THE COLOMBIAN CHOCO;
IMPLICATIONS OF CURRENT DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

by

Toye Helena Brewer

B.A., Harvard University
(1977)

Submitted to the Department of
Urban Studies and Planning
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Degree of

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June 1982

C Toye Helena Brewer

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the consequences of land colonization in the
Colombian Choco for its inhabitants. The Choco is an extremely under-
developed region of Colombia characterized physically by the predom-
inance of rainforests. It is populated by primarily by Blacks, the
descendants of slaves imported by the Spanish to work in placer mines,
and also has a considerable indigenous population, Cuna and Choco
Indians.

The Choco has been incorporated in the world economy for over 400
years as a supplier of platinum, gold, rubber, lumber and other raw
materials. Blacks have supplied cheap labor when market demand for
Choco's products is high, reverting to subsistence agriculture and
fishing when demand is low. Now, as a result of the inequitable dis-
tribution of land in Colombia, landless peasants (colonos) from the
Caribbean and Andean regions of Colombia are migrating to Choco to
look for lands to cultivate. Generally failing in their attempt to
establish viable farms, they surrender their cleared lands to investors
who establish extensive cattle ranches. Colonos find no solution to
their problem while threatening the continued subsistence of Blacks and
Indians. In the long run, the ecological, social and economic conse-
quences could be devastating as rainforests are converted to pastures,
agricultural production gives way to cattle ranching and the original
population is displaced from the land with no other source of liveli-
hood assured.

Because land reform legislation passed over twenty years ago will
not be implemented due to political constraints, colonization cannot
be expected to end. Policies to help control the impacts of coloniza-
tion would include establishing security of tenure for those currently
in the area and limiting the formation of new pastures while
encouraging agricultural production through greater assistance to
peasant producers. Pasture formation for cattle raising is negative
not only from the ecological point of view, but from the perspective
of generating employment and increasing food output, in a country
with problems meeting demanding for basic foodstuffs, as well.

Thesis Supervisor: Lisa Peattie
Title: Professor of Urban Anthropology
## Abbreviations Used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DANE</td>
<td>Departmento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (Spanish) / National Administrative Department of Statistics (English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECS</td>
<td>Estudiantes de Ciencias Sociales (Universidad Tecnologico del Choco) (Spanish) / Students of Social Sciences (Technological University of the Choco) (English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IBRD</td>
<td>International Bank of Reconstruction and Development (World Bank)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDB</td>
<td>Inter-American Development Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCORA</td>
<td>Instituto Colombiano de la Reforma Agraria (Spanish) / Colombian Institute of Agrarian Reform (English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Proyecto Darien (Spanish) / Project Darien (a study done by the Organization of American States and Republic of Colombia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USDOT</td>
<td>U.S. Department of Transportation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All translations from texts written in Spanish are by the author.
Acknowledgments

To Martín Diskin, Lisa Peattie and Jafet Gonzalez for their helpful criticisms and suggestions on earlier drafts.

To Elvira Bustamante and Fabio Ramirez for xeroxing and mailing me important documents from Colombia.
INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to examine the social and economic consequences of land colonization in the Colombian Choco for its inhabitants. Land colonization is underway in many parts of America. The Amazon is the area which has received the most attention but other areas in Peru, Ecuador, Panama, etc. are also experiencing the same phenomenon (See Barbira Scazzochio 1980). The Choco appears to differ from most of these regions in two ways: the existence of a long established Black population in addition to the indigenous one, and its long standing incorporation in the world economy based on gold extraction.

The Choco is a classic example of a tropical rainforest, abound- ing with animal and plant life, rivers and lagoons. In addition, when the area was studied by American geographer Robert West in 1957, it had the highest human population density of any American rainforest (1957:8). The people of Choco engage in agriculture, fishing and mining in an area where roads are virtually absent and villages enjoying either electricity or aqueduct are rare. However, the Choco is not undeveloped due to lack of incorporation into the modern world economy but rather underdeveloped as a consequence of four hundred years of exploitation of its resources and peoples (See Gunder Frank 1969). In the 1500s Spaniards began "pacifying" the indigenous population and importing Black slaves to work in placer mines. For centuries the Choco has been a producer of gold and plantinum. Since the end of colonialism and the abolition of slavery, lumber, rubber and other raw materials have been extracted from the Choco as well, utilizing the cheap labor of Blacks and Indians who are largely able
to produce their own subsistence needs. Precisely because Blacks and Indians have had access to the land to farm and rivers to fish, the fluctuating demands of the world market for their labor has not endangered their survival. Now, however, things are changing. The increasing concentration of land ownership in the central areas of Colombia is driving landless peasants, colonos, into jungle areas like the Choco to claim public lands. Most colonos fail in their endeavors to establish a viable farm and surrender their cleared holdings to large cattle ranchers before moving on to clear new lands. The result is that colonos clear the land for ranchers, finding no solution for their own problem, while threatening the continued subsistence of Blacks and Indians by invading their lands. Given the fact that the Pan-American Highway is to cross this area, the situation must be stabilized soon or truly massive displacement will accompany the completion of the highway.

