CITIZENS AND ANTHROPOLOGISTS

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Introduction

In this paper I propose to outline some of the debates and positions that have shaped anthropology in Colombia since it was established as a disciplinary and professional field in the mid 1940s. Although archeology, linguistics or biological anthropology might also be interesting perspectives from which to approach this subject, my intention here is to focus on socio-cultural anthropology. I will argue that the evolution of anthropology can be understood in terms of the tension between the global orientations of the discipline (concerning dominant narratives and practices, theories, field work, relations between subjects of study) and the way they are put into practice within the Colombian context. In countries such as Colombia, anthropological practice is permanently faced with the uneasy choice between adopting dominant anthropological concepts and orientations, or modifying them, adapting them, rejecting them and proposing alternatives. This need to adapt the practice stems from the specific social condition of anthropologists in these countries; that is, our dual position as both researchers and fellow citizens of our subjects of study, as a result of which we are continually torn between our duty as scientists and our role as citizens.

From this perspective, there is a danger of falling into a nationalistic interpretation of the history of anthropology in Colombia. As Claudio Lomnitz (1999) ironically comments, such is the case of Mexican anthropology, which has gradually represented itself as a family tree rooted in its own pre-colombian and pre-colonial tradition. However, I am more concerned with the practice of anthropologists in Colombia, since, as in other countries in similar situations, this practice has been continuously upset by discussions on the place of cultural differences within the hierarchy of power in our society; on the relationships of subjection and exclusion that afflict certain sectors, on the basis of their ethnicity, class or gender; or on the dilemmas posed by so-called "development". The questions raised have frequently come from outside of the discipline itself; from social organizations or movements, or as a result of situations of violence and internal conflict. This has meant that the certainties of a practice oriented towards academic knowledge have been shaken by questions about the social repercussions of our interpretations and images on the populations being studied. Moreover, we are plagued by an interminable controversy regarding the social and political significance of intellectuals in our society. This controversy expressed itself as a rift between the generation commonly referred to as the "pioneers" and the one that suddenly emerged in the university system at the beginning of the 1970s (Arocha and Friedemann 1984; Jimeno 1984, 1999; Barragán, 2001, 2005; Caviedes 2004). But, rather like a weed that is impossible to eradicate, the controversy has sprung up again today, phrased in a new language that expresses the confrontation between new subjects and new preoccupations. In other words, from its very beginnings, Colombian anthropology has had to face a long and persistent social preoccupation, which has not been without its share of ambiguities or contradictions, and which is part of the aforementioned dual position of anthropologists. The result of such a situation is that a dialogue (at times more of an uproar without possibility of communication) is established between the anthropologist and the struggles of different social sectors, regarding projects of national construction. This is reflected by certain types of anthropological emphasis, which have varied over time and have even come into conflict at certain

points, but which have consistently been rooted in the questioning of the conditions of democracy for the construction of the nation, of the place of those we are studying —since they tend to be the most underprivileged members of society— and of our relationship with what we know as the State.

It is possible to point out some dominant trends and a number of breaks that appear to me to have been significant during the six decades of anthropology in Colombia. These can be grouped together into three broad tendencies which are not consecutive, but rather have co-existed and overlapped since the establishment of anthropology as an academic discipline. They also act as cut off points, since each one has characterized a particular period. The first of these tendencies is related to the predominance of a descriptive approach, in particular with the intention of carrying out a detailed inventory of the Amerindian societies, from the settlement and development of prehispanic societies, to aspects of physical anthropology, linguistics and the social organization of the indigenous societies existing within the limits marked out by the national territory. The second is particularly concerned with the the role of social inequality and cultural differences within the Colombian State, with how they are fomented, and with relationships of subjection within the local and national context. This tendency, as we shall see, adopted two opposing positions. One supported integration into national society and was particularly prevalent from the 1950s to the 1970s, though it is still present in 'development' postions, which during that period employed concepts such as assimilation and cultural integration. The other position was also established in the 1970s, in opposition to the first, since it attacked the hypotheses of national integration, on the grounds of its cultural homogeneity and racial supremacy. This particular stance was encouraged by the emergence of social movements seeking recognition of the rights of ethnic and peasant populations and by the ideological influence of Marxism, which was particularly strong during that period (Jimeno 1985, 1996). The emphasis here was on a type of anthropology that was militant and, as Mauricio Caviedes (2004) has called it, largely apocryphal, on account of its habit of debating, participating much and writing very little. At its height between the 1970s and 1980s, this approach sought to transform the symbolic markers of national identity and refute the position based on the ideology of one language, one religion and one nation. Its aim was to accompany the new ethnic movements in the creation of a 'counter-narrative', an alternative version of events, with which to challenge the cultural hegemony that ostracized the indigenous communities and other social sectors, regarding them as being responsible for the country's backwardness.

The third tendency, which is in full force at the present time, coincides with the consolidation of anthropology in universities, post graduate studies and research centers such as the Colombian Institute of Anthropology and History. This has brought about divisions in an academic community with very diverse interests and approaches, ranging from global processes and ecology to the most varied social subjects. At the same time, there are a large number of professionals, many more than there are academics, whose job it is to apply their knowledge in a vast array of public and private institutions. Nonetheless, there is a good deal of interchange between the application of knowledge and academic life, since the division between the two is relative and very often temporary. Many anthropologists, as well as sociologists —Orlando Fals Borda being a prime example— retain an interest in the practical and political implications of their studies, to the extent that they usually participate in debates and involve themselves in proposals on public policies. A recent example is their participation, in 1991, in the process of constitutional reform and development, with regard to the recognition of cultural and ethnic rights.

Anthropologists and citizenship

Veena Das (1998) suggests that anthropological knowledge is constructed on the basis of maps of otherness made up of theories of the Other rather than theories of the self. It is for this very reason that the sociopolitical proximity between anthropologists and their subjects of study in Latin America has resulted in a very particular anthropological output (Ramos 1999-2000, 2004). The construction of anthropological knowledge, as well as the entire anthropological practice, is carried out in conditions in

which the Other is an essential and problematic part of the self. This shapes the anthropologist's relationship to his/her own work, since a good proportion of anthropologists do not regard their subjects of study as being exotic worlds that are isolated, distant and cold, but instead consider them to be co-participants, with a voice of their own, in the construction of the nation and its democracy.

Thus, the overall tone of anthropological practice in Colombia is precisely that of the indistinct boundary between the practice of anthropology as a discipline and social action taken as citizens. This is why it is not a question of establishing or initiating critical thinking in relation to what could be seen as mere self indulgence. Rather, it is important to remember that in countries such as ours, social thinking has been repeatedly shaken by intellectual polemics. These are contradictory ways of understanding the concepts of State and democracy, which are given concrete form in institutions, legislation and opportunities in life for certain sectors of society. Contact with the Other has made it possible to criticize anthropological approaches such as 'inflexible holism', as Veena Das (1998) calls it, which has been left behind by experimentation on ethnographical representations and by the re-conceptualization of certain categories commonly used in anthropology. Das demonstrates that in India, it was precisely the emergence of new communities, as political communities, which led to the discussion and creation of new anthropological categories, given the confrontation between the diverse sectors that make up this abstract concept of community. In short, by trying to understand new social actors that come into play on the same social stage as itself, and by reclaiming their particular narratives, the anthropology carried out in these countries reconsiders over-generalizing rhetoric, reformulates analytical categories and recuperates varations of gender, class, history and place. It does not settle for being the object of thought, instead it declares itself to be an instrument of thought (Das 1998: 30-34).

I have called this sort researcher the 'citizen researcher' (Jimeno, 2000) in order to highlight the close relationship that exists between exercising one's profession as a researcher and exercising one's rights as a citizen. Krotz (1997) has underlined the fact that, for what he terms 'southern anthropologies,' the Other, the Others are at the same time both fellow citizens and research subjects. The fact that we are fellow citizens of the subjects of our research pervades the practice of anthropology in countries like ours, making it more like the practice of politics, as a kind of *naciocentrism*. Every characterization has repercussions on the everyday lives of the people and on the practical significance of exercising citizenship. Hence the statement by Alcida Ramos that "in Brazil, like in other countries of Latin America, practicing anthropology is a political act" (1999-2000: 172). Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira (1995, 1998) also had this in mind when he put forward the concept of *style* to characterize Latin American anthropology (for a discussion on this topic see Jimeno 1999, 2000; Krotz 1996; Uribe 1997). Esteban Krotz (1997) criticizes the diffusionist anthropological model based on images of 'extension' or 'adaptation', for its failure to recognize that the production of scientific knowledge is a process of cultural creation, just like any other, and cannnot be analyzed merely as symbolic systems that are separate from other aspects of a more comprehensive social reality.

Thus, the structure of the national state pervades the emergence and development of anthropology and provides the backdrop for the dialogue taking place between anthropologists and the Others. This is why I believe that, of all the social concepts proposed by Norbert Elias (1989), the idea of *naciocentrism* is a particularly useful one. I would like to expand this concept, in order to emphasize the diversity of meanings and interests that are brought into play when anthropologists ask themselves about the relationship between their work and their responses to questions about who participates, how and in what circumstances, in what nation, in what state. There is still much to be said regarding the answers to these questions, and they continue to pervade the theoretical output and indeed the entire work of intellectuals. With the idea of *naciocentrism* Norbert Elias seeks to underline the relationship between concepts and the social conditions in which they are created and employed (Elias, 1989), with specific reference to the intellectual orientation centered on the concept of 'nation'. Elias demonstrates how this *naciocentrism* is found throughout much of the output of the social sciences. To illustrate this

point, he offers the example of the concepts of civilization and culture, which *naciocentrism* first gives rise to and then transforms, as the societies and social strata in which they originate are themselves gradually transformed (Elias 1989). The concepts therefore go through a dual process of "nationalization", being adopted by the both nation and the State. Other concepts that allude to social units, such as that of society, also take on this nationalized quality, in the sense that they are adapted to the project of national construction through ideas of equilibrium, unity, homogeneity, and with the intention of presenting them to the world as stabilized and divided into clearly defined units (Elias 1989, Neiburg 1998, Fletcher 1997).

As numerous authors have already pointed out (Fletcher 1997), Elias's observations are fundamentally critical of *naciocentrism* as an intellectual current that is connected to the rise of the European nation state. However, his theories can be applied to our own historical situation, if we emphasize the fact that here there is no conceptual homogeneity regarding the constitution of the nation, nationality and the national State. On the contrary, some analysts have suggested that the violent confrontation that has been affecting Colombia for the past two decades, as well as the one it lived through in the middle of the last century, can be understood as a struggle between opposing demands on the State, in which the competition between opposing sides plays a role in the spread of violence (Roldán 2003). In Daniel Pécaut's (1987) view, for the past half a century, the intensification of partisan rivalry for State control has contributed to the increasingly widespread use of violence, which has never entirely been a state monopoly. The recent confrontation in Colombia, which escalated from the mid 1980s on, has again involved a confrontation between very heterogeneous forces, in dispute over the precise nature of the formation of the state. But leaving aside the fact that the opponents in this struggle are armed, their conflicting viewpoints and perspectives are formed within an arena of debate in which Colombian intellectuals also participate.

Now let us look at the three main tendencies spanning the practice of anthropology in Colombia.

The early debates

An early tendency in Colombian anthropology was marked by an inclination that is common in Boasian anthropology, namely that of practicing a generalizing ethnography on the existing native groups of the country and considering them as being in danger of extinction or cultural decline. However, there was already a tendency among the pioneers of this current to blend universal theories and models or to apply them in a fairly unorthodox fashion, which is a tendency that persists to this day. Anthropology was established as a professional discipline in Colombia at the beginning of the 1940s, thanks to the efforts of Gregorio Hernández de Alba and the French ethnologist Paul Rivet. The latter found refuge from the war in Europe in Colombia, and in 1941 set up the National Institute of Ethnology. The first generation of professional anthropologists was made up of a handful of young graduates, some of whom had come from other disciplines. Amongst them they combined an exclusive interest in ethnography with Rivet's interest in the origin of American settlement and the diffusion of cultural traits, all of which meant researching into archeology, ethnohistory and physical anthropology, in search of enduring sociocultural sequences. This early generation played a fundamental role in the organization of anthropology courses at Colombian universities from the 1960s onwards. The same can be said of the Colombian Institute of Anthropology (1952), a state research center which absorbed the former ethnological one and began to dedicate itself to research in the four fields of anthroplogy, and to the preservation of archeological heritage (Barragán 2001, 2005). Thus, this first handful of anthropolgists (there would be fewer than fifty in the following two decades) practiced their profession in the context of public research institutions. The social sciences, particularly sociology and history, were only just starting up in a limited number of university centers.

What were the preoccupations of this early generation of anthropologists? The first issue of the *Revista Colombiana de Antropología*, an institute publication, came out fifty years ago when violence devastated certain rural areas. At the time, Colombia was immersed in a violent confrontation in a

number of rural areas, which took the form of a partisan struggle. It was the height of Cold War suspicions and the fear of communism was rife. It is said that during this period, the partisan affiliations of those who worked at the Institute determined whether or not their work received support, and even whether they were to continue to be employed there. In this first issue of the Review the following articles appeared; "Contacts and Cultural Exchange in the Sierra Nevada of Santa Marta" by Gerardo Reichel Dolmatoff, "La Guajira, a Region, a Culture of Colombia" by Milcíades Chaves, "The Social and Economic Aspects of Coffee Growing in Antioquia" by Ernesto Guhl, and "Food Distribution in a Transitional Society" by Alicia Dussan. There were also contributions by Segundo Bernal on mythology and folk tales from a Paez community, Federico Medem on the taxonomy of the alligator, and Nils Holmer and Jean Caudmont on the linguistics of two indigenous groups. Not a word then was said about the violent confrontation taking place in a large area of the rural Colombia. But on the other hand, the government was already experimenting with a type of applied anthropology in what were called programs of rural social security, which sought to resolve the problem of the rural violence. Others might note, as Marco Martínez (2004) has done, the conspicuous absence of any theoretical discussion, or explicit reference to a question or to a methodology employed in the work. Their writings appear to assume that reality is in front of our very eyes, ready to be revealed by the expert. In archeology, the focus was on establishing cultural areas across the Colombian territory and elaborating chronological sequences. We might say, then, that the focus of these works was on "local worlds" and the "objective" description of closed cultures. However, this emphasis was qualified by the preoccupation that is apparent in almost all of the texts, and is particularly explicit in those of Alicia Dussán and Gerardo Reichel, with "contact" and "cultural exchange" and with the effects of "aculturation", particularly where they perceived a "cultural loss". It was also qualified by the appearance of applied anthropology projects in certain communities, or on matters such as urban housing. Which is to say that the anthropologists were not unaware of the fact that these local worlds existed in relation to a history and a regional context that were imposed on them and that in general placed them at the bottom of the social hierarchy, or that they were facing pressing new social conditions and necessities. What they did was limit themselves to context of the Colombian national territory.

In this first issue of the Review it is also apparent that the anthropologists drew conclusions from their studies with the aim of modifying the deeply-rooted prejudices that provided the ideological justification for the subordination of indigenous societies. For example, Milcíades Chaves begins the piece on the Guajira, a peninsula in the north of Colombia, with the subtitle *Colombia, a tropical country,* and after examining the infuence of the climate on man, he takes the opportunity to say that, behind many theories on geographical infuence, there are hidden racist theories that ignore man's adaptation to his environment. He emphasizes the fact the region should be considered "as a culture of Colombia", when in ordinary language this term was only applied to esthetic and refined representations, and the indigenous peoples were commonly referred to as "savage tribes" and "barbarians". Chaves finishes by arguing that the "guajiros [are an example of] astonishing adaptation". Nowadays we might argue that the anthropological representation of the ecological Indian, to which the native peoples stake their claim, is largely an anthropological "invention" (Orrantía 2002). Nonetheless, although this praise for cultural adaptation might now seem naive to us, there is no doubt about how strange Chaves' words must have sounded in a society where racism towards Indians and Afro-Colombians was prevalent. This was not just intellectual pie in the sky; as is often the case with ethnographic representations (Ramos 2004), they had implications for the way in which Amerindian societies were perceived in Colombia. There is no denying that the results of a change in the public image of the indigenous peoples would take several more decades to become apparent, and would require prolonged and repeated work on the value of cultural diversity. It would also be necessary for the ethnic reaffirmation movements and the ethnographic representation to come together. Nonetheless, it was the first step towards seeking an improved position for these societies.

In this first issue of the *Revista Colombiana de Antropología* (1953) it is also apparent that the anthropological emphasis on indigenous societies soon went beyond a mere interest in these societies as

exotic objects. But equally obvious are the tensions between the various approaches to the subject of these indigenous societies. The *Review* was announced as the "modern and more scientific" replacement for the *Revista del Instituto Etnológico Nacional* and the *Boletín de Arqueología*, publications belonging to the former National Ethnological Institute. Under legal guidance, the management of the Institute announced the establishment of the following sections: Archeology, Physical Anthropology, Ethnography, Social Anthropology, Linguistics and Folk Studies, emphasizing that in the near future there would be

> "A very particular section devoted to the Protection of the Indian, which will study the specific problems of each community, in order to suggest to the goverment measures that might rescue the indigenous peoples from their precarious condition, **thereby incorporating them into the national identity,** since with 10% of pure indians, 40% of *mestizos* of caucasian descent and 30% of *mestizos* of Afro-Colombian descent, Colombia urgently needs the solutions that anthropology can offer it in this respect" (Andrade 1953: 13).

Before announcing the opening of a three-year course for training anthropologists, the director, Andrade, declared that anthropology could not escape from the problems facing the nation, or avoid offering an answer to the question of what it meant to be American. However, Andrade himself was responsible for failing to start up the aforementioned section, for fear that its research would "become politicized". Thus, the idea that anthropologists might act as mediators between the State and the indigenous peoples turned out to be problematic in itself, since it raised the question of whether it was possible to sustain the dichotomy between objectivity and commitment to the populations being studied.

Many of these anthropologists included in their bibliographies the likes of Melville Herskovits, Ralph Linton, Abraham Kardiner, Margaret Mead, and also Malinowski. But they didn't neglect to study in detail the chroniclers of the Indies as well as regional histories and monographs. The tendency to adopt the attitude of ingenuous discoverers was challenged by the need to do two things: on the one hand, to put new names on the map of Colombia, and on the other, to answer for the place that these populations would occupy within the nation as a whole; a nation which defined itself as still being in the process of formation. Thus, they clearly demonstrated their desire to participate in the very formation of Colombian nationality, in a similar kind of role to that of the cartographies, museums and censuses described by Benedict Anderson (1983).

There was no unanimity amongst this early generation regarding how they should resolve the problematic relationship between knowledge and political position, nor was there agreement as to how far their concrete proposals on social questions should go. In the fourth issue of the Review (1955), Virginia Gutiérrez de Pineda relates how during an "expedition" to la Guajira she was struck by the high infant mortality rate among the indigenous community then known as 'guajiros'. She then goes on to look at the high infant mortality in Colombia and immediately suggests that if cultural models of child rearing and nutrition were reconsidered, Colombia could reduce this high rate. Virginia was only just beginning her career, but the question of how to translate anthropological knowledge into public policies on health and the family, in accordance with the cultural particularities of each Colombian region, was one she would spend her life addressing. An important part of her work as an anthropology professor was giving classes in the Faculty of Medicine of the National University.

Other colleagues adopted more radical positions, inspired by the ideas of the Peruvian José Carlos Mariátegui, among others. According to this viewpoint, the problem of the indigenous peoples, the agrarian problem and the national problem were all one (Mariátegui and Sánchez [1927, 1928] 1987). Roberto Pineda Giraldo, another of the pioneers, recently recounted (Caviedes 2004, Barragán 2005) how two contrasting tendencies soon appeared among the first generation of anthropologists. One favoured "objective" knowledge of "in vitro" societies in danger of extinction, whilst the other, which was termed *indigenista,* backed the political claims of the Indians. Despite the fact that the two tendencies co-existed within the Ethnological Institute from 1940 to 1952, they separated their production; whilst the purely ethnographical texts were published in the *Revista del Instituto Etnológico Nacional*, the articles on the social situation of the indigenous peoples came out in the *Boletín de Arqueología.*

By the 1960s and 1970s, this difference had taken another form. Although some remained distrustful of official policy and continued to denounce the situation of the indigenous communities, others jumped on the bandwagon of the 'development' current within the Colombian state apparatus. They even laid the foundations for an official policy designed to assimilate the indigenous communities into the stream of Colombian national identity, largely influenced by Mexican *indigenismo*. During this period, the development argument permeated the Colombian state and made use of a new crop of scientists and technicians, who set out to "plan" social intervention in their capacity as participants in the public administration (Jimeno 1984). It was at this time that the two principal mechanisms employed by the development camp were consolidated: professionalization and institutionalization (Escobar 1996).

As far as professionalization was concerned, this was the time when the first three university programs (undergraduate to begin with) in anthropology were opened up, replacing the training given by the Colombian Institute of Anthropology. As was the case in other areas like sociology, the organization of of the training programs largely followed North American university models and their creators were distinguished members of the first generation of anthropologists, namely Gerardo and Alicia Reichel-Dolmatof, Luis Duque Gómez and Graciliano Arcila. The aim was to train both scientists and professionals in the four branches of anthropology. By the mid 1970s the number of graduates was increasing throughout the country and they were rapidly being incorporated into the various official agencies. However, there was also a rapid expansion within the universities, particularly the public ones, of a student movement that was encouraged by the Cuban Revolution of 1959, by anti-colonial and "third world" social protest movements, and by the student movements that had emerged in the late 1960s throughout the first world. It was believed at the time that Latin America might constitute a utopia of social equality. The anthropology students of the late 1960s joined the movement with enthusiasm and, along with their questioning of the social order, began to question anthropology for being a product of colonialism and their professors for being docile followers of such modes of thinking (Caviedes 2004, Jimeno 1999). This questioning soon led to a confrontation between generations, which resulted in a number of the early anthropologists being removed from their teaching functions. They were replaced by radical youngsters who were heavily influenced by Marxism and the critical theories of dependency, and who attempted to reorientate the teaching programs along those same lines.

The second mechanism employed by the development ideology was that of institutionalization. We have already mentioned that some of the pioneers of anthropology actively supported new state "development" institutions, including those concerned with land reform and *indigenismo*. Some of them believed that the role of anthropologists should be to plan cultural changes, in order for development and technological improvements in agriculture to bring about the integration of peasant and indigenous populations into the social structure of the nation (Jimeno and Triana 1985). Here they were implicitly following the Andean region model, which consisted of civilizing the periphery. The anthropologist Gregorio Hernández de Alba was the inspiration for the new official agency, the Division of Indigenous Affairs, the aim of which, according to his own definition, was "social improvement and the effective incorporation into active life and national progress of territories and inhabitants that could be classified as marginal" (quoted in Jimeno and Triana, 1985, 82). From as early as 1940, the concept of *national integration* had been at the very core of *indigenismo*, which was spread throughout Latin America by Miguel Gamio. This *indigenismo* affected the formulation of Colombian policies towards the indigenous societies in the early 1960s (Jimeno and Triana 1985). The anthropologists of the time saw themselves as bureaucratic agents assigned to assimilate the indigenous peoples, who were considered to be marginalized individuals that needed to be put on the path to progress. Hernández de Alba believed that a more modern and efficient kind of action on behalf of the state might reduce the enormous influence the Catholic Church had maintained over the indigenous populations since the 19th century, on the explicit orders of the Colombian state itself (Jimeno and Triana 1985).

The first article of the decree proclaiming the creation of the new agency stated that its function would be "to study stable indigenous societies, as a basis for the planification of any cultural, social and

economic changes that might be advisable, with a view to encouraging the progress of these societies" (quoted in Jimeno and Triana 1985: 82). This directive included very concrete forms of action with respect to the indigenous populations, and in particular their lands. As is still the case today, the indigenous societies were scattered throughout the peripheral regions of Colombia, in groups of low population density with pronounced cultural differences. Some retained legal protection of their lands, dating back to Spanish colonial legislation, which they had secured through legal and political battles against various expropriation attempts since the declaration of the Republic in the 19th century. The policy of development considered collective territorial rights to be a transitional stage on the way to individual ownership, much as the liberal ideology had done in the 19th century. Thus, in 1962, the Land Reform Institute was given the task of breaking up the communal lands. However, it also opened up the possibility of allocating lands beyond the economic border. It was this small loophole that provided the perfect opportunity for the movement for the defense and expansion of indigenous lands, which would go on to achieve a great deal in the following decade.

In the early 1970s social unrest spread amongst peasants and indigenous communities seeking lands inhabited by the land owners. The latter not only refused to divide up their common lands, they also claimed lands that had been seized from them in the past, or demanded that their rights be recognized in border regions. To the surprise of the paternal wing of the peasant movement, the indigenous populations formulated their own claims through newly established ethnic organizations in which dozens of young anthropologists and other intellectuals actively participated (Jimeno 1996, Caviedes 2004).

A militant anthropology

Caviedes (2002, Arocha and Friedemann 1984, Barragán 2001) argues that in the 1970s there was a break in the practice adopted by anthropology, the most drastic element of which was the way anthropologists became activists in peasant and indigenous social movements. In Caviedes' opinion, this break did not occur simply because of a movement within anthropology influenced by Marxism and the proximity to the indigenous movement, (particularly the Indigenous Regional Council of the Cauca, CRIC), as some of us have suggested (Jimeno 1999). Instead, he argues, it came about as a result of attempts during that decade to rethink the power relationship both between Colombian society and the indigenous peoples, and also at the heart of Colombian society as a whole. This would mean that the rethinking of anthropology was a result of the struggles to transform this power relationship. Caviedes is probably more right than those of us who were too closely involved in the process during those years. In fact, I myself belong to the generation that questioned the orientation of the anthropology curriculum at one of the universities between 1968 and 1970, precisely on account of its lack of "commitment" to the social movements. Shortly after, I was able to participate in the debate on the orientation of land policies, in support of the new ethnic organizations. Many of those who I have mentioned as contributing to the first issue of the Review were affected by our criticisms, in some cases quite profoundly. During that period, the answer to the question "what is the purpose of knowledge?" was emphatic —to transform social injustice in our society. The practical response, which owed more to enthusiasm than to reflection and much more to naivety than preparation, consisted of accompanying and even trying to merge with the social movements of the time.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the land distribution problem was at the center of national debate. On one side, there was pressure from peasants and left-wing organizations, and on the other, from the principal rural landowners, who mobilized support from the most conservative sections of the party political system and from a third sector within the government, which proposed agricultural modernization, within a moderate framework of technological innovations and improvements in productivity. The result was an ineffectual land reform project that proved to be incapable of modifying the concentration of land ownership, in a country that was already largely urban. However, the rural organizations became strengthened, particularly the indigenous organization that brought together the three main indigenous groups from the South West in the CRIC (Jimeno, 1996). Their demands could be summed up in two

words: *land* and *culture*. Many of us who at the time had recently become professors at the public universities (National, Cauca and Antioquia), embraced the indigenous cause with enthusiasm. In it we saw the possibilty of achieving the "commitment" between science and politics that we had so desired. One way of contributing to the cause was by producing short texts written in the fervent language of the activist, denouncing abuses, especially by landowners, the Catholic Church and local police forces, and attacking official policies towards the indigenous communities as "ethnocide". We also promoted countless meetings so that indigenous leaders could put forward their point of view in the cities, we attended reunions and congresses organized by the indigenous communities themselves, or we took advantage of work-related trips throughout the country to act as liaisons between the indigenous groups that were cut off from each other. We were *collaborators*. One of the numerous examples of this militant literature was the newspaper *Yaví,* produced by a small group of anthropologists, lawyers and sociologists, which was circulated among intellectuals and indigenous organizations, from 1978 to 1983. The assassination of indigenous leaders during that period, as well as the imprisonment of others, was one of the driving forces behind the publication, which also examined local confrontations and praised the variety and wealth of indigenous beliefs and practices. As for the researchers from the Colombian Institute of Anthropology, they set up work stations, known as "anthropological stations" in indigenous communites, the purpose of which was to bring together research and work in the community, on ethno-education, health and organization.

We collaborators concentrated on circulating ethnic demands; the right to "territory" and to "self-determination", the right to live according to their cultural practices and to denounce relations of submission and exploitation in the local environment. We were active image creators, who advocated the intrinsic value of the Amerindian cultures as a political means of rethinking both the relationship between these societies and official policies, and the place of the native American in society and in the national consciousness. In a sense, we continued the work that had already been started by the pioneers. The limits of this activity and its ambiguities would only become apparent some time after. The indigenous communities appropriated the ethnographical images and transformed them into a new ethnical topography.

However, militant activity was not limited to students and university professors. The expansion of official institutions involved a large number of professionals, anthropologists and other intellectuals who sympathized with the indigenous cause. They saw themselves, not as agents of the official order, but as subvertors of this order, working discreetly, even sectretly, and at times more openly and defiantly. This work had two main purposes. One was to influence official policy to rethink the role of ethnic and cultural diversity. The other was to promote the creation of new local indigenous organizations designed to demand recognition of the rights of the indigenous communities. It also had the intention of putting different groups in contact with each other, by promoting the idea of a national indigenous movement with common demands and courses of action. We also worked on promoting a rethinking of official land policy, and established the ideological and practical bases for what would be a long struggle to obtain official recognition of indigenous lands in different parts of the country. Ideological, in that they rejected the idea of dividing up communal lands and advocated the very opposite: the advantage of maintaining the existing ones and applying the same scheme of community lands to the peripheral regions of the selva. Practical, since they led to intense promotional activity with local and regional organizations throughout the country.

The action taken by anthropologists, by contrast, was fairly diverse. We can demonstrate this by examining their case work in relation to the construction of the Urrá hydroelectric dam in an indigenous territory in the North of Colombia, the same dam studied by Caviedes (2004). Between 1960 and 1970, a local environmental development agency began a feasibility study on the construction of a dam in the region of the Embera Katío, near to the Caribean plains. The plan had the financial backing of multinational corporations, and attracted interest from land-owners and politicians in the region. Over the next three decades, there was a succession of technical assessments by social and environmental

scientists. The Embera also made their voice heard, and, in a fairly haphazard manner, with a number of internal disagreements still unresolved, presented legal claims and organized public protests. During the course of the debate on Urrá, anthropologists were to be found working on various sides. On several occasions they acted as consultant technicians on the social impact of the dam. The first participants, the anthropologists Piedad Gómez and Roberto Pineda Camacho, maintained that the environmental destruction of the selva and the rivers would have a negative impact on the survival of the Embera, in spite of veiled pressure from contractors and powerful local interests. Others though understated indigenous demands (Caviedes 2004).

Parallel to the conflicting techical studies, Antonio Cardona, another young anthropologist, recently graduated from the public university, travelled the region in the early 1980s as a public employee of an agency on indigenous affairs (Caviedes 2004). His job consisted of seeking out an area for the creation of a protected communal territory, but very soon he was forced to take a position on the construction of the dam. He then worked to group the local communities together into new organizations that took the form of "cabildos" —organizations of Spanish colonial origin that were adopted as a model by the national indigenous movement. Supported by other anthropologists who had recently graduated from other universities and also sympathized with the indigenous struggle, Cardona used his knowledge of mobilizations that he had acquired as a student in contact with the peasant organization and the CRIC, and succeeded in putting the Embera in contact with each other and with other indigenous organizations. This marked the start of a slow but continuous process of participation by the Embera in meetings and they even ventured into the unknown —to the capital, Bogota. Supported by anthropologists who worked with them, they travelled on to the south of Colombia to attend the first national indigenous meeting in 1981, which led to the formation of the National Indigenous Organization ONIC. Numerous events, such as the assassination of indigenous leaders, harassment by the Colombian army and armed groups, both 'paramilitary' and guerrilla, have marked the protest movement against the dam. In spite of everything, the first phase of the construction began in 1989. Antonio Cardona opted, as he remembers it, for open "commitment" in opposition to the dam —and lost his job (Caviedes 2004).

The central concept guiding the action of the militant anthropologists was that of *commitment,* which they understood as a moral duty to confront what they believed was damaging communities. Many practiced it to the full, as in the case of the Urrá dam, and some still continue with this approach, but others chose to become more conciliatory and modify their positions. In time, the combative young anthropologists of the 1980s gave way to others who put their expert knowledge to use in a new way: now as consultants to the Constitutional Court, studying the damage caused by the dam that had already been built. In 1998, based on anthropological opinion, the Court ruled that the dam had caused sweeping changes that threatened the survival of the Embera and awarded compensation to their communities. At this stage, new challenges appeared. Firstly, there was the matter of reaching agreement on how to manage these fairly considerable sums of money. Secondly, there was the question of the Embera's very survival in the midst of a war between guerrilla factions that had accused them of siding with the 'enemy' on one side, and paramilitaries who beseiged them and kept close watch on their movements on the other. We know all this thanks to anthropologists such as Caviedes, who works for the public administration on the defense of human rights in a small town in the region. But that is another story, of history in the making.

Between Political Constitution and conflict

From the second half of the 1980s onwards, two distinct situations began to come together. On the one hand, anthropology was reaping the rewards of its consolidation as an academic discipline, with a considerable number of professionals practicing applied anthropology in a wide range of areas. On the other hand, the concept of *commitment* as political activism in the community had been substituted by a greater interest in the actual production of knowledge and by a greater sectorization of anthropology according to the social, regional and institutional affiliation of the researcher. The subject of indigenous

societies now became the domain of a limited number of specialists, at the same time as the indigenous organizations and their spokespeople were becoming increasingly visible politically, and could speak for themselves. For some researchers, including Caviedes, this meant that the bulk of anthropology had distanced itself from social movements. But it can also be seen as an overall reorientation of the discipline, which in Colombia, covers a wide variety of topics and approaches. The influence of debates within the social sciences in the US, and to a lesser extent in France, have replaced the former contact with Latin American critical theory. Moreover, there has been a shift in the function of *commitment,* which is no longer understood as being a political and moral bond with local communities. Instead, it is now seen as fostering political debate at the national level. The best of example of this is perhaps the process that led to the constitutional reform of 1991, as well as the determination of many anthropologists to defend and build on some of their social achievements.

The constitutional reform came about in 1991 partly as a result of the peace agreements with the M-19 guerrillas. The country was still reeling from a wave of assassinations and bombings carried out by the drugs cartels, who were attempting to put pressure on the authorites to abandon the official measures taken against them. Many sectors of society saw the constitutional reform as a ray of hope in the midst of the conflict; as the possibility of a new social pact and the chance to make progress on social rights and economic guarantees. For certain intellectuals, including some anthropologists, it was the opportunity to leave behind the Political Constitution of 1886, which proclaimed one official religion and culture, and left the Amerindian and Afro-Colombian populations in a state of social exclusion and disadvantage. It was also the opportunity to support the ethnic organizations in their demands. Thanks to their active participation in the formulation of the new Constitution, the indigenous communities improved their public image and received recognition for a host of safeguards and rights that they had fought long and hard for, such as the recognition of their cultural diversity, their territorial rights, their native language and education. The same cannot be said for the Afro-Colombian populations, who lacked such experienced forms of representation and organization. Even so, thanks to the activities of a group of anthropologists, the Constitution included a norm that led to moderate advances in the recognition of the exclusion of these populations and in territorial guarantees for some of them. It was no coincidence that the Colombian Institute of Anthropology coordinated the committee that developed the constitutional principle on communal rights of black communities. The committee's work leds to the Law of Black Communities (Ley 70 de 1993 de Comunidades Negras.

Here we encounter a difference between the perspective of foreign intellectuals and that of Colombian ones. Most foreign observers look on the progress achieved through negotiation with considerable skepticism, and see each accomplishment as merely confirmation of the existing order, since the changes have been minor ones. They see a tendency to endorse the state and accept its overall authority (Gros 2001). Jaime Arocha (2004) demonstrates precisely this difference in perspective. Whilst foreign anthropologists are skeptical towards the socio-political events affecting the Afro-Colombian population for example, through the law establishing their ethno-territorial and political rights, the dominant position taken by Colombian anthropologists is one of attachment and commitment to the political achievements concerning the recognition of these peoples.

Indeed, the majority of Colombian anthropologists make a more positive political assessment of every advance made against discrimination and historical forms of domination, or in the unequivocal process of the empowerment of the indigenous peoples. For some, it is a question of attaining a new social order, for us, it is about working in a field of day-to-day struggles to expand democracy, in the midst of a long and violent confrontation. Again, the difference in perspective has to do with our historical position as researchers and citizens, which is continually challenged by controversial ideas on the State, the nation and the democracy we are seeking to build.

The proliferation of subjects and approaches, and the shift in interest towards the national public arena, have occured within the context of increasing internal conflict in Colombia. It is well

documented that the characteristic feature of this conflict is the complex criss-crossing of local situations and struggles for control of the State between State forces and insurgents from across the political spectrum. The money and interests generated by the traffic in illegal drugs permeates this conflict, further complicating the panorama of alliances, negotiations and confrontations. This adds a particular kind of tension, not only for those who have to live with the immediate effects of the violence, but also for the rest of Colombian society, who are afraid of becoming inadvertently caught up in it. Since 1985, much of the escalating confrontation has taken place in rural areas, which are paying the highest price for the violence. Thus, there is a relative degree of protection to be found in urban life. However, to some extent, the atmosphere of preoccupation and fear is inescapable.

In this sense, anthropologists who work in Colombia do so "under fire", to use the expression from the book by Nordstrom and Robben (1995). How has practicing anthropology in the context of this conflict affected research work, the relationship between the researcher and the research subjects, and the field itself or its theory? The events of the conflict are like accumulating layers that shake our consciousness and personal sensibilities, to the point where none of us can ignore the fact that our environment is becoming increasingly unsafe. How does this translate to work of the anthropologist? Those anthropologists who work in a strictly professional capacity, in the countless social institutions in the areas of conflict, have to make a permanent effort to ensure that their institutional cover is the general frame of reference for their actions. Like many other civilians, they go about their business with the utmost caution, which, amongst other things, involves showing neutrality towards all parties and permanently negotiating what we might call civil neutrality. This attitude must be demonstrated in daily conversation and in their choice of relations. It also means not inquiring about people, places or critical actions. But the struggle to achieve the neutrality that protects them and the people they work with can easily be destabilized, forcing the anthropologist to abandon the area in order to ensure his/her survival.

From the point of view of non-applied research, there has undoubtedly been a decrease in the amount of work being carried out in high risk zones, particularly in some rural areas. But there is a great deal of interest in studying political and other forms of violence, even though there are tencies to be more political scientists than anthropologists in this field. One effect of the conflict on anthropological practice has been to reinforce the general tendency towards opening up new topics of investigation, as we have previously seen. This has entailed redefining what exactly is meant by the "field" and "field work" of anthropology. The avoidance or prevention of violence has led anthropologists to abandon their former interest in localized communities, in favour of general or multi-localized processes. It has also brought about methodological innovations, including varied strategies for approaching research subjects, from the use of visual texts to the internet, or changes in traditional writing formats.

The relationship of anthropologists with their subjects of investigation has also undergone a process of re-evaluation. The naive position of committed activism has been left behind, although it still exists amongst some young anthropologists with pronounced loyalties towards the most disadvantaged sectors of society. This change can be seen as the emergence of a new understanding of political action, 'apolitical politics', as Barragán (2005) calls it, which is now oriented towards environmental impact, gender identity, emotional youth communities (musical, literary) or globalization processes. The concept of *complicity*, put forward by George Marcus (1999), and used by Sara Shneiderman (Shneiderman *et al.* 2004) to show the adaptation in the relationship between social scientists and their informants in Nepal, might prove useful to those working in conflict zones or on violence-related topics. According to this concept, neither the anthropologist nor the subject of investigation can limit their project to purely local questions; they must work together to place themselves in a wider context, agreeing on their purposes and commitment to an external 'third party'. In Shneiderman's work this entailed new forms of *complicity* with local colleagues, insofar as their common goal was to guarantee the safety of those involved and to understand the changing situation. Indeed, those working in Colombia emphasize both the need to guarantee the safety of all concerned, and the way in which this creates special bonds between them and their research subjects. Together they begin to participate in a whole range of vital little strategies, such as avoiding certain places, people and times, maintaining a degree of mobility within the area and paying

close attention to rumours. However, in our case, this concept is limited by the fact that the internal conflict makes it difficult for social scientists to regard the opposing parties with indifference, and in general they adopt a definite position of either sympathizing with them or not, as the case may be. Thus it is impossible for them to form a bond of *complicity* with some of their research subjects: in the case of paramilitary or guerrilla groups, for example. Nevertheless, they must walk a fine line between relying on the approval of armed groups in order to move above freely and claiming civil neutrality. Another factor affecting the anthropologist's relationship of *complicity* is that it is so difficult to avoid arousing suspicion, however cautious they may be. Female researchers are said to be safer in such situations, since the fact that they are women protects them from the automatic assumption that they are combatants. By way of contrast, we can cite the case of our colleague Hernán Henao, which provides a dramatic example with which to end this analysis. A university professor whose research subject for a number of years was the relationship between region, territoriality and culture, in 1999 Hernao finished a study on territorial conflicts in a region of Western Colombia known for its predominance of paramilitary groups. In May of that year he was murdered by a commando in his own office at the University of Antioquia. As occurs with most violent deaths, conflicting versions of the reasons for the attack immediately began to circulate. According to some of the versions, what made him an enemy of these groups was the fact that an NGO had used his work abroad to support a claim of territorial usurpation. This particularly painful example demonstrates the difficulty of operating in a changing terrain dominated by the use of force.

Conclusion

The practice of anthropology in Colombia has been pervaded by the tension between the global orientations of the discipline and the way they are put into practice in the Colombian context. This is due to the fact that the practice must be adapted to the social condition of anthropologists as being fellow citizens of their subjects of study. In this sense, the practice of anthropology has been *naciocentric*, since our cultural production is permeated by disparate and polemical ideas regarding the make-up of the State and what it means to construct a nation, democracy and citizenship.

This is why anthropological practice in Colombia has been far from just an acritical repetition of imported models. We anthropologists have been forced to account for the tangle of perspectives and social interests in which we find ourselves immersed, and to exercise the function of citizen-researcher. The three main tendencies that sum up the six decades of anthropology in Colombia point to certain dominant trends and a few breaks, which have not been consecutive, but rather have co-existed and overlapped since it became an academic discipline in the 1940s. At one extreme we find an ethnography with a generalizing 'blanket' mentality, and at the other, a militant anthropology. Between the two we can identify a range of positions and discussions, the distinguishing feature of which has been the ill-defined boundary between practicing anthropology as a discipline and acting as citizens. In one sense this limits our anthropological practice, but in another sense it also opens it up.

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