions and political ethics) for non-violent action tend to “complement each other, rather than exclude one another” (Mellon and Semelin 1994:24).

When looking at the process of resistance by the indigenous population in Colombia, this combination becomes apparent. “*We are not a people of arms, we are people of words*” (Interview 2007f) – I was told many times during interviews and informal chats with members of indigenous communities. This statement, as part of the indigenous’ rhetoric in regards to the Colombian conflict, might lead to the categorization of indigenous resistance processes under the *pacifist focus*. However, bearing in mind the violent indigenous guerrilla group “Quintin Lame”, this notion could be challenged. Furthermore, the indigenous groups have been able to attain a variety of ethnic rights which make them a privileged minority group<sup>48</sup> (Interview 2007b). Resorting to violent means would very likely result in the loss of these legal privileges. Consequently, it is not surprising that the “Quintin Lame” dissolved coevally to the Constitutional process. Therefore, I argue that, despite indigenous rhetoric, the resistance process is rather based on a combination of political ethics, legal considerations and pragmatism than mere pacifist beliefs.

## **A RECENT PHENOMENA?**

Non-cooperation, as a form of exercising pressure, is not a recent invention nor did the concept emerge in a certain moment of history. Civil resistance has its roots in the much older notion of passive resistance and specifically collective non-cooperation.

Passive resistance or individual disobedience, understood as the right and the individual duty to breach the law according to one’s own conscience, has many examples in

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<sup>48</sup> In particular when compared to the constitutional rights of afro-descendants.

the past.<sup>49</sup> In medieval times, policies and philosophies around the idea of state emerged which recognized – although in a restrictive form – the right of the nobility and authorities to disobey, repeal or resist to unjust and immoral monarchs (Hernández Delgado 2004).

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, John Locke’s writings in defence of the English Revolution became a cornerstone in liberal constitutionalist thought (Randle 1994). He was one of several political thinkers in advance of the notion of a ‘social contract’ between rulers and ruled. Government was essential to provide certain vital benefits for society, such as the separation of public powers, impartial judgement, legitimacy to enforce decisions and the capacity to defend the society against outside threats (Locke 1956). A king that failed to fulfil these responsibilities breaches the social contract with society and loses his legitimacy. In an extreme case, society could resist and overthrow him (Skinner 2002).

“The end of government is the good of mankind; and which is best for mankind, that the people should be always exposed to the boundless will of tyranny, or that the rulers should be sometimes liable to be opposed when they grow exorbitant in the use of their power, and employ it for the destruction, and not the preservation, of the properties of their people? (Locke 1989:233)”

In recent history, the closest ancestors of civil resistance are the collective actions that emerged in Europe and North America at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as consequence of the spread of industrial capitalism. Civil resistance as collective non-cooperation developed towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century around different struggles: fighting for labour rights, in favour of extending voter rights and for basic social and political rights (Hernández Delgado 2004:32). At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the phrase ‘passive resistance’ was coined to describe the new forms of the struggle. Since then, examples of civil resistance can be found throughout the world, ranging from Ghandi’s independence movement to Eastern European resistance against communism. Most well-known examples in Latin America include the Brazilian MST<sup>50</sup>-Landless workers’ movement which emerged in 1980 as well as the popular resistance in Peru against authoritarian leader Fujimori at the end of the 1990s.

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<sup>49</sup> Amongst them the first Christians, who preferred to be eaten by lions in the *Circus Maximus* instead of recognizing and worshiping the gods of the empire, to go to war or to give up their religious beliefs. Another example are the Jews who opposed emperor Gulgula<sup>49</sup> in the years 37 – 41 when he wanted to have a sculpture of himself constructed in the Temple of Jerusalem Randle, Michael. 1994. *Civil resistance, Fontana movements and ideas*. London: Fontana Press.

<sup>50</sup> *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*

## **CIVIL RESISTANCE AGAINST WHOM?**

As it is almost always the case when defining a certain terminology, there is no agreement amongst the scholars on the question against whom civil resistance is aimed at. Supposing that the state is the only guarantor and the institution on which lies the fundamental responsibility of watching over the human rights of its people, civil resistance could be defined as a response to the abuse of power by the state through means of exercising systematic violence and/or violence directed towards the people in general, as well as excluded sectors of the society in particular – at least Salazar Posada and Tolasa G. would argue accordingly. This notion, however, would pose a variety of questions: Wouldn't state policies to promote civil resistance imply a negation of the state itself and consequently result in a restraint of its role and responsibility of protecting the people against governmental institutions, private and economic rights violators? Secondly, is it not very short-sighted to define civil resistance exclusively against state actions and omissions?

In regards to the first question one might put forward the possibility of a state to call for civil resistance of its people as the state's sovereignty is endangered due to interference of another state or an external military force. Nevertheless, even this argument raises doubt, as the defense of national sovereignty is traditionally the responsibility of the state and with its mechanisms and procedures to address that case.

In order to answer the second question, it is useful to look first at the circumstances under which civil resistance arises. Salazar Posada argues that civil resistance emerges as a consequence of extreme political scenarios such as “political oppression; neglect of rights/identities of certain parts of society; authoritarian, totalitarian or extremist regimes and systematic persecution based on race, gender and sexual or political opinion” (Salazar Posada 2003:36). The Colombian scholar Hernández Delgado sees civil resistance as a result of the consolidation of different forms of violence (amongst other structural violence such as poverty and misery; socio-economic violence; socio-cultural violence and intrafamilial violence); the prolongation and increase of the armed conflict, the increasing number of civilian victims as well as the vicious circles of production and reproduction of violence” (Hernández Delgado 2003:60).

Without necessarily agreeing on these characteristics as (the only) preconditions or root causes of civil resistance, it becomes nevertheless obvious that any civil resistance rooted in these extreme scenarios can not only be directed against the state. Instead, a much broader perspective is required which defines civil resistance as a dynamic against “*hegemonic powers*” against which the people are constructing a counterbalance by withdrawing from the hegemonic logic of dominance (Salazar Posada 2003:38). The hegemony power can be of ideological, political, cultural, technological or economical character such as the church, the school, the market and mass media over which the state has power and through which he exercises his dominance. Following the thoughts of Salazar Posada (2003:39), civil resistance can be exercised against “any political, institutional or social actor that posses or abusively exercises economic, social, political, military and/or cultural control over a certain group of society or the society as a whole”, ranging from impairing its development according to their life aspirations to putting survival at risk.

This interpretation of the resistance process defines best the situation of the indigenous communities in the Chocó. As described, various actors endanger the survival of the indigenous communities in the Bajo Atrato. They suffer from the neglect on the part of state institutions as wells as from violence exercised by all armed actors. A resistance strategy that would focus solely on the state, as put forward by Randle, could not succeed as it does not give consideration to the complex conflict setting. Instead, indigenous communities challenge the hegemonic logic of dominance and do not distinguish between state and non-state force, since both are seen as a threat to their life aspirations. As *Gordito*<sup>51</sup>, ex-governor of one of the indigenous communities in the Bajo Atrato, revealed to me:

“We don’t trust any armed actor. We don’t trust the military, not the guerrilla, not the paramilitaries – no group that carries arms [...] We have also no trust in the government. The government speaks with them [the military] but not with us; hence we have no trust in the government” (Interview 2007d).

Consequently, the indigenous resistance process is as complex as the conflict itself. Being confronted by a variety of threats, the resistance process has to address all of them. In

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<sup>51</sup> Full name is not mentioned due to security concerns.

this regard it is more appropriate to speak about a dynamic against hegemonic powers, instead of focusing solely on resistance against the state.

### **Process or spontaneous collective action?**

In general, those in academic circles agree that civil resistance is always an expression of organized collective participation and its objectives – in contrast to many social movements – tend to be strategic. Instead, certain social movements aim at responding cyclical on a medium-term basis or intend targeted change while dissolving once the issue is resolved. In this sense, the civil resistance represents much more of a ‘process’, which during its evolution combines different actions based on a strong core objective with the necessary flexibility to adopt to changing conditions as it is required in every true ‘process’ (amongst others Guerrero 2003; Hernández Delgado 2003; Randle 1994; Tolosa G. 2003).

Civil resistance against conflicts is a process that hardly brings any short-term results. On a short-term-based view, civil resistance against the armed conflict in Colombia might seem to result in a dead end street without providing any solutions to the structural problems of the country which are the origin of the confrontation and resistance of the communities. Therefore, civil resistance can be seen as process requiring efforts and initiatives that go beyond short-term strategies (Rosero 2003).

By creating a multilayered organizational structure, following a “bottom-up-approach”, the indigenous communities have given consideration to the importance of a true process. Despite different aims in certain regions<sup>52</sup>, four principles forming the core of the indigenous resistance process have been defined: “*autonomy, culture, territory and unity*” (Interview 2007f). These principles have been adopted by all indigenous authorities and organizations and serve as common ground to unite and strengthen the collective resistance process. Furthermore, indigenous organizations underwent a constant process of development and enhancement. The first Regional Indigenous Council – CRIC – was created in the department

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<sup>52</sup> Especially, in regards to the perseverance of natural resources (e.g. timber in the Amazon, oil in Santander, minerals in Guajira.), the indigenous communities are confronted with different actors which require different aims and strategies.

of Cauca in 1971, and has served as ethical and political guide for similar organizations. As seed of non-violent indigenous resistance, the CRIC has promoted the creation of similar regional councils around the country, eventually leading to the formation of the national organization, ONIC in 1982. In line with Rosero (2003), the indigenous communities have developed a long-term strategy held together by four collective principles.

### **IS AN ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE NECESSARY?**

In the framework of this thesis, talking about civil resistance refers to an organized societal group with its own political identity. This group does not seek individual power, but popular power as a counterweight to a hegemonic power. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to start a process of organization with the aim to confront these policies based on a very well defined strategy. A collective interest and some objectives of transforming the political system are seen as preconditions for true civil resistance (amongst others Guerrero 2003; Hernández Delgado 2003; Salazar Posada 2003). If these criteria are not fulfilled, it represents more an isolated struggle without clear social interest and without any political impact on the national level. I have explained that the collective interest can be defined as the four principles on which the indigenous resistance process is based. However, as Marcos López emphasizes in his essay, the process of constructing civil resistance also needs an element of slow and deliberate reflection in which the owners of civil resistance develop the concept and meaning of this resistance (López 2003). Civil resistance can have its starting point in individual resistance that slowly but surely becomes civil resistance as collective social values through a slow and deliberate process of reflection are being developed. Consequently, civil resistance can not be – as already elaborated above – a spontaneous collective action and therefore, needs an organizational structure under which to function.

While many authors see only extreme political scenarios or different forms of violence as starting point and precondition for the emergence of resistance<sup>53</sup>, my findings confirm

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<sup>53</sup> See for example: Salazar Posada, Marcela. 2003. Horizontes de la resistencia civil en Colombia: Confluencias y expresiones de participación ciudadana no violenta para el cambio social y la vigencia de los derechos humanos. In *La resistencia civil: Estrategias de acción y protección en los contextos de guerra y globalización*.

Lopez' necessity for an organizational structure. Daniel Rojas endorsed that the indigenous organizational structure can be seen as the key to the resistance process.

“The strong social control which exists over its [the indigenous communities'] members on the part of the [indigenous] authorities allows specific negotiations with the armed actors. [...] If one *cacique* [indigenous leader] tells the captain of an armed group: ‘No, here nobody participates, nobody collaborates with the guerrilla.’ He has more credibility than a leader of a black community because they don’t have the same control over their members” (Interview 2007b).

Rojas refers to the strongly hierarchical and communitarian form of organization which is characteristic for indigenous communities. While afro-descendants live in a more individual way, indigenous communitarianism and strong organizational structure has substantially contributed to resisting forced displacement by negotiating with armed actors.

“In general, the experiences show that the indigenous peoples have the greatest capacity to hold negotiations with armed actors – more than the afro-descendants, *campesinos* or mestizo [...] The indigenous are victims but still have succeeded to resist as a group” (Interview 2007b).

Consequently, I argue that it is the organizational structure which has enabled the indigenous communities to successfully develop a resistance process accompanied by constant identity reaffirmation through the notion of territory. At a later stage of the thesis, I will come back to this point as it is also crucial for the perception of the resistance process as grass-roots peace initiative.

#### **A RESISTANCE BY AND FOR CIVIL SOCIETY?**

The concept of civil society has undergone significant changes in its meaning and connotation throughout the history. The followers of the natural law concept were the first to apply the notion of a natural society which was later expanded by Rousseau and Hegel, who were first to separate the state and civil society into different concepts encompassing the dissociation from the natural law concept (Guerrero 2003).

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Bogotá: PIUCP.; Hernández Delgado, Esperanza. 2003. Resistencia civil en Colombia: Dilemas, límites y posibilidades. In *La resistencia civil: Estrategias de acción y protección en los contextos de guerra y globalización*. Bogotá: PIUCP.

The dichotomy between society and state is nowadays fundamental to almost all modern political philosophy, which views the civil society – in contraposition to the state – as the sphere of relations between individuals, groups and social classes which develop outside of the power relations characterizing the state institutions. From this point of view, and in accordance with the theoretical agreement that exists today on the notion of civil society, it can be claimed that it is the civil society that expresses civil resistance and from which this resistance emerges.

However, an interesting viewpoint worth reflecting upon – in particular in the Colombian case – is the question whether the indigenous resistance fulfils the criteria of civil resistance. This problematic involves the need to also look at indigenous identity construction and the extent to which the indigenous people define themselves as Colombian citizens. The majority of indigenous people I spoke with, defined themselves as Colombians but “first of all as indigenous” (amongst others Interview 2007c; Interview 2007f). Also the resistance process is perceived rather as something ‘indigenous’ than ‘civic’. Being asked about the difference between civil resistance and indigenous resistance Dario Mejia replied:

“Civil resistance expresses itself in its relation to the state, in its relation to legality. Indigenous resistance is much more profound, its reaffirmation of ourselves [...] We are not interested in legality, we are interested in humanity – our existence as people and, above all, our view of life” (Interview 2007c).

Another fact illustrating the difficulty to define ‘indigenous resistance’ as ‘civil resistance’ is reflected in the development of an organizational structure outside the institutional system. Instead of pressuring state institutions directly, the indigenous organizations have integrated into an international advocacy network. Although indigenous communities are beginning to lobby national politics, they still use mainly non-state-channels – meaning their own authority networks – to articulate their resistance (Interview 2007b). So far the notion of ‘civil resistance’ would not be appropriate to describe the indigenous resistance process. Daniel Rojas explains, that indigenous resistance is not part of a wider “political concept” but more a “strategy of cultural and physical survival” (Interview 2007b).

“Civil resistance is more a conscious act, saying my political view is this and that. Little by little the indigenous people are incorporating this into their discourse – into their organizational development – but the indigenous communities as such, I believe, are not excising a concept of civil resistance. It is rather a cultural and territorial resistance. [...] Civil resistance is more the

struggle for a political position than defending a certain way of life (*moda de vida*)” (Interview 2007b).

Hence, I argue that the indigenous resistance strategies are part of a process which should be termed as ‘cultural and territorial resistance’ as it does not fulfill the criteria for civil resistance.

#### **POLITICALLY PROACTIVE OR MECHANISM OF DEFENCE?**

According to Randle, civil resistance follows a power concept which opposes the strategy of Mao Tse-tung, denying that “power grows out of the barrel of a gun” (Randle 1994:25), but rather depends on the capacity of evoking loyalty and obedience of the institutions and the assurance of collaboration, or at least the conformity, of the majority of the population. In his well-known book, Randle divides civil resistance into two dimensions: politically and defensive.

The political dimension puts forward the claim that through collective political struggle the collaboration and conformity with the government is being denied and therefore its source of power can be eliminated. Consequently civil resistance – according to Randle (1994) could be employed to end dictatorial, arbitrary or foreign-imposed rule.<sup>54</sup>

The defensive dimension of civil resistance is less known and goes back to the defense associated with the World Wars and more recently with the anti-nuclear movement. Defense by civil resistance could be understood as:

“[...] a prepared system of national defense based on non-violent forms of action and/or the actual development of such means against foreign invasion or occupation, coups d’état, or other forms of attack on the independence and integrity of the state” (Randle 1994:130).

However, this thesis aims at taking the theory of defense by civil resistance beyond this notion of protection against invasions or coups d’état as a substitute for military power, as the theories of Randle, Sharp and others are rather difficult to apply in a Latin American context.

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<sup>54</sup> Already in 1915, Bertrand Russel raised this idea, arguing that after a generation of training, the British population could defeat a German occupation by systematic non-cooperation Arendt, Hannah. 1970. *On violence*. New York: Harcourt..

The objective is to develop a concept of civil resistance that follows a holistic notion – political and defensive – but not against an external power nor as a process of civil resistance exclusively against the state.

Furthermore, my findings suggest that the ideological basis for the resistance process can be found in the spiritual meaning of the ancestral territories. The territory – in indigenous *weltanschauung* much more than a piece of land – is at the core of indigenous identity reaffirmation. As described in the thesis, identity construction is fundamental for the indigenous resistance process and likewise meaningful is therefore the territory. As explained, this resistance process does not constitute a clear political concept but rather is expressed in the defense of different understanding of life. Therefore, I will take a critical look at the political meaning of indigenusness and ancestral territories.

### ***THE NOTION OF INDIGENOUSNESS***

Rodolfo Stavenhagen (1988:34), a Mexican sociologist and current United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedom of indigenous people, argues that “if the indigenous peoples are claiming the recognition of special rights precisely on account of their character as ‘indigenous’, it already explains the value of ‘indigenusness’.”

As Stavenhagen further points out, the term has undergone various changes and modifications in the meaning and its connotation. The terminology was primarily used as pejorative and discriminating by the dominant colonial society. Later, the indigenous themselves adopted and transformed that terminology into a concept of identity, defining a different culture. In many cases, the term was used as a symbolic phrase in the struggle for resistance and the defense of human rights (Berche, María Garcia, and Mantilla 2006; Stavenhagen 1988).

Something similar occurred with the terminology ‘Indian’ in the Colombian context. The contemporary indigenous movement adopted the term when beginning to organize during the 1970s:

“At around that time the generic term “Indian” was rejected by the indigenous not only because it was used contemptuously but it also meant the amalgamation of individual and group identities. The indigenous preferred to be called *paeces, wayúus, sikuanis, emberas, tules, guambianos, tikunas, etc.*<sup>55</sup>. In the following attempt to unite the indigenous strengths they argued that if the term “Indian” was synonym to oppression and exploitation it also could be transformed into the contrary and create a notion of solidarity and unity in the search of freedom. In this way a new framework for the struggle and resistance beyond mere indigenous ethnicity was formed and created a more successful perspective of the future. It is due to this process that indigenous became visible on a national level” (ONIC 2007).

The term and concept ‘indigenous’, with roots in the colonial era, today defines the descendents of peoples that occupy a territory that – according to José R. Martínez Cabo<sup>56</sup> – was given to them after it was invaded, conquered and colonized by a foreign power and population. The United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP) led by Martínez Cabo formulated in 1987 the following definition:

“Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, in having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems” (Martínez Cabo 1987).

Throughout history and recent political developments, examples are found in which governments refuse to accept that indigenous populations exist in their countries. Accepting the existence of an indigenous population implies the acknowledgement of the entire concept:

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<sup>55</sup> All names of different indigenous peoples

<sup>56</sup> UN’s Special Rapporteur on Discrimination against Indigenous Populations during the 1970s and 1980s

to avow territorial occupation, to challenge national sovereignty and to admit the implementation and imposition of a form of colonialism.

The perception of the indigenusness in society still remains a challenge especially when it comes to peoples that have integrated into occidental cultural practices as the dominating image still depicts an Indian with plumes living in the jungle far from what it is called civilization (Berche, María Garcia, and Mantilla 2006). Therefore, this thesis follows the definition of the indigenous population, which is also recognized by international human rights institutions:

“The recognition as indigenous nor implies the need for a pure genetic blood line neither does the state decide who is indigenous and who is not. Rather it is the indigenous population themselves who auto-recognizes it as such [...]” (Gobernación de Antioquia 2001) cited in (Berche, María Garcia, and Mantilla 2006:37).

As indicated above, the definition of ‘indigenusness’ is based on the feeling of identity and the perception of affiliation – which does not pose severe problems to official acknowledgement. However, the controversy around the concept of ‘indigenous peoples’ is much more profound, as it entails a theoretic debate with political consequences and legal implications. Indigenous governors describe the concept of being ‘peoples’ as follows:

“Those who inhabited the American territories before the arrival of colonizers were peoples in the truest sense of the word. We, successors of these native inhabitants, continue to unite these objective characteristics attributed traditionally to peoples (language, history, culture – different and in common) as well as subjective characteristics (identity, willingness to continue united) [...] The term people is a notion and a feeling which we resolutely defend” [(Regino 2001) cited by (Berche, María Garcia, and Mantilla 2006:38)].

The governors clearly point out that talking about indigenous peoples does not entail an international status implying self-determination or the right to create a separate state as could be expected when interpreting the term from a judicial perspective.

The phrase 'people' has various meanings which do not necessarily stand in harmony with one another. From a sociological perspective, the term implies a nation – so to say an association of human beings united in a feeling of affiliation. This sentiment is determined by several aspects such as race, origin, common history, culture and language as well as religious beliefs (Berche, María Garcia, and Mantilla 2006). In this case, it refers to a population that inhabits a state territory. Consequently, those individuals that fall under the law and the jurisdiction of state form the people of that nation.

Considering the word from a political-judicial perspective follows the same line of thought, which sees the people as an element of the state and the embodiment of sovereignty. In this case, the people is a legal subject with rights and duties and origin of the 'will of the people', which contributes to fundamental decisions such as the form of the state or its own functioning (Berche, María Garcia, and Mantilla 2006). However, as will be explained in the following, neither of these different conceptions do grasp the notion of the indigenous peoples.

Giorgio Agamben (2001) has done a remarkable analysis on the polysemy and ambiguity of the term 'people' which becomes very useful to reflect on the importance for indigenous to be characterized as peoples, especially in relation to the defence, the exercise as well as the protection of their rights. He argues that the word 'people' denotes the political subject which constitutes policy and law as well as the classes and social groups that indeed find themselves excluded from fundamental decisions (Agamben 2001). In the same way, the term refers to collective groups that refuse to assimilate into a homogenous political entity, thus constructing a distinctive identity different from their national affiliation.

When looking at the work of Berche, María and Mantilla (2006:39) in this context, an interesting coherence becomes obvious. Although seemingly incompatible, it is possible to identify three characteristics for indigenous peoples that take on all trains of thought by Agamben.

1. The indigenous refer to themselves as peoples to be characterized as a legal entity with rights. The indigenous peoples are collective bodies constructing a distinct law and

advocating judging themselves according to distinct norms. In addition, the indigenous peoples are entitled to specific human rights regarding their own form of life and identity.

2. Commonly the indigenous peoples are subject to discrimination and hence are excluded from political decisions. Therefore the indigenous peoples are obliged to consolidate actions and processes of resistance. In the framework of these dynamics results their acknowledgement as a legal entity which is crucial for the further struggle for a life in dignity.
3. Furthermore, the indigenous peoples construct and claim an identity distinctive to the national affiliation. Although the majority of the indigenous sees themselves as national citizens, this is not done through a homogenous national identity but through different, independent and manifold identity constructions.

The term ‘people’ was finally defined in 1989 in the framework of an international human rights organization. The ILO – International Labor Organization – defined the indigenous people in its Convention 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent countries<sup>57</sup> as follows (ILO 1989):

1. “Indigenous people are peoples in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present State boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions.” (Art. 1/1b)
2. “Self-identification as indigenous or tribal shall be regarded as a fundamental criterion for determining the groups to which the provisions of this Convention apply.” (Art. 1/2)

Today, the main international human rights organizations use this definition. However, it should be noted that this characterization puts great limitation on the interpretation of the term ‘people’ and consequently the rights implied. In accordance with the Convention 169, no indigenous people could use the document to claim sovereignty or separation of the state or other rights that are only entitled to states. It can instead be used to demand acknowledgement

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<sup>57</sup> Which was ratified as Law 21 of 1991 and made Convention 169 a Colombian law.

of the rights vis-à-vis the state and the state's compliance with its duties. In the framework of this thesis, I follow this judicial, linguistic and semantic concept of the 'indigenous peoples' defined politically-philosophically by Agamben and legally by the ILO.

### **FORMATION OF THE INDIGENOUS TERRITORIALITY AND ITS INSERTION INTO THE CONFLICT LOGIC**

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word territory is presumed to derive from *terra*. Herby, *terra* means land, earth, nourishment and sustenance. These words express a sense of a sustaining medium. On the other hand, Connolly (1996:144) points out that the OED suggests that the root of the word could also derive from *terrere*, meaning to frighten, to terrorize. Following this logic, the word *territorium* is "a place from which people are warned" (Connolly 1996:144) and consequently territory would be land occupied by violence. Although one does not have to agree on this derivation of the term, Connolly still emphasizes the close relationship of violence and territory. This correlation is best illustrated when looking at the question of forming national identity – or better, founding a people. In Jacques Rousseau's book on the "the Government of Poland" he argues that:

"in order to be free one must belong to a people; to be a people you must have a common identity burned into; to be a flourishing people one must exclusively inhabit a contiguous territory; to flourish freely as territorialized people you must stringently limit contact with the foreign" [cited in (Connolly 1996:143)].

When investigating indigenous territories, it becomes obvious that the correlation between territory and violence is apparent here as well.

However, various authors agree that the agrarian problems that exist today are the result of poor organization by the Spanish colonizers. Both the manner in which the country was populated as well as the organization of the social and economic structures contributed significantly to these problems. This problem, understood as 'agrarian' from a peasant's perspective, is at the same time a 'territorial' problem for the indigenous population.

Based on the reports from the World Bank (WB), the land distribution in Colombia is highly unequal.<sup>58</sup> The adverse effects of high inequality – in terms of incomes, assets, voice and opportunities – have long been recognized in Latin America.<sup>59</sup> It is also hypothesized that high inequality is associated with lower public investment, which may make it more difficult to establish representative local institution and, because of lack of opportunities, “may drive the poor to support armed movements” (WB 2004). The report by the WB further confirms that municipalities with more unequal land distribution are also characterized by higher levels of conflict-related violence in its many manifestations (kidnapping, massacres and guerrilla actions). Therefore, Colombia’s unequal land distribution is at the core of the country’s violence: 5% of the population possess about 80% of the agricultural land, while two thirds of the peasants own only 5% of the national land. This is a problem which, despite various attempts at land reforms, could not be solved (Brües 2003).

When reviewing the country’s history it becomes evident that the insurgency and the expansion of the armed conflict evolved coevally with the construction of the indigenous territoriality during the last four decades. This correlation can be associated with different dynamics of territory and settlement since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The major dynamic corresponds to the process of expropriation and de-territorialization of the indigenous population. In the nineteenth century, Colombian indigenous people were considered savages, to be civilized under a series of paternalistic laws such as Law 11 of 1821, which ordered the dispartment of *resguardos*, driving many indigenous people to remote mountain regions and forests as a consequence of being expelled from their productive lands. This dynamic configured the territoriality of the majority of the indigenous peoples in the Andes and practically converted the indigenous’ and peasants’ interests in the region and made them share economic poverty as the majority of the Colombian peasants found themselves with insufficient access to agricultural land.

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<sup>58</sup> Rural Development Unit, Latin America Region. 2007. *Colombia: Land Policy in Transition* [Report]. World Bank, 2004 [cited 10.05 2007]. Available from [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2004/03/12/000160016\\_20040312102005/Rendered/PDF/279420CO.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2004/03/12/000160016_20040312102005/Rendered/PDF/279420CO.pdf).

<sup>59</sup> In fact, a 1950 World Bank mission identified unequal land distribution as a key impediment to economic and social development in Colombia.

In the result of this complex causality and various dynamics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>60</sup>, the indigenous territories were included in the insurgents' and the states' conflict strategy. In the framework of this situation, also the first modern indigenous organizations emerged, opposed to latifundio and political control exercised through gamonalismo. These initial organizations were based on autonomy and the reconstruction of indigenous territoriality. During the 1970s and '80s the indigenous struggle focused on the recovery of their lands and took place mainly in the departments of Cauca, Tolima, Cordoba and Nariño. Increasing incidents of political violence against those indigenous communities connected to the control of natural resources were registered – especially regarding mining and logging in the Pacific. This political violence has been explained as territorially motivated, not only by the indigenous organizations, but also by academic scholars (Villa and Houghton 2005).

However, one aspect analyzed by Villa and Houghton is essential when looking at the development of indigenous territoriality. The authors argue that during the violent struggle for lands during 1970s no collective indigenous mobilization had yet emerged. Neither in the indigenous discourse nor in concrete actions had a national indigenous territoriality become visible – a notion that would become essential during the 1980s and 1090s emerging alongside the notion of being a people and other values derived from the concept of national autonomy (Villa and Houghton 2005).

During the 1990s, the indigenous attenuated the actions in regards to the recovery of land and began evolving their project of territorial order based on the new constitution, as it recognizes a number of rights<sup>61</sup> that specifically pertain to indigenous communities. The four years following the constitution showed a decline in violence against indigenous communities. With about 50 registered cases per year the number was significantly lower than during the years between 1988 and 1991. Despite this positive trend and the immense advances in the legislative protection of the indigenous rights achieved by the new Constitution the situation for the indigenous worsened. The year 1996 marks the transition to the next period – the complete integration of the indigenous communities into the armed conflict – as paramilitary

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<sup>60</sup> Such as increasing agricultural cultivation followed by a migration wave of mainly displaced peasants that fled due to political violence during “la Violencia” in the 1950s and consequently penetrated indigenous lands. Another dynamic of settlement corresponds to the agricultural crisis of the 1960s which triggered the continuing cultivation of illicit crops in remote regions and mountain areas contiguous to indigenous territories or of traditional importance for some indigenous peoples

groups begin to fight with the guerrilla over the control of indigenous territory in the department of Córdoba.

The question arises why the Constitution, which granted the indigenous peoples various specific rights, did not deploy its positive effects. According to the Office of the Presidential Adviser for Human Rights, some of the chief problems in securing respect for the human rights of indigenous peoples are as follows [(Colombia 1991a) cited in (OAS 1993:5)]:

- “Government officials are, on the whole, ignorant of the laws that protect the rights and territories of indigenous groups. As a result, their lawful authorities are ignored and supplanted by countless state institutions.”
- “In most cases, their titles to the *resguardos* are not recognized by government officials. Some institutions and organs in the regions [...] do not take kindly to creation of areas and regional organizations with spokesmen for a number of communities [...] engaged in defending their ethnic rights and their territory.”
- “The right to autonomy [...] is not recognized by political groups and organizations of all persuasions.”

Based on my findings, I argue that the territorialization of the conflict which led to the inclusion of the ancestral lands into the logic of conflict, has contributed simultaneously to the development of a resistance process based on these very territories. As Villa and Houghton (2005) have analyzed, it was not until the creation of the ONIC in 1982 that a notion of being *the* indigenous people of Colombia evolved. Only through the conflict territorialization, indigenous identity construction throughout the county was threatened and the communities

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<sup>61</sup> The state recognizes and protects the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Colombian nation (Article 7); it is the obligation of the state to protect cultural assets (Article 8); the languages and dialects of the ethnic groups are also official languages within their territories; in communities with their own linguistic tradition, education shall be bilingual (Article 10); instruction shall respect and develop their cultural identity (Article 68); the communal lands of ethnic groups and reservation lands cannot be taken away or attached (Article 63); ethnic groups settled in areas of archaeological treasures have special rights over that cultural heritage, which rights must be regulated by law (Article 72); indigenous persons who share border territories are recognized as Colombian nationals, provided the recognition is mutual (Article 96); the new Constitution creates senatorial posts and as many as five representatives to be elected by indigenous communities in a special national election (Article 176); the new Constitution provides that indigenous peoples’ authorities may exercise jurisdictional functions within their territories and in accordance with their own lands and procedures, provided they are not contrary to the Constitution and the laws (Article 246). A complete English version of the Colombian Constitution can be found: Colombia, Republic of. 2007. *Constitution of Colombia* 1991b [cited 16.05. 2007]. Available from [http://confinder.richmond.edu/admin/docs/colombia\\_const2.pdf](http://confinder.richmond.edu/admin/docs/colombia_const2.pdf).

began to develop a resistance strategy to defend their territories as core of an indigenous identity. Therefore, the illustrated change in the logic of conflict has triggered this new dynamic of non-violent resistance which will be further analyzed in the following chapter.

## 5 CONCEPTUALIZATION OF TERRITORIAL AND CULTURAL RESISTANCE OF THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

*“There are many threats, but also strong resistance. This time calls for unity, the strengthening of our organizations, to defend what is our, to create alliances with other sectors and indigenous organizations abroad but also unity forces with campesinos.”*  
Luis Evelis Andrade, ONIC

Especially amongst Latin American scholars in anthropology and political science the topic ‘ethnic activism’ as received much attention. Several successful indigenous mobilizations during the 1990s, such as the uprising in Ecuador and Bolivia<sup>62</sup>, contributed to this recognition. The Zapatista uprising in Chiapas in 1994 to protest the NAFTA is another well-known case, despite its continuous struggle for national impact (Jackson and Warren 2005:551).

Until the 1980s and 1990s, public discourse and state policies aimed at assimilation and deterred indigenous identification. As Jackson and Warren (2005:550) point out, some scholars like Gordillo and Hirsch even talked of the “invisibilization” of the indigenous population. However, during the past three decades a turn-around has become visible. In various countries across the continent, a process of re-indigenization was initiated as an attempt to revive lost indigenous cultural practices. The emphasis on mestizaje – stressing biological mixing – shifted, according to Jackson and Warren (2005), to identities that valorized difference, in particular indigenusness. Guatemala, Nicaragua, Brazil, Mexico, Paraguay, Ecuador, Argentina, Peru, Venezuela and also Colombia are examples where constitutional reforms recognizing multicultural nations containing plural citizenries took place. International human right treaties and covenants, such as the 1989 ILO convention, were signed and enabled indigenous communities to claim collective rights. However, the well-intentioned rhetoric of international norms lacks – often due to its vagueness and ambiguity – sufficient implementation. Still, discrimination based on ethnicity and race is

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<sup>62</sup> For more information see: Van Cott, Donna Lee. 2005. *From Movements to Parties in Latin America: The evolution of Ethnic Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

visible, which seems deeply embedded in the societal structure and indigenous movements continue to exact a high toll (Jackson and Warren 2005). Nevertheless, some scholars such as D. Yashar<sup>63</sup> argue that ethnicity became a powerful language for social mobilizing and political demands. Many indigenous groups demand and attain national and international recognition of their identity and the legitimacy of their claims. Adopting a strategy of cultural and historical recovery and revival seems to be “often the best route for achieving a degree of autonomy and self-determination, as well as convincing sponsors and legislators of the reasonableness of other kinds of claims, such as titling a traditional collective tenure system” (Jackson and Warren 2005:553). Campaigns to gain collective land rights centered on the validity of indigenous understanding of native identity and practices have proved, according to Jackson and Warren, more successful and eventually led to a more comprehensive notion of territory. Rather than simply the land itself, territory is seen as a crucial foundation for self-determination, a “fundamental and multidimensional space for the creation of recreation of the social, economic, and cultural values and practices of the communities” [(Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998:20) cited in (Jackson and Warren 2005:553)]

In 1995, van Cott characterized the goals of Latin American indigenous movements as: “self-determination and autonomy, with an emphasis on cultural distinctiveness; political reforms that involve a restructuring of the state; territorial rights and access to natural resources, including control over economic development; and reforms of military and police powers over indigenous peoples. [(Van Cott 1995:12) cited in (Jackson and Warren 2005:550)]”

It could consequently be argued that indigenous identity has, in the framework of this shift, become a strategy in itself. If however, as I argue in this thesis, ancestral territory forms the pillar of indigenous identity, the resistance and self-determination process is being challenged if the very territory is endangered. The territorialization of the Colombian armed conflict which resulted in the inclusion of the indigenous *resguardos* in the conflict logic crucially endangers indigenous identity which consequently demands a change of the resistance process.

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<sup>63</sup> Cited in Jackson, Jean E., and Kay B. Warren. 2005. Indigenous Movements in Latin America, 1992-2004: Controversies, Ironies, New Directions. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34:549-573.

## **THE FOUR PRINCIPLES OF THE INDIGENOUS RESISTANCE PROCESS: AUTONOMY, CULTURE, TERRITORY AND UNITY**

*“To be Colombian is a matter of nationality –  
to be indigenous is a matter of identity.  
To be indigenous is a matter of the philosophy of life  
and a not question of bloodline.”  
Dario Mejia, ONIC*

The indigenous organizations, and above all ONIC, have defined ‘autonomy, culture, territory and unity as the four main principles on which they base their struggle. These principles all correlate while, the territory – in connection to the indigenous identity that emanates from it – are at the core. As previously illustrated, the threats against the integrity of the indigenous territories are multiple. There are various important protagonists of invasion, destabilization and destruction of the land, communities, way of life, culture and spirituality of the indigenous population: paramilitaries, Colombian armed forces, guerrilla, big landowners, and multinational companies extracting natural resources. Big parts of the indigenous population have begun to believe that true aim of the paramilitaries is to drive them of their territories in order to give access to multinational companies:

“For us it is obvious, that the war is one principle form of the economic model which becomes obvious in the passed legislations and the paramilitarization of regions of value for mega projects. When the law does not allow denying us our rights, then comes the other hand of these mega projects: paramilitarism” (ONIC 2002).

“The resources and biodiversity found in our identities are one aspect which we defend as our very own [...] I do not want to say we aim at selling these riches; to the contrary, our interest is to maintain them as indigenous property [...] and not to give them to private or semi-private companies which aim at patenting and commercializing life [...] eventually they will derive us of our territories” (ONIC 2002).

Without the right to territory it is impossible for the indigenous communities to imagine themselves as collective political subjects. This right is an integral part of the struggles that were revived in the 1970s.

“The protection of our territories is fundamental in our struggle – the struggle to preserve our territories means to protect the natural resources, protect what for

us is life – that is the nature [...] because we are not superior to nature but part of it, our role is to defend our brothers and friends which are the trees and insects – the flora and fauna. That’s what we then can call *reaffirmation of ourselves* and in the same sense *resistance against the project of death*” (Interview 2007c).

When Dario Mejia, member of ONIC, speaks about the ‘project of death’ he refers to the “occidental culture [...] based on polarization – on the good and the evil” (Interview 2007c). He refers to the entire history of mankind, and in particular the colonization of Europe and later America, which can be described, in his view, as a history of killing and murder – “a project of death against the human species and the nature.” Indigenous resistance – or reaffirmation of themselves, as Dario Mejia calls it – is hence the contestation of this concept and therefore should be called “project of life”. In this perspective, the strong correlation of identity and territory becomes evident. Identity is perceived as the reaffirmation and reproduction of the institutions, values and practices of their culture. Hence culture includes: “the whole of principles and aspirations passed on with fidelity and which are preserved in our memories” (Interview 2007c). The territory is a pivotal point of their religious and social practices. These practices can only be carried out in a place fulfilling specific conditions, natural resources and a cosmological meaning.

It is necessary to avoid a romanticized, idealized and de-contextualized view on the indigenous culture. Instead of something fixed, solid, closed and finished, they renew, adopt and develop – sometimes out of own will, sometime due to external pressure – the indigenous culture. The indigenous peoples in Colombia – like many others – are confronting socioeconomic and culture pressure from different systems and understandings. The main challenge consists in the conflicting coexistence of different models and in the internal need to reject or adopt those adequately (Houghton 2001). This destruction is reflected in the continuous abandonment of cultural expressions regarding games, singing, dancing, art, and handicrafts. Moreover it becomes visible in the nescience of rituals in regards to aspects such as sowing, harvest and nature (Houghton 2001). This fact has raised concerns in many indigenous communities about a possible cultural disintegration.

History, memory, and oral communication have been the channels to transmit culture from parents to children and future generations; today, oral culture is hollowed, without a substitution of orality by written culture. Instead, a stagnancy of linguistic creativity has become visible, characterized by the increase of loan words from Spanish and its grammar structure. Consequently, a gap between the generations opens which negatively affects the advance of knowledge and thinking.

A people that is reconstructing its economy, its organization and political life on the basis of its identity, needs to be aware that it involves an ongoing task and a long process with the willingness to continue 'feeling indigenous'. This feeling of indigeneness does not amount only in the conscious awareness, "but in the form of dreaming, distinguishing colours and flavors, and the way how to look at the horizon" (Interview 2007f).

It becomes obvious that since the arrival of the Spanish conquerors, the occupation, loss and recuperation of the territory have been constant elements in the history of the indigenous population in Colombia. The indigenous have constructed a mystic and social meaning in relation to their territories which can be described as a concept of territoriality: The territory has developed into a holistic relationship between the communities and their environment, constructing a fundamentally ethnic identity besides the development and production models which distinguish the communities from the rest of Colombian society. Thus, territory could be seen as the entirety of correlations which determines the exercise of rights the right of property; the development of the ritual and mystic significance of their surroundings; and the formation of social, cultural, political and economic structures inside their own society.

The defense of the project of territoriality is the response of the indigenous communities to the existing threats – the basis of its resistance strategies against the conflict. The communities struggle to live and preserve this autonomy in the midst of an armed conflict. Therefore, the indigenous make use of various resistance strategies – some inherited from past experiences, others new. They attempt to defend the principles from which derive their rights: own government, own jurisdiction, own development, own culture, etc.

## **STRATEGIES AND MECHANISMS OF RESISTANCE**

*“We already know how [the state] operates and who it serves.  
What we need now is to build popular  
mechanisms for sovereignty and resistance.  
For that, we - the people –need to come together.”  
Luis Evelis Andrade, ONIC*

The indigenous have hence developed strategies to exist as a people and to defend the autonomy of their territories. These strategies concentrate on three specific spheres:

**Economic sphere:** The fight for control over all economic activities inside indigenous territories. These activities have to fulfill the principles of sustainable development as well as social and economic sustainability.

**Cultural sphere:** Strengthening of the spiritual institutions in order to protect the unity that exists between the indigenous people and its territory. Moreover the aim is to develop education processes so that future generations are raised appreciating and respecting their territories. Last but not least, the indigenous movement tries to insist on its peoples to use their spirituality and historic experiences in order to exercise resistance against the forced displacement from their territories.

**Poli-organizational sphere:** Authorities are strengthened in order to develop their own jurisdiction as a means to settle internal tensions and disputes and to organize interethnic exchange. Moreover, the indigenous peoples aim at consensus at a national level, through the framework of ONIC, in order to permit direct contact with the state, in order to negotiate education and health politics and demand attention to specific problems of indigenous communities.

As I explained, organizational structure is at the core of any resistance process. Although some authors like Michael Randle would argue that resistance emerges out of a specific social or political situation, I put forward the necessity of some kind of organizational structure to assist and consolidate a true process. The indigenous people in the Chocó have

created a remarkable and successful internal organization process that has contributed significantly to the achievements of their territorial and cultural resistance. In the following part, I will take a look at the development and functioning of its organizations and authorities.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AS A KEY ELEMENT OF INDIGENOUS RESISTANCE**

Today, the indigenous communities of the Bajo Atrato, and Colombia in general, show a very high level of organizational structure. From the local level – the community as a single entity – up to the national level with international contacts, a strongly hierarchal structure can be identified. At each level, the indigenous peoples have created representing institutions, which are democratically elected; however, these institutions have a low proportion of women.

The rights of political participation are exercised vis-à-vis national government and local self-government. At the national level, there are two senatorial positions and as many as five representatives to the National Congress reserved for indigenous peoples. Furthermore, the human rights department of the Vice Presidency has a committee on indigenous policy with indigenous representation.

The 1991 Constitution grants indigenous territories autonomy for purposes of managing their interests. They may have their own authorities to govern them; they may administer their own resources, levy taxes and have a share of the national revenues (Colombia 1991b, Article 287). The indigenous territories are to be governed by *cabildos* that, using their own customs and practices, shall be

“responsible for seeing that the laws are observed, for designing economic and social development policies, plans and programs within their territory, promoting and overseeing public investments, receiving and distributing revenues from those investments, overseeing natural resources, coordinating programs and projects, and helping to maintain law and order” (Colombia 1991b, Article 330).

In general the indigenous peoples are organized on three levels:

1. The ONIC (National Indigenous Organization of Colombia) is the federation of regional councils (the most influential of the regional councils are the CRIT in Tolima and the CRIC in Cauca).
2. The Regional Council or *cabildos mayores*, are the bodies through which the indigenous communities can function as groups with a legal personality and interact with other indigenous organizations.
3. The Local Councils or *cabildos locales* most closely approximate the local communities and their traditional structure of authority.

In the following, the functioning of the three levels of indigenous organization will be analyzed and at a later stage I will look at its importance in the resistance process.

#### **LOCAL LEVEL: CABILDOS LOCALES**

Although it can be traced back to the Spanish colonial institution of the same name, the *cabildo* – an institution of Colombian public law – is a representative body and enables the community to preserve established community principles and collective decision-making procedures. It was Law 89 of 1890, which officially adopted the *cabildo* as the organizational structure of indigenous people. It was a compromise between, on the one hand, self-government and indigenous administrative autonomy, and the unified political and legal system of the Colombian state on the other hand.

The members of each *cabildo* (the number varies between five and twelve) are elected by each community to one-year terms; they receive no pay and enjoy no privileges. The members of the *cabildo* elect a governor. Although Law 89 gives them broad authorities in regards to internal administrative, executive and police affairs, their authority over the community is not binding; instead, it is a kind of moral authority. While this reinforces their democratic commitment, it weakens them – as the OAS (1993) report points out – vis-à-vis challenges or attacks from other State institutions with overlapping or parallel authority. The result is that the authority of the *cabildos* is systematically disregarded or dismissed by state institutions, even the courts, the police and municipal institutions (OAS 1993, Chapter XI).

This conflict of parallel authorities also occurs between the *cabildos* and municipal authorities. The latter are also popularly elected officials, but generally elected through a party structure controlled locally by political elites that operate by buying votes through the so-called community actions boards. This source of conflict and of frequent human rights violations could be reduced – according to some authors – “if within the new territorial division, the municipalities were to be configured to coincide with the communities or to be contiguous” [(Fernando Rojas) cited in (OAS 1993, Chapter XI)].

Article 246 of the Constitution of Colombia provides that the authorities of the indigenous peoples may exercise jurisdictional function within their territories, in accordance with their own standards and procedures, provided they do not conflict with the Constitution and laws of the Republic. This provides an important opportunity to develop the independence and autonomy of the ethnic minorities, as it could obviate the difficulties that occur when members of the indigenous communities are tried by authorities who do not take into consideration the minorities’ cultural values.

#### **REGIONAL LEVEL: CABILDO MAYOR CAMIZBA**

Camizba – *Cabildo Mayor Indígena de la Zona del Bajo Atrato* – was created in 1986 and underwent many different stages of advancement and consolidation. Based on the four principles – territory, culture, unity and autonomy – Camizba was founded as an answer to the precarious living conditions of the indigenous population in the Bajo Atrato; living conditions as a result of colonization, invasion of indigenous territories and the undifferentiated exploitation of natural resources as well as violence and neglect on the part of the state (CAMIZBA and PAC 2006).

The organization represents the region’s five indigenous peoples: Embera, Wounaan, Katío, Chamí and Tule living in the municipalities of Unguía, Acandí, Riosucio and Carmen del Darién. Each of the five peoples – with their own native tongue - has tried to overcome cultural particularities and geographic distances in order to combine their forces and resist the dominant influences of the armed conflict. This was particular difficult as each one of them

has a different culture and a “different form of thinking” (Interview 2007a). Wounaan leader Archimedes – founder member of Camizba – emphasized the need to concentrate in particular on “unity” during the first years of the organization.

In September 1986 the “Primer Congreso Zonal” (*First Regional Conference*), with about 130 participants, was held in the community Marcial Wounaan. The principal objective of the conference was to create a regional organization – to be called Camizba – with the aim of promoting the wellbeing of the communities and to call for and claim the respect of the indigenous territories.

“Camizba was created to defend the interests of the communities and demand the respect of the legislative rights by Law 89 of 1890. Hence, the political objective was to implement the creation of *resguardos* in the Bajo Atrato” (Interview 2007a).

Today, Camizba is the regional council for 25 communities in Bajo Atrato and Carmen del Darién. During the past ten years, the consequences of the internal conflict in the region impaired seriously. The indigenous population suffered from threatening, torture, forced displacement and murders. In particular, the inhabitants of Campo Bello and Chimirindó were pressured to leave their territories; however, the majority of the communities decided not to leave their *resguardos* and practice territorial and cultural resistance to protect their ancestral lands (Interview 2007f). Nevertheless, the neglect by parts of the state and insufficient living conditions took its toll. Some community leaders were assassinated – amongst them the secretary of Camizba Rito Sobricama. Consequently, Camizba decided to further strengthen its organizational structure and resist threats by the armed actors. The organization, “began to form leaders through courses, youth encounters, and seminars with women as well as cultural workshops”, Archimedes explained to me. (Interview 2007a) Moreover, the absence of the state, in particular in form of health care and education, has forced Camizba to take action in these areas.

“Education and health care are the responsibility of the state [...] but the state does not comply with its obligations [...] hence we have to fight that the state fulfils his accords and obligations – all this is part of the process of defence” (Interview 2007f).

Through training of teachers and *promotores de salud*<sup>64</sup>, Camizba has succeeded – except between 1998 and 2000 when the activities had to be suspended due to the impairment of the conflict – in guaranteeing at least a certain degree of basic education and health care (Interview 2007f).

“The organizational process surrounding Camizba has achieved a lot [...] we have built contacts with other organizations to articulate our problems [...] and we achieved to establish dialogues with the captain of the paramilitary bloc and demand respect of our indigenous policy” (Interview 2007a).

However, as a staff member of the International Red Cross explained to me, Camizba suffers also from repeated malpractice of financial resources provided by national and international organizations. As in project work often the case, members of the organization receive no financial allowances for their work. I was informed about various cases in which money designated for assistance projects has not reached the communities (Interview 2007g). Therefore, some NGOs such as the Red Cross, have decided to work directly with the communities instead of giving funds to Camizba. However, what ‘western’ NGOs perceive as unjust enrichment is considered normal practice within the indigenous organization (Interview 2007g).

## **NATIONAL LEVEL: ONIC**

The National Indigenous Organization of Colombia – ONIC, refers to itself as a great "maloka"<sup>65</sup> of the indigenous population inside the country. After a decision by the First Indigenous National Congress, the organization was created in 1982. It aims at assuring the rights of the indigenous peoples through the consolidation of its four basic principles (ONIC 2007).

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<sup>64</sup> Community members educated in basic health-care – in particular in the use of medical plants – in order to cure common diseases such as diarrhea.

<sup>65</sup> “Maloka is, as its indigenous name indicates, urban landmark, encounter place and dialogue, where possible paths open for the individual's and the society's better future. It's a program of national projection that looks for the contribution of social change, through multiple strategies of democratized and permanent seeking for social appropriation of science and technology entertaining way” UN-Habitat. 2007. *Best Practices Database - Maloka interactive center of science and technology* 2002 [cited 01.07. 2007]. Available from [http://www.ucl.ac.uk/dpu-projects/drivers\\_urb\\_change/urb\\_society/pdf\\_health\\_educ/HABITAT\\_BestPractice\\_Maloka\\_science\\_technology.pdf](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/dpu-projects/drivers_urb_change/urb_society/pdf_health_educ/HABITAT_BestPractice_Maloka_science_technology.pdf).

The ONIC has a key role in the struggle for indigenous territories and the defence of the indigenous culture and its values. Despite significantly different experiences and histories among the varied peoples that constitute the ONIC, it is a bridge anchoring itself on philosophical principles that define the following platform (ONIC 2007):

- Defense of indigenous autonomy
- Defense of indigenous territories and recovery of those that have been usurped
- Collective ownership of land in *resguardos*
- Control over the natural resources located in the indigenous peoples' land
- Creation of community economic enterprises
- Defense of indigenous peoples' culture, history and customs
- Bilingual and bicultural education under the direction of indigenous authorities
- Recovery and strengthening of traditional medical practices and programs that reflect the social and cultural values of the communities

Today, the ONIC is the legal and legitimate national organization representing Colombian indigenous peoples. Political representation was, and remains, in the hands of the democratically-elected indigenous leadership, both through the ONIC as well as through the formation of political movements. The ONIC brings together 44 regional organizations and indigenous authorities from 32 departments in the country, and at the same time, represents 84 different peoples.

Based on my data and after reviewing the well-functioning organizational structure of the indigenous population and its importance in the resistance process, I argue that without some kind of organizational structure, resistance processes cannot develop. The indigenous people have constructed organizations and authorities that have enabled them to carry out a very successful resistance process – in particular in terms of resisting forced displacement. Nevertheless, certain difficulties, such as internal power struggles between the different peoples and mismanagement of funds, have become visible. But despite these challenges, the need to work together and the importance of defending the indigenous territories has enabled the communities to develop a common ground – supported by the four basic principles – and eventually a common organizational structure.

Following my hypothesis, the resistance process that has developed in correlation with the changing logic of conflict, has entered a stage with the potential to develop into a grass-roots peace initiative. This fact will become even more evident when looking at some concrete examples of the indigenous resistance. In all of them, the ONIC and its local authorities have played a crucial role in the success of their strategies.

## **EXAMPLES OF THE RESISTANCE PROCESS**

Since the creation of the first regional indigenous council in the department of Cauca in 1971, the organizational structure has expanded and become much more effective. On all levels, the indigenous authorities have formed a support network that makes violations of their rights rapidly public. The so-called *denuncias* (denunciations) of threats and human rights breaches have proven to be an especially successful mechanism to exercise pressure on government institutions to fulfill their obligations. The entire structure follows a ‘bottom-up-approach’ where incidents on the community level rapidly become of national importance. The Internet has particularly enabled the indigenous authorities to pass on information quickly to the ONIC in Bogotá.

“We denunciate everything that’s happening, every assassination, every threat on the part of the guerrilla, paramilitaries or army [...] we denunciate at national and international level with the help of the ONIC, with the help of the *defensoría* and with the help of NGOs” (Interview 2007f).

However, it should be noted that communication between the *cabildos locales* and the regional councils is still hampered by a lack of proper infrastructure. Nevertheless, the importance of the created networks has just recently become visible. In March 2007, the ONIC reported the deaths of about 50 children in the Chocó in a three-month period due to malnutrition and improper medical conditions, with the consumption of unfit drinking water identified as one of the main causes. Indigenous leader Diocelina Chocho was quoted in the BBC: “The child wakes up vomiting, diarrhea and with a little bit of a fever. Two days after, the child is completely dehydrated and that is what has been happening here” (BBC 2007). Passing on information about the incidents to the national and international media as well the

the defensoría (*Colombian ombudsman*) has forced the respective government institution to take the necessary steps and assist the affected communities.

Demonstrations and marches have also been very successful. The largest in recent years took place in September 2004, when about 60,000 indigenous people marched for two days on the Pan-American Highway demanding respect for their autonomy. They protested against attacks by the various armed actors, an attempt of President Uribe to alter Constitutional recognition of indigenous territorial rights, as well the government's negotiations regarding a free trade agreements which would undermine the few protections against multinational cooperate power. The blocking of the Pan-American Highway was especially dreadful to the government as it is the region's most important commercial route. On trucks or on foot the demonstrators covered a distance of about 100 km to the city of Cali.

The march was organized by regional indigenous organizations as well as the ONIC, which also ensured the wide coverage of the event by national and international media, including the BBC, Reuters, and others (Cryan 2004). Colombia's biggest national newspaper, *El Tiempo*, wondered how the indigenous organizations have become so strong and able gain so much attention, even from pro-Uribe newspapers. *El Tiempo* gave an easy answer: "through organizing, organizing and organizing [...] the march demonstrates the level of organization and commitment to their cause achieved over more than 30 years of continuous work" (Cryan 2004). "We do not speak for the government to hear; we talk to the people." – That was the central line of the communiqué distributed during the march's inauguration by the ONIC. Putting this principle in practice, the organization deployed a number of 'community communicators' which operated small mobile radio stations. These stations broadcasted interviews with participants of the march to their families and friends who could not participate in the march. Furthermore, international support groups were informed about the broadcasts via the Internet. A picture of one 'community communicator' who installed a transmitter and antenna on an adapted bicycle was widely published in the media. In each town they passed through, the marchers stopped to hold a session of their "mobile congress". The theme of this 'mobile congress' was "Minga for life, justice, happiness, freedom and autonomy". "Minga" is an indigenous word that refers to the ancestral practice of communities joining efforts or "meeting for the achievement of a common goal" (Cryan 2004). According

to the organizers, the "mobile congresses" are held in defense of the right to life – not only of human beings, but of also animals, plants and the nature as a whole.

Unfortunately, a much smaller demonstration of about 700 indigenous people, who peacefully demanded the guarantee of social services on the Pan-American Highway between Cali and Quibdo in May 2007, was violently attacked by anti-riot squads. ESMAD – mobile ant-riot squad - repressed the march using tear gas, which resulted in the death of three children between the ages 6 – 8. At first 28 persons ‘were disappeared’ of which only seven have returned thus far. On the day of the attack, government authorities had claimed that the demonstrations were organized by the guerrilla. These accusations have been vigorously denied by indigenous authorities and lack any justification. Instead, accusations such as these tantamount to a death sentence in Colombia. Although a commission has investigated the case, so far nobody has been held responsible (Comisión de Observación Interinstitucional 2007). Nevertheless, peaceful marches in Colombia are generally associated with indigenous movements as many other demonstrations in the country – especially students’ manifestations – regularly turn violent. Marches by indigenous peoples have become an integral part of the resistance strategies.

## **INDIGENOUS RESISTANCE AS PART OF AN INTERNATIONAL NETWORK**

The indigenous organizations have discovered the importance of integrating into international support networks as it improves the efficiency of the resistance process. Luis Evelis Andrade expressed this importance when being asked about the ONIC’s strategies:

“We must strengthen our lobbying strategies so decisions will be taken in favor of our people – on the national as well as international level. [...] On the one hand it is necessary that the indigenous people promote the processes of organization and political leadership, on the other hand we need to seek alliances with different sectors that share and support our interests on the national and international level. (Interview 2007e)”

When asked about these possible alliances, Andrade suggested NGOs, labor unions, social, ecological and anti-globalization movements as well as political parties “which are willing to support a transformation process [...] or exercise pressure on the government.” He further emphasized the need for exchange of experiences and a process of political maturation

in order to achieve the awareness that they have the same strategic aims – “a more inclusive, pluralistic and ecological society.”

This aim has recently been put into practice when indigenous peoples from 24 different countries convened in March in Guatemala for the Third Continental Summit of Indigenous peoples. The summit’s slogan “*From resistance to power*” reflected the focus on primarily economic and political, rather than cultural issues. One aim of the summit was to define alternatives to the state and society construction. As Bolivia’s foreign relations minister David Choquehuanca argued, “development plans look for a better life, but this results in inequality. Indigenous peoples, instead, look to how to live well [vivir bien]” (Becker 2007). The integration of indigenous movements was another topic that was debated. Despite the agreement to establish continental coordinating bodies, the importance of local work was stressed as well. The Declaration of Iximéche<sup>66</sup> was published as the final outcome of the summit, which can be seen as a strengthening mechanism for both local and transnational indigenous organizing efforts.

Another example for the enhanced integration into the international context is the *International Verification Mission on the Human Rights Situation of the Indigenous People* that took place between 21–29 September 2006. The mission was composed, on the one hand, by various regional indigenous organizations from Colombia as well as the ONIC, and on the other hand, by foreign social organizations, human rights movements, representatives of foreign governments and international organizations (EU, UN, OAS), and academic institutions as well as national and foreign media. Representatives of these institutions and organizations came from Latin America, North America and Europe. The delegation travelled to different regions in order to collect data regarding the human rights situation of indigenous peoples. The findings were published as a book (CONIP 2007) and video on DVD, with English subtitles in order to reach a wider audience.

Through international missions such as these, it is possible to reach NGOs that will lobby their governments in order to exercise pressure on the Colombian government. Various countries have seen the establishment of lobby institutions that deal solely with Colombia. Efficient and well organized examples are the German *kolko e.V.* as well the Washington, D.C. based *U.S. Office on Colombia*, which are both non-profit organizations that seek to

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<sup>66</sup> Available in English and Spanish on the summit’s website: <http://www.cumbrecontinentalindigena.org>

educate policymakers, the media and the public about the Colombian policies as well as the impact of their country's policy on Colombia. Scholars have drawn attention to the rise of advocacy networks that foster social movements and pressure for policy change. Transnational networks can provide resources (information and material) which enable social movements to advocate effectively in favor of different policies (Keck and Sikkink 1998). The possibility to overcome political obstacles at home by turning to the international arena to lobby for change and social transformation has been referred to by Keck and Sikkink as the "boomerang effect". In this regard, Alison Brysk has published a detailed study how indigenous movements have appealed to international organizations to draft certain UN documents and pressure for change in the home country.<sup>67</sup> Meanwhile, the funding for indigenous organizations (i.e. Oxfam) has risen in recent years significantly. However, it should be noted that the very international networks that aim at increasing the visibility and clout of the indigenous movements might simultaneously weaken organizational and ideological links to the local level. As Deborah J. Yashar points out in her essay, international cooperation is important, but "not determinative of either movement origins or success" (Yashar 1999:39). Moreover, funding from the outside could contribute to a division between the leaders who travel in international circles and those communities that they are supposed to represent.

Thus, I argue that the role and impact of international organization and the development of advocacy and support networks can not be disregarded, rather it has proven in the Colombian case to be a strengthening factor from the local to the national level. Instead of assuming a globalization of indigenous movements beyond control, contemporary social movements are – as in the case of Colombia – responses to the state. The majority of movements has appealed to the international arena neither because it displaces the nation state nor due to the development of a global civil society, but on the contrary. The aim is, in general, to bolster pre-existing domestic currents and struggles (Yashar 1999).

From my findings and on the basis of my data, indigenous movements in Colombia demand a variety of state-based reforms such as national recognition, local autonomy, bilingual and bicultural education, and the promotion of a pluralist society. While following an ethnic-based agenda, the indigenous organizations demand on the one hand, greater inclusion

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<sup>67</sup> Brysk, Alyson. 2000. *From tribal village to global village: Indian rights and international relations in Latin America*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

into the national state and, on the other hand, greater autonomy from it. These initiatives emerge from a new multilayered identity construction and reaffirmation process as well as a different interpretation of national citizenship based on a particular concept of territory. The endangerment of the very territories on the parts of all armed actors and the neo-liberal system forces the indigenous peoples to respond to the changing national conditions. Although this response may vary from a regional perspective, the indigenous people have addressed the challenge of local autonomy and made use of trans-community networks, which have evolved into a strong organizational structure interlaced with the international context.

### **INDIGENOUS ORGANIZATIONS AS AUTHORITY ALTERNATIVES**

Following the above mentioned thought, I argue that indigenous organizations, with their multilayered and complex roles, can be described as authority alternatives. In this sense, they pressure the state into fulfilling its obligations while at the same time bringing international awareness to their cause. These dual purposes coincide to function as a peace-promoting factor.

In classical political science, exclusive authority is seen as the cornerstone of the territorial state. While Westphalian politics demand no authority superior to that of the state, other authors argue that world politics has always been about “multiple overlapping and intersecting sociospatial networks of power” (Mann 1986:1). On the basis of Ian Clark (1999) authority, I argue that groups organize and also identify themselves in multiple ways. What is called the ‘pluralist paradigm’ has led to an increasing consideration of the territorial state as only one of many sites of social relations and authority (Clark 1999). Following this thought, it opposes the Westphalian concept of a globe divided according to the institution of sovereignty which serves as an exclusive property right granted over certain territories. Consequently, the state would have exclusive right to govern in a bounded space. Other authorities derived from subnational or transnational groups would be pushed into illegitimacy. However, more common is the “nesting of authorities within others, whereby various public agents share territory and maintain authority relationships with the same constituency” [(Ferguson and Mansbach 1996:13) cited in (Mason 2005:40)].

Colombia is a case in point. The correlation of continuous contestation of the social order and the state's weakness and insecurity are evident. Throughout its history, Colombian sovereign authority is characteristic for its partiality and fragmentation which is resulted in an insufficient articulation of the central authority. Furthermore, the establishment has been complicated due to new forms of global and transnational governance (Clark 1999). The deficient presence – and in some remote regions even absence – of the Colombian state institutions and authority has foiled the national project of the Colombian state. According to Ann C. Mason, the state is been unable, ever since independence, to impose centralized control, which eventually contributed “to strong regional loyalties and identities, but also to parallel, extralegal authorities” (Mason 2005:41).

This notion becomes best visible in the armed actors, which emerged and flourished out of the state's failure to establish control and preserve a monopoly on the use of force. However, the escalating violence and brutal acts against the civilian population have resulted in the loss of the actors' legitimacy. Until the 1980s, the armed actors had managed to establish wide public support through a combination of ideological empathy and the provision of basic services. It should be noted, however, that although the state authority has established control in urban areas, some remote territories still remain “virtual no-man's land or have come under the de facto authority of the FARC or paramilitaries” (Mason 2005:42). In reference to María Teresa Uribe (2001), Mason characterizes Colombia's socio-political order as “disputed sovereignty”.

The consideration of this highly contested political landscape in Colombia is crucial for the understanding of the country's authority architecture, especially when looking at the development of the indigenous authority's position in this setting. In the framework of these developments, a new form of authority and identity structure has emerged. This process is characterized by the generation of loyalties and identities which are no longer related to sovereign authorities. Due to the state's poor reputation, indigenous communities have developed alternative authorities that form part of a global struggle. Increasingly, indigenous communities are exercising an identity construction which goes beyond the Westphalian concept of exclusivity of state authority. Lobbying the international community and bypassing

the government institutions has put the state under pressure to fulfill its duties and responsibilities.

## 6 CONCLUSION

The indigenous peoples of Colombia have, for centuries, resisted the efforts of colonization by conquistadors, missionaries, hostile governments, emerald miners, drug traffickers, and resource extractors of every kind. The magnitude of violence from various sectors, however, seemed to overwhelm their centuries-old resistance process. While the academic attention to the Colombian armed conflict has always been high, it is only recently that the sacrifice of indigenous peoples, one of the conflict's "invisible victims", is being acknowledged. Genocide and ethnocide is on the lips and minds of many.

Despite these challenges, the resistance process has seen successful recovery rooted in the organizing capacity of indigenous peoples, in their traditions and culture, to pressure and negotiate with the state, and to elaborate development proposals based on autonomous community plans. With the formation of the ONIC in 1982 and of regional councils in several departments, both before and after this date – such as the CRIC and Camizba – indigenous peoples' struggles for the recognition and legalization of territory, the right to teach native languages in local schools, the recognition of native systems of justice, and the right to traditional health care provision, were no longer invisible. Some of the key aspects of the movement's evolution over the last two decades have been the development of a program for the defense of unity, territory, culture and autonomy.

Despite the advances, it is estimated that – according to the UN Human Development Report for Colombia – 80% of the indigenous population still live in conditions of extreme poverty, 74% receive wages below the legal minimum, and their municipalities have the highest rates of poverty and unmet basic human needs. In such areas, the indices of quality of life and human development are below national standards and life expectancy is 20% lower than the national average. The implementation of policies and programs designed specifically for these communities in order to guarantee the exercise of their rights to autonomy and cultural identity has been inadequate. Despite the fact that the Constitution legally enshrined the rights of indigenous peoples in 1991, more than 350 indigenous leaders have since been assassinated. At the same time, globalization increased the value of oil, mining, natural gas, biodiversity, hydro-electric, and transportation potential. Recent Colombian governments have facilitated a multitude of easy-term concessions for, and association contracts with, private

companies, both national and multinational, for the extraction of natural resources. This development has been accompanied by the territorialization of the conflict. Although still basically and essentially a political conflict, the territory has moved into the centre of the logic of conflict. The political convenience and strategic interests of the armed actors have become subordinate to economic interests and needs. While the aim – the defense or destruction of an economic model and power constellation – is maintained, the dynamics do not correspond to the intent anymore. The revenues from illicit activities – such as drug trafficking – make the guerrilla, as well as the paramilitary groups, independent from the interests of the population and consequently result in the loss of a political program. Instead, the control of strategic corridors which are important for the control of economic resources, the access to weapons and retreat areas gains importance.

These dynamics have included the indigenous territories into the logic of conflict which became particularly evident after the paramilitaries' arrival to the Chocó in 1996. The population of the Bajo Atrato region now finds itself in the middle of an armed dispute over a region of great strategic importance for the protagonists of the conflict. At the same time, the indigenous had begun to develop a resistance process concentrated on the very territories now particularly endangered. After decades of partly successful – and therefore destructive – assimilation policies on the part of the state, the indigenous people started in the 1970s a reaffirmation and recovery process of their identity and history. The territory took the central role, as from its cosmological meaning all other aspects such as culture, history, traditions, etc. can be derived. However, as the territory became the main source of dispute of the armed actors – increased due to the geo-strategic importance of the Chocó – the indigenous suffered greatly from the violence.

The change in the logic of conflict and the increasing availability of other resources, led to the gradual alienation of the subversive groups – in particular the guerrilla – from the civilian population and eventually resulted in violence directed at the civilians. However, through a very compact and hierarchical organizational structure and the policy of non-cooperation with any armed actor, the communities have had notable success in resisting the violence. As has become apparent in the course of this thesis, the indigenous resistance process goes beyond the conventional understanding of 'civil resistance'. Especially the widely accepted focusing on resistance against the state must be taken further in the

Colombian context, as the opposed hegemonic power is not necessarily solely the state but subversive armed groups within the state's boundaries.

Furthermore, the understanding of the civil aspect is very different when it comes to the indigenous population. Indigenusness is a concept in itself. It goes way beyond any interpretation of a 'citizen' or a 'society' in a conventional political science point of view. This is reason for affirming the initial hypothesis and presenting indigenous resistance as a very peculiar form, which should hence be described as 'territorial and cultural resistance'. In particular, the mechanism and strategies that are derived from indigenusness, as well as the internationalization promoted through its organizations and authorities, have led to a potential interpretation of the described process as a grass-roots peace initiative.

The indigenous resistance process, via its development of an indigenous organizational structure, has been promoted by globalization and its transnational social processes. By embedding their local struggle in a broader campaign of transnational concerns, of threats to natural reserves and indigenous land rights, the communities have transformed the local struggle with its grass-roots objectives into a global resistance movement. The decision to globalize the indigenous movement's objectives has made indigenous voices heard and led to a mobilization in favor of their cause and put pressure on the government. The indigenous organizations were convinced that setting their struggle in the framework of an environmental and indigenous rights context, as well as bringing their cause to an international level, would be more successful. Experience has shown that limiting efforts to pressuring the national government which does not respond to the indigenous' claims, will not advance resistance processes. At this point, I want to emphasize the strategic element and purposive action in their decision to bypass state authority, aiming at alternatives which better fulfill their needs.

The government is not only incapable of protecting the indigenous population, but even the military and police themselves are seen as a threat to the civilian population. The indigenous resistance based on identity reaffirmation, recovery and defense of their ancestral territories as well as culture and customs can be understood as expression of this development.

Indigenous resistance is embedded in global processes which interact with transnational actors.

As described previously, the indigenous communities of the Bajo Atrato have resorted to alternative sources of social power not for the purpose of evading state authority. Instead, the communities seek to force state compliance with constitutional provisions protecting indigenous rights by lobbying the state to fulfill its legal obligations.

I argue that authority alternatives – as illustrated in the previous chapter – do not necessarily endanger state authority, as the Westphalian model's emphasis on exclusivity would suggest. As visible in many countries, non-sovereign actors increasingly take over state duties and responsibilities that governments are incapable or unwilling to fulfill. Coevally, these new types of socio-political organizations and non-state authorities function, paradoxically, as reaffirmation of the state's legitimacy. Challenging and pressuring the state through international advocacy networks, can trigger simultaneously a process of reforms and reconstitution. The indigenous organizational structure – as one type of authority alternative – functions hereby as enhancement and improvement of the state's capacity and eventually leads to a re-orientation of the state-society relationship as result of external pressure on the Colombian government.

Of course, my argumentation might prompt concerns about the true element of 'resistance' in the development of this organizational structure. To what existent can an authority structure be termed resistance? Does it lose this connotation when integrating in the institutional system, as some argue happened with the German Green Party at the end of 1960s? However, even if the indigenous resistance process might not be so easy to define in regards to the state, explicit resistance against the illegal armed actors and multinational companies is visible. Furthermore, I have argued that indigenous organizations have created authority alternatives to state institutions and have not yet integrated in state structures. Consequently, the process still constitutes resistance although a slow integration in the state can be expected. This integration, however, will only be possible if exercising democratic opposition is not violently oppressed as in the past.

Furthermore, the non-violent and well-organized resistance process in the midst of a more than four decade-old violent conflict finally breaks the vicious circle of violence. It presents itself as a true alternative of peace construction that extends the conventional understanding that peace is achieved by governments or armed actors. The indigenous resistance process should rather be seen as a genuine grass-roots initiative that evolved into an internationalized context, challenging the legitimacy of all armed actors through non-alliance. Out of a very peculiar process of self-determination and identity reaffirmation, the indigenous resistance has developed into a very interesting and useful example of breaking the circle of violence. As I argue this would not have been possible without its organizational structure, which can be identified as a key element of the resistance. Some afro-descendent groups have taken this experience as an example and developed similar authority alternatives which – although naturally based on a different idea of identity reaffirmation – also show successful elements of peace construction in Colombia. It remains to be seen what consequences for the internal stability and quality of life these initiatives will have, however, so far an interesting process has been set on fire.

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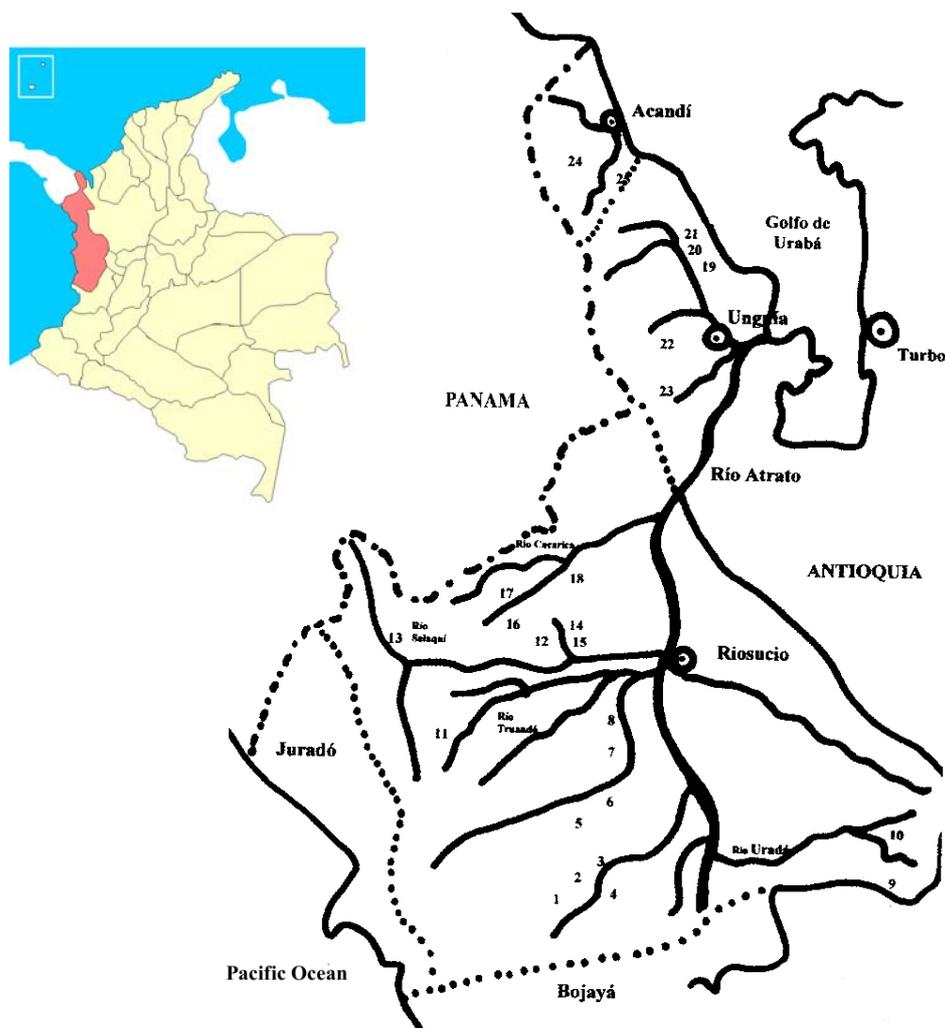
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## ANNEX

### 1 INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES IN THE BAJO ATRATO, CHOCÓ



### 2 LIST OF INTERVIEW PARTNERS

1. Andrade, Luis Evelis – President, ONIC – 17.03.2007, Bogotá.
2. Carpio, Arquimedes – Indigenous leader, Wounaan – 26.02.2007, Cacarica.
3. Conquista, Victor Carpio – Coordinador zonal, Camziba – 19.02.2007, Riosucio.
4. Ferro, Victoria – Red Cross, Colombia – 22.02.2007, La Unión.
5. Gordito (nickname) – Ex-governor Embera community – 27.02.2007, La Unión.
6. Guzman – Member of the *cabildo local* in La Unión – 27.02.2007, La Unión.
7. Mejia, Dario – Comisión Territorio, ONIC – 15.03.2007, Bogotá.
8. Rojas, Daniel Alejandro – Defensoría del Pueblo – 26.02.2007, Cacarica.

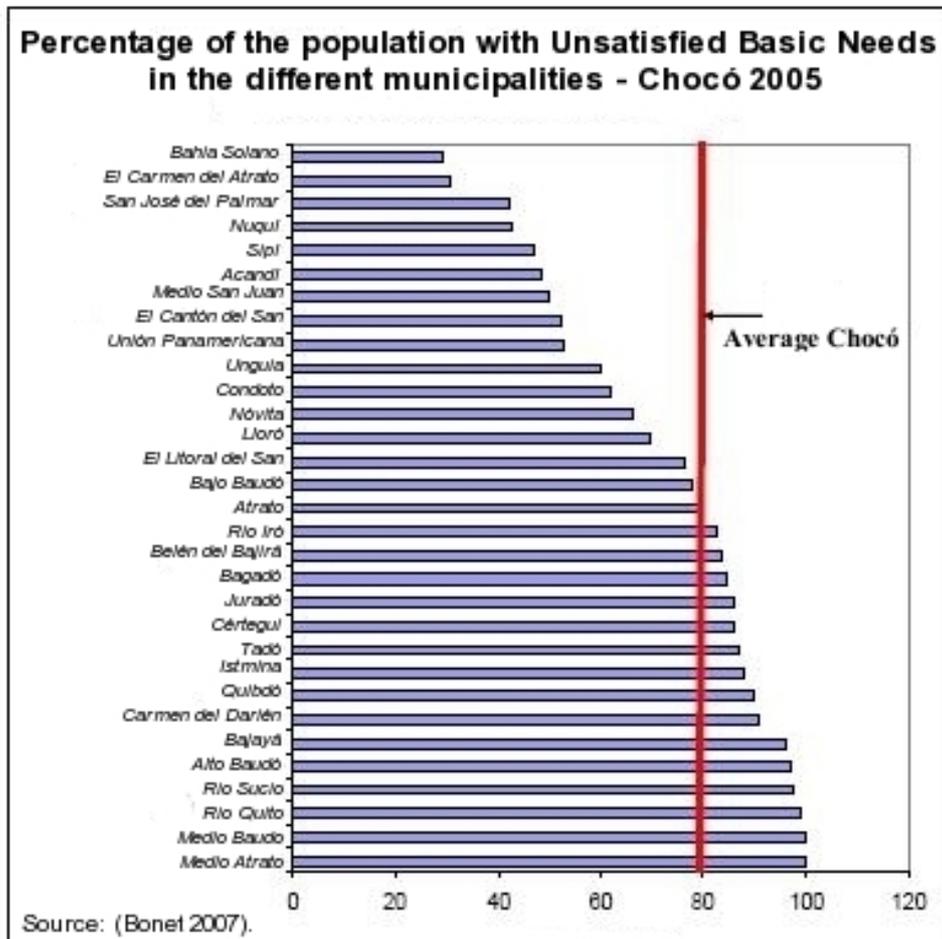
### 3 TABULAR PRESENTATION OF THE CONFLICT ACTORS

	<b>ELN – National Liberation Army</b>	<b>FARC – Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia</b>
<b>Ideological background</b>	Communist and socialist beliefs close to the strategies of Che Guevara and its <i>foco theory</i> as well as the liberation theology	Self-defense against the great land owners with political orientation towards Communism and Marxism
<b>Emergence</b>	Mid 1960s: Student protest movement against the National Front with urban background	1964: Peasant self-defense group in the wake of <i>la violencia</i> with presence up to date in almost exclusively rural areas
<b>Size</b>	3,000 – 5,000 armed fighters	12,000 – 17,000 armed fighters
<b>Goals</b>	To end the national and international exploitation of the people in this undemocratic system and introduce a new social system.	Upheaval of the state and social system with extensive reforms particular in social and agricultural sector (e.g. 50% of the state budget on social spending and 10% on scientific research; protection of resources and the national economy)
<b>Important events</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Anorí operation carried out by the Colombian military from 1973 to 1974 decimated the group, but it managed to reconstitute itself and escape destruction, in part due to the government of Alfonso López Michelsen allowing them to escape encirclement, hoping to initiate a peace process with the group.</li> <li>• Initiations at the end of the 1980s/beginning of the 1990s to merge the guerrilla groups and create a joint force called: <i>Coordinadora Guerrillera Simon Bolívar</i> failed</li> <li>• Decision not participate in the peace process that the administration of Andrés Pastrana Arango attempted during 1998 to 2002 with the FARC.</li> <li>• 2002-03: military offensives initiated under the Uribe administration and the strengthening of the Colombian Army hit the ELN hard.</li> <li>• December 2005, the ELN and the Colombian government begin a new round of exploratory talks in La Habana, Cuba, with the presence of the ELN's military commanders.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1982: the initials EP are added to its name implying the intention to organize the FARC into an “Army of the People” (<i>Ejército del Pueblo</i>) and extending its military strategies employing vehicle bombings, gas cylinder bombs, killings, landmines, kidnapping, extortion, hijacking, as well as guerrilla and conventional military action against Colombian political, military, and economic targets.</li> <li>• 1980s, the FARC extends its financial sources to illicit drug activities (taxation and protection) and kidnapping ransoms.</li> <li>• End of the 1980s, accretion from an organization with about 1.000 to about 15.000 armed fighters.</li> <li>• After its political arm is almost extinguished as the end of the 1980s/beginning of the 90s, the military command inside the FARC is strengthened and gains more autonomy.</li> <li>• 1998: President Pastrana grants FARC a 42,000 km<sup>2</sup> safe haven meant to serve as a confidence building measure. After a series of high-profile guerrilla actions, including the hijacking of an airplane and the kidnapping of several political figures, Pastrana ends the peace talks on February 21, 2002.</li> </ul>

	<b>Government</b>	<b>Paramilitary groups – United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia - AUC</b>
<b>Ideological background</b>	Only democratically legitimated (except during the National Front) actor with a liberal or conservative ideology depending on the current government	Right wing ideology in the protection of the local economic power structure against left insurgents
<b>Emergence</b>	Independence from Spain in 1810	Created as either a pre-emptive or reactive consequence to the perceived growing threat represented by the actions of guerrillas
<b>Size</b>	145,000 armed soldiers in the Colombian military and about 105,000 armed policemen	Estimated 10,000 – 20,000 armed fighters, however in the demobilization between 2003 and 2006 32,000 members have demobilized – officially all paramilitaries are considered to have demobilized
<b>Goals</b>	Regain the monopoly on the use of force with zigzag course regarding its strategy (peace talks and negotiations with guerrilla [Betancur, Pastrana]; military defeat of guerrilla and demobilization programs for paramilitary groups [Uribe])	‘Self-defense’ against the guerrilla groups without being opposed to the state or the political, economical system as a whole; perpetuation of the societal <i>status quo</i>
<b>Important events</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1946: Colombian conservative party gains power</li> <li>• 1948-58: ten years of sustained warfare between the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party takes the lives of more than 200,000 people</li> <li>• 1958-1974: an exclusively bipartisan political alternation system, known as the National Front, resulted from an agreement between the Liberal and Conservative parties to end the violence</li> <li>• 1982 President Betancur (1982-86) negotiates cease-fire with the FARC; many guerrillas imprisoned are released</li> <li>• 1986: Siege by M-19 of the Colombian Palace of Justice in which 120 people lose their lives marks the end to Betancur’s peace process</li> <li>• A February 11 1994 decree of Colombia's Ministry of Defense and a law passed in the Colombian Congress led to the creation of the CONVIVIR, a national program of cooperative neighborhood watch groups, in response to growing guerrilla activity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1981: The kidnapping of Martha Nieves Ochoa, a sister of the drug businessmen in the Ochoa family, by the M-19 leads to a meeting of her family which decides to set up an aggressive response. Three weeks later, leaflets are dropped from a small airplane, announcing the creation of the "Muerte a Secuestradores" (Death to Kidnappers) or MAS, an armed group which would henceforth seek to find and execute all kidnappers.</li> <li>• 1982, a meeting of drug traffickers, landowners, businessmen, local politicians of the Liberal and Conservative Parties, local military officials and representatives of the Texas Petroleum Company in Puerto Boyacá, Santander discusses the issue of growing guerrilla activity in the region. They decide to create a fund to sustain an armed paramilitary force, with the intention of both protecting the participants and the general population from guerrilla action and of eradicating all signs of guerrilla presence in the region. The following year, the "Asociación Campesina de Ganaderos y Agricultores del Magdalena Medio" (Association of Middle Magdalena Ranchers</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1998: Presidential candidate Andrés Pastrana appears after the first round on pictures in the newspapers with FARC leader Manuel Marulanda which creates hopes that Pastrana could end the conflict peacefully and wins the elections</li> <li>• 2000: The government starts negotiation talks with the FARC a demilitarized zone of about the size of Switzerland.</li> <li>• 1998/99: The so called “Plan Colombia” is being negotiated between the Pastrana government and the US. The controversial plan provides massive support in terms of financial aid, weapons, military advisers and logistics to fight drug trafficking and to strengthen the military.</li> <li>• 2002: As the violence, kidnapping and assassinations by the FARC continues outside the demilitarized zone, the FARC continues its drug business within the area. President Pastrana ends the talks in February and sends troops in the more than 2 years abandoned zone.</li> <li>• The population, being deeply disappointed by the negotiations with the FARC, votes in 2002 in favor of Álvaro Uribe and his concept “of democratic security”.</li> <li>• 2002: The newly elected Uribe government changes the established rhetoric from “armed conflict” to “terrorist threat of criminal groups”</li> <li>• 2003: Government of President Uribe begins talks with the group with the aim to eventually dismantle the organization and reintegrate its members to society.</li> <li>• April 2006: The agreement signed by the AUC and the Uribe government, led to a bloc by bloc demobilization of over 32,000 AUC members; High Commissioner for Peace announced AUC demobilization complete.</li> <li>• Since 2003: New paramilitary structures are filling gaps in strategic drug-trafficking areas.</li> <li>• 2006: Through a change of the constitution initiated by Uribe himself, he runs again for presidency and is being re-elected to serve another four years.</li> <li>• 2006 - present: The new term “parapolitics” is phrased referring to the congressional scandal in which several congressmen and other politicians have been indicted for suspicions of colluding with the AUC and other paramilitary groups.</li> </ul>	<p>and Farmers) or ACDEGAM, is created.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1980s: Further groups of paramilitary forces are being created, often with greater or lesser influence from drug lords, though also involving relatives of victims of past guerrilla crimes, and even a number of guerrilla deserters.</li> <li>• A February 11 1994 decree of Colombia's Ministry of Defense and a law passed in the Colombian Congress leads to the creation of the CONVIVIR, a national program of cooperative neighborhood watch groups, in response to growing guerrilla activity.</li> <li>• 1997: The AUC is founded as an umbrella paramilitary foundation to consolidate many local and regional paramilitary groups in Colombia</li> <li>• July 1997: The Mapiripán Massacre takes place in Mapiripán, Meta Department</li> </ul>
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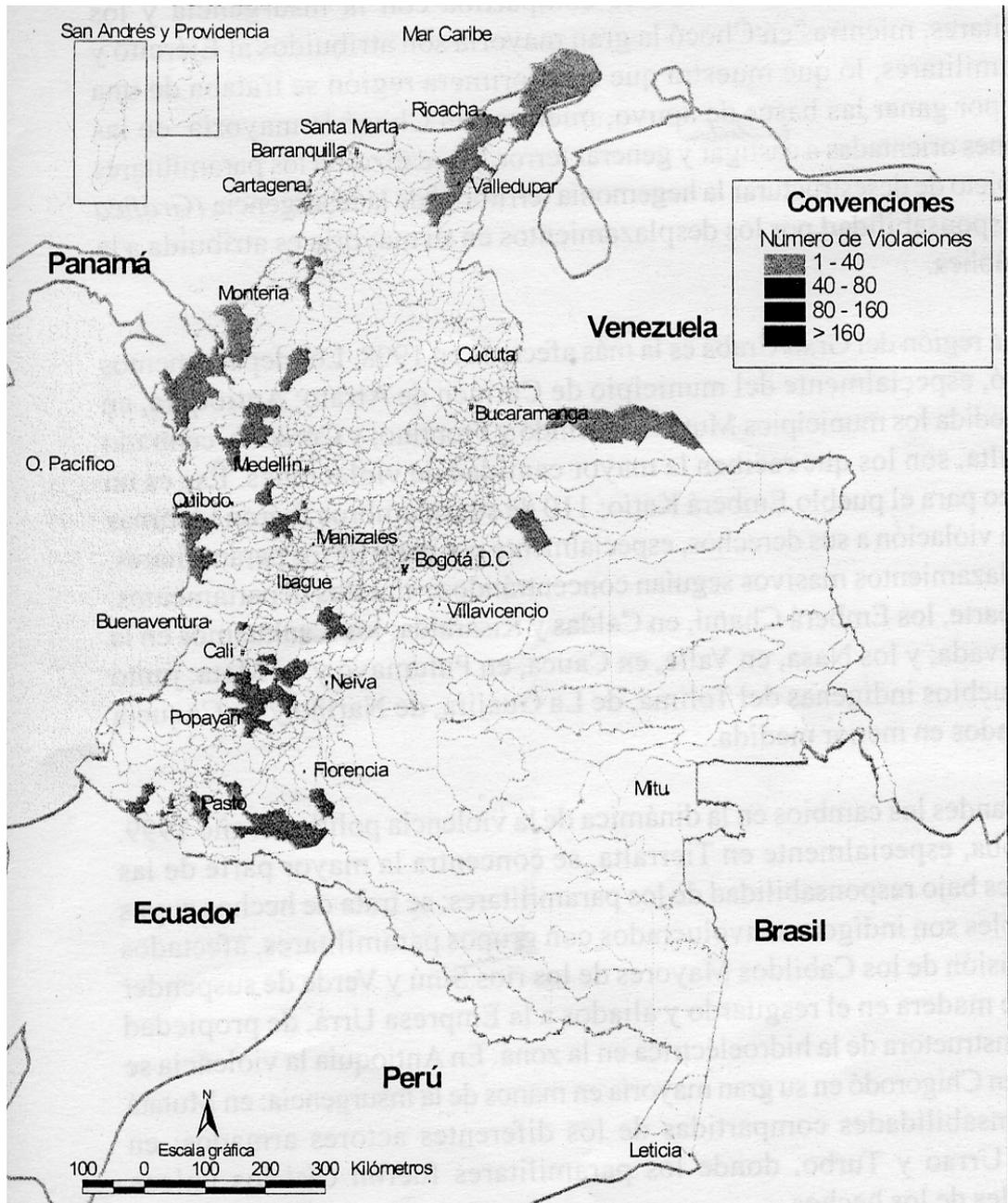
#### 4 POPULATION WITH UBN IN THE CHOCÓ



## 5 Regional Development of the Violence against Indigenous Communities

### Violations against Indigenous Communities

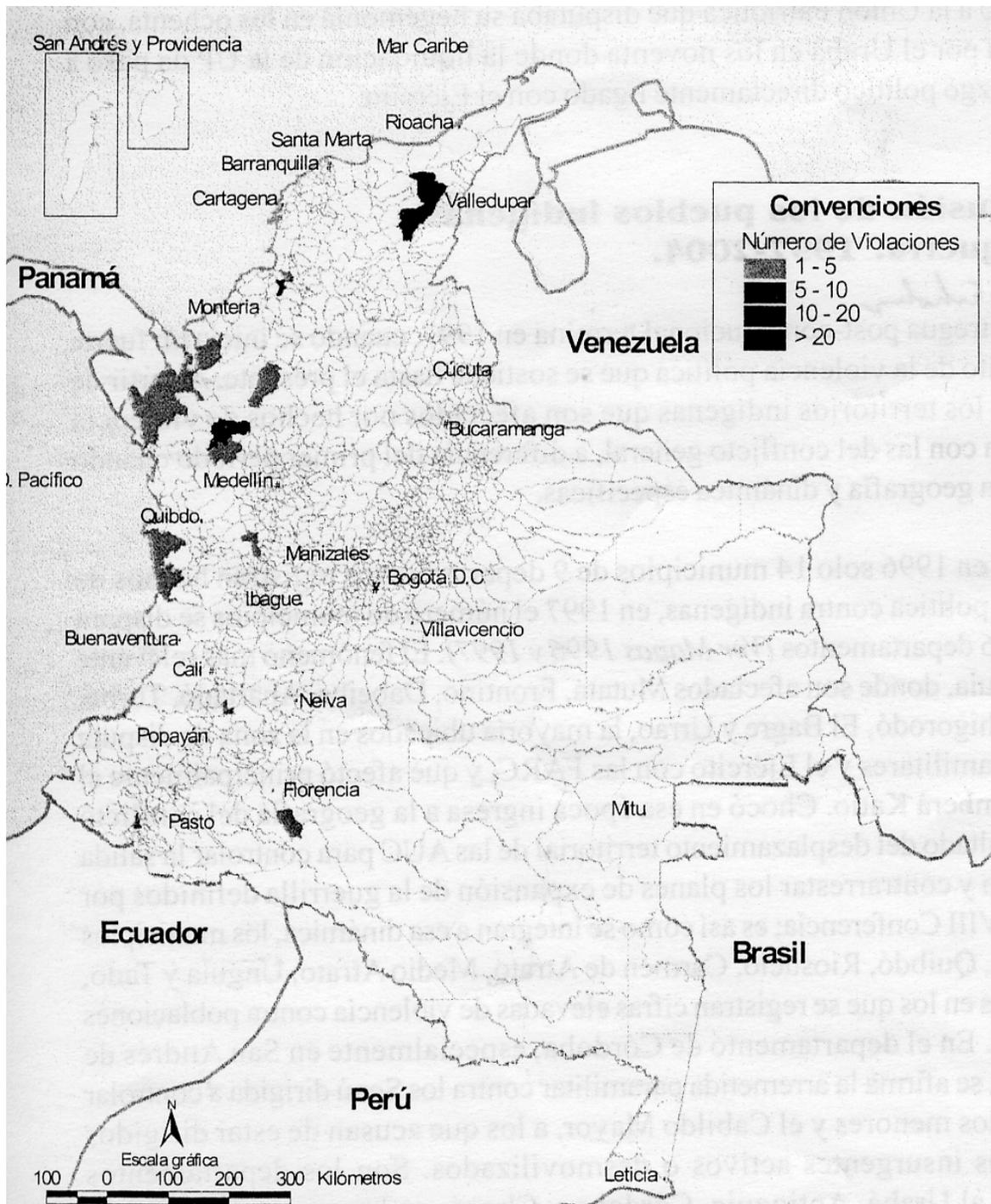
1992-1996



Source: Villa (2005)

# Violations against Indigenous Communities

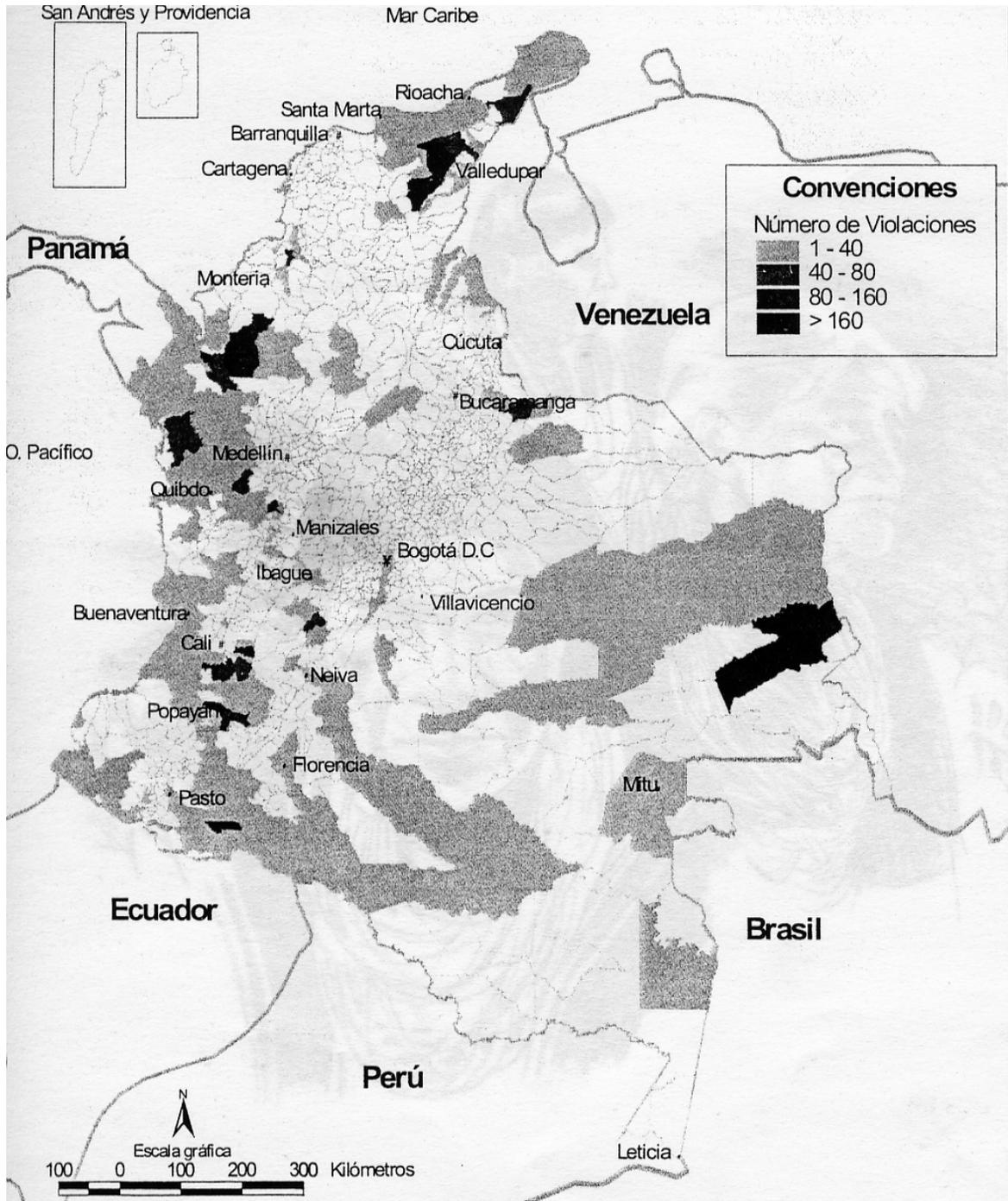
1996



Source: Villa (2005)

# Violations against Indigenous Communities

1997-2004



Source: Villa (2005)