The Indian groups this study will refer to are the Chocoes (Embera and Noanama) and Cuna of the Darien. A number of Chocoes live in Tanelita in the municipio of Unguia. A Cuna reserve, under heavy pressure from colonos, is located in Arquia, also in Unguia. A smaller Cuna reserve is located in Jilgal (Unguia). Although the 1973 Colombian census states that over 1300 Indians (Chocoes) live in the municipio of Riosucio, data about their exact location and the extent of their contact with colonos is unavailable.

Colonos, Indians (and Blacks) are all affected by "economic and political processes which deep down are identical and affect them equally" (Souza Martins 1980: 97) as their lands are sought after by larger economic interests. While I agree that all three groups
are affected by the same economic process - the increasing monopolization of land and the establishment of capitalist agricultural developments - I don't agree the groups are affected equally. The colono is already a victim of the process and no longer has anything much to lose. Blacks and Indians still have access to their land and hence have everything to lose. While the problem is generated in the wider political economy to which colonos are also victims, to the Black and Indian population the colono can easily be perceived as part as the problem.

This paper will examine these processes and their implications for the future development of the Darien and the Choco. Special attention will be paid to the Black population. While there is a general consensus that Indians have a right to the land, Blacks are expected to fend for themselves and take advantage of the "development" of the area. This means that if displaced from their lands, they are left to migrate to join the urban marginal sector, rural migratory labor force or move deeper into the jungle to less accessible lands. The reality is that the development process in the Darien offers few benefits to Blacks.

Physical and Historical Setting

The Choco is part of a larger geographical and cultural area known as the Wet Pacific Lowlands. The Wet Pacific Lowlands encompass the rainiest area in the hemisphere with average annual totals between 400 plus inches to 120 inches in most areas (West 1957: 25, Proyect Darien 1978:3). It is considered to be "one of the most complex ecosystems in the world" (Whitten 1974:25). Bounded by the Pacific Ocean on one side, the Caribbean on another and separated from
THE PACIFIC LOWLANDS OF COLOMBIA

WESTERN COLOMBIA
AND ADJACENT AREAS
PACIFIC LOWLANDS
CULTURE AREA

Source: West 1957
the rest of Colombia by the western chain of the Andes, humidity rates oscillate between 75-95% year around (Moncada 1979:16). It is an area chiefly dominated by rainforests, where paca, peccary, jaguar, crocodiles and monkeys, although decreasing in number, can still be hunted. A satisfactory inventory of the plant and animal life in the Choco has yet to be made (USDOT 1976:4-31). With a population density of 10 persons per square mile in 1957, the area had the highest human population density of any American rainforest (West 1957:8).

The region is united not only by its geographical characteristics, but more importantly by its common population, way of life and historical development, all of which set it apart from neighboring regions (West 1957:3).

While the Pacific Lowlands extend from Esmeraldas, Ecuador, up through Darien, Panama, within Colombia the Choco is the only political department in which this territory and its population constitute a majority. The remainder of the Pacific Lowland territory and its inhabitants are divided into the more prosperous departments of Antioquia, Valle, Cauca and Narino, in which Pacific Lowlanders are regarded as minorities from a backward area.

Located in the extreme northwestern corner of Colombia, the Choco is the fourth largest department in Colombia (Fadul 1960:25). It is the only Colombian department with coasts on both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The Choco constitutes the center of the Pacific Lowlands; near the capital city, Quibdo, rainfall is highest. Moving north to the Darien and south to Esmeraldas, precipitation rates decline. In these latter areas, there are distinct wet and dry seasons, whereas in the center there are only brief periods of relatively drier
Political Map of the Choco 1973

Source: XIV Censo Nacional de Poblacion y III de Vivienda 1973, Choco
weather from January to February and July to August. Rivers, swamps and lagoons abound in the Choco, providing an intricate transport system which expands and contracts with the arrival of wet and drier seasons. The principle waterway, the Atrato River, is navigable 175 miles year around from Quibdo to the Gulf of Uraba in the Caribbean. The San Juan River extends for some 100 miles and flows into the Pacific. The possibility of using these two waterways as the basis for a new interoceanic canal has been discussed in international circles.

Land Types in the Choco (Prior to 1959)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jungle</td>
<td>60.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forests</td>
<td>24.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swamps/Lagoons</td>
<td>10.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastures</td>
<td>.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3.25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Choco: Plan de Fomento Regional 1959-1968 cited in Mondada 1979:24

While Colombian census figures do not identify ethnic groups other than Indians, it can be estimated that over 80% of Chocoanos are Black, the descendents of African slaves imported by the Spanish to work in gold placer mines. The 1973 Colombian census estimated a total population of slightly over 250,000 in the Choco, with Indians comprising 7.4%, an estimate somewhat lower than others (See Reichel Dolmatoff 1972:552). In any case, the indigenous population may be as numerous as the white population.

The Choco epitomizes the image of underdevelopment. With the exception of one road, in deplorable condition, linking Quibdo to Medellin and to a few areas in the nearby mining districts, roads
are virtually absent. Most travel is along the numerous rivers of the Choco, by dugout canoe or outboard motorboat. Travel by foot along jungle paths is also common. Very few villages enjoy either electricity or aqueduct. Even the capital city of Quibdo, which receives electricity generated in Medellin, commonly experiences several blackouts every month lasting from a few hours to a few days. Problems with the aqueduct preventing service are equally as frequent in Quibdo. Water is rationed and comes twice daily. That water which does come through the aqueduct is not potable. In an area with less rainfall, the lack of sanitary services would have "fatal" consequences for the health of the population (Fadul 1960:40). Poor housing conditions, the lack of sewage systems and latrines, irregular water supply, unsatisfactory water storage conditions, lack of adequate waste disposal and the proliferation of insects all interact to cause health problems such as gastrointestinal disorders, broncopulmonary infections, malaria, typhoid fever, malnutrition, tuberculosis, etc. (PD 1978:96). The poor sanitary conditions as compared to other areas of Colombia is evident in 1973 census figures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Dwellings with Selected Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aqueduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia as a whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antioquia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choco</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: XIV Censo Nacional de Población y III de Viviendas, 1973

In addition, in 1973, over 83% of Chocoano households lacked electricity, bathing facilities and toilets (Censo Nacional 1973, Resumen del Choco). In 1973 illiteracy affected 47% of the population of
Choco, compared with 33% nationally (Censo de Poblacion 1973). Along with these dismal health conditions are dismal health facilities. In the mid-70s the Choco had less than two hundred hospital beds for a population of over 300,000 and almost half of these were in Quibdo (Lozano Pena n.d.:5). The percentage of the population dedicated to agriculture and mining is highly disproportionate to those in other areas of the country.

Population Engaged in Agriculture and Mining (1964)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Choco</th>
<th>Colombia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, Hunting,</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
<td>47.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forestry</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>1.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>88.8%</td>
<td>48.78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: XIII Censo de Poblacion 1964, Resumen del Choco and XIII Censo Nacional 1964

Manufacturing and services which employed over 30% of the Colombian population in 1964 were almost nonexistent in Choco. No manufacturing was reported in the 1964 census and only 4% of the population worked in service industries.

As this data suggests, most Chocoanos are subsistence farmers, practicing slash and mulch, slash and burn or riverine agriculture. Slash and mulch, a variation on slash and burn agriculture which cannot be practiced in large areas of the Choco due to the excessive rates of percipitation, is probably of Indian origin (West 1957:129). In this system, the forest is cut as in slash and burn, then the vegetable matter is allowed to decay "forming a thick mulch through which the sprout from the seeds and cuttings appear within a week or
ten days" (West 1957:129). This system of agriculture actually requires greater extensions of land than does slash and burn due to greater nutrient loss in the clearing (Isacsson 1976:21). In both slash and mulch and slash and burn agriculture a combination of roots, cereals, shrubs and tree crops are usually grown.

These grow rapidly and provide a layer to cover the soil, protecting it from sun and rain. The crops have different requirements of the soil and thus serve a similar function to the crop rotation of temperate lands. They also mature at different rates and so harvests are more evenly spaced throughout the year, reducing the "hunger" season (Grigg 1970:216).

Little labor is demanded after the initial clearing and relative to labor inputs yields are high. If the fallow period is long enough, no ecological damage occurs.

Riverine agriculture is practiced on the low terraces which flood in the rainy season. The floods leave an alluvial deposit on the terraces which act as a fertilizer. No fallow period is required on this superior farm land.

These methods of cultivation are practiced by Blacks and Indians alike to grow plantain, maize, yucca, rice and other subsistence crops. Blacks learned the techniques they practice in mining (de Friedemann 1974:70) and agriculture (West 1957:129) from Indians. Their earlier hunting techniques, canoes and crafts are also based on Indian technologies (West 1957:164, 182, 187). Outside of urban areas and a few areas where tourism has disrupted the traditional economy (e.g. Bahia Solano, Capurgana, Sapzurro), their concept of land tenancy is the same as that of Indians. Lands not claimed by any community may be occupied by those who need them as long as they are using them (West 1957:154). While some demarcated Indian re-
serves do exist in Choco, 99% of Blacks are estimated to be squatters having neither title to their land nor paying rent (West 1957:153), potentially quite a precarious position for people who depend on the land for so much.

Black Chocoanos maintain few elements of their African heritage. Norman Whitten (1974:13) cites body gestures, patterns of carrying loads and eye avoidance, musical rhythms and folklore themes as the most pervasive. However, Chocoanos are marginalized from the rest of Colombia not only economically but racially and culturally as well. "Probably more than any other Latin American people, Colombians have remained conscious of their Spanish heritage" (Blutstein et. al. 1977:94), meaning that Blacks and Indians alike "reside on the outskirts of national life, as much because of their culture as of their color" (Blutstein et. al. 1977:95). The Choco is as synonomous of Blackness in Colombia as it is of poverty. Chocoanos are well aware of their marginality to the larger Colombian society economically, socially and culturally. According to anthropologist Reichel Dolmatoff (1972:552):

Although the Choco is very rich in timber, platinum, gold, etc., an atmosphere of material and moral misery weighs over the entire department which the Blacks are conscious of. They express it as a criticism "of the government and the whites who have abandoned us." There is a humble resentment against "fate," against the foreign mining companies which operate in the Choco, and in general against the lack of food, schools, doctors and communications.

The current deplorable state of material development in the Choco is not due to the absence of capital investment, lack of natural resource endowment or lack of integration into the world market economy as some development theorists might suggest. In fact, as
early as 1600 Spaniards had begun "pacifying" Indians and importing African slaves to work in gold mines in the Choco. Gold was abundant in the Choco; the only problem in its extraction was sufficient labor.

By the time Spaniards were drawn to the Choco, it was already known that Indian labor was unsuitable for the intensive mining they demanded. Fear of the extinction of the native population led the Crown to pass protective legislation in 1542, lest they be unable to contribute in any form (Jaramillo 1968:30). The problem of labor in the Choco and other mining areas was solved by the importation of African slaves. It was commonly asserted that one African did the work of five Indians and slaves with any trace of Indian phenotype generally could not be sold at a profit (Jaramillo 1968:28, 20).

In colonial times, life in Choco revolved around gold extraction for Blacks as well as Indians. Indians were "pacified" and forced to move into large villages designated by the Spanish where they were expected to produce food for the slaves working in the placer mines as well as pay gold tributes (Isacsson 1974:23-24, Historia Documental del Choco 137-140). "Indians died by the thousands" (Sharp 1974:92) from disease and hunger under the new system.

Nevertheless, between 1690 and 1810, 75 million silver pesos, 375,000 lbs., of gold were extracted in the Choco (Sharp 1974:93). So intense was gold exploitation that agriculture was at times abandoned, producing a famine in the early 1700s in which over 300 slaves starved to death (Sharp 1974:93).

The Spanish never wanted to live in Choco. Its hot, humid climate and jungle terrain have never been regarded as suitable for white settlements. In 1782, in one central region of the Choco, it
was reported that of a population of about 18,000, less than 400 were Spanish: 7,000 were slaves, 4,000 liberal (freed slaves) and 6,500 Indians (Sharp 1974:94). Apparently Blacks were dominant numerically in many regions and the liberal population was uncommonly large. The ability, even the right of a slave to buy his freedom was the only safety valve in an area where whites were greatly outnumbered. Slaves were permitted certain areas to mine in order to earn money on Sundays and holidays and the master was obligated to accept a legally established price. However, masters commonly attempted to sway Blacks by offering to sell them tobacco, liquor and other goods in exchange for their earnings (Sharp 1974:95). Even as slaves, Black Chocoanos were already integrated in the market economy.

The mining of gold and platinum, the latter considered useless before the 18th century (West 1957:174), did not end with Spanish colonialism; after the abolition of slavery many Blacks continued to work in placer mines. But in the late 1800s North American and British capital began to invest in mining in the Choco. The first successful dredging operation was established in 1915 by a British firm which in 1916 transferred to North American ownership (West 1957:179). This new company, Compania Mineria Choco-Pacifico-America, built "one of the largest gold and platinum dredging operations in Latin America" on the San Juan River (West 1957:179). In 1957 the Choco-Pacifico was operating "five large bucket dredges powered by electricity generated at a hydroelectric plant constructed on the upper Andagueda" (West 1957:179). For decades mining operations were headquartered at Andagoya where on one side of the river Blacks lived
in the usual conditions characteristic of the Choco, and on the other
foreigners lived in a protected camp, known as Andagoyita, with all
the comforts and conveniences of the developed world. Nationalization
of the Choco-Pacifico in 1973 meant that it passed to the hands of
the Colombian private sector, mainly investors from Medellin and
Bogota (Moncada 1979:97). According to one report, "The company
established in Andagoya is now called 'Mineros del Choco,' but
actually is the same old Choco-Pacifico. The only palpable difference
is that the administrative personnel went from being North American
to being Colombian (Antioqueno)" (Moncada 1979:101).

This large scale, technologically sophisticated mining concern
coeexists with the "folk" or primitive sector. The 1964 census
showed that almost 18% of the economically active population of Choco
worked in mining, with women outnumbering men two to one. The men,
women and children who mine placers in the Choco use the same techni-
ques practiced by their slave ancestors. It is a flexible occupation,
which probably accounts for its popularity with women. One works
independently, alone or with company, making one's own hours,
dedicating the amount of time necessary to meet subsistence needs.
In 1957 folk miners were extracting 25% of the gold and 50% of the
platinum mined in the Choco (West 1957:174). The near collapse of
the newly nationalized Mineros del Choco in the late 1970s probably
means that folk miners' contribution is even greater today.

Gold is not the only significant extractive industry operating
for the benefit of outsiders in the Choco. Since World War II timber
exploitation, especially for hardwoods, has been extremely profitable
(Whitten 1974:75) Again the foreign element is present. Demand is
largely, but not exclusively, generated from the U.S. and Europe (PD 1978:Part 2, 31). Buyers are commonly foreigners (Whitten 1974:76), foreigners operate many of the logging operations on the lower Atrato (ECS 1976:97) and, at least in the past, ocean freighters were reported to take logs to Pascagoula, Mississippi as well as to Barranquilla for processing into plywood and veneer (West 1957:170). The cativo forests of the Darien are among the most promising in the nation.

Ships from foreign ports take advantage of the excellent fishing waters off the Pacific coast of Choco (ECS 1976:106), while fishermen of the Choco use primitive techniques, have inadequate methods for preserving fish and experience severe price fluctuations during the course of a year. Fish prices drop dramatically twice yearly when the fish schools conduct long migrations up and back down the Atrato River, known as the subienda and bajanza. Yet, the only method of preservation is salting and drying the fish.

Booms occurred in the last century which leave no traces of activity today. In the 1850s, for example, intensive exploitation of latex for rubber production was stimulated by Goodyear's vulcanization process. "In 1858 the collection of latex from the forest had become the chief occupation of the small number of Negroes and mixed bloods living in the lower Atrato" (West 1957:166). By the end of the century production was falling with the depletion of the trees along the river banks which had easy transport access outside the region and the development of plantation production in South East Asia (West 1957:166).

The mid-1800s also saw a boom for tagua or ivory palm nuts which were used for button making. Tagua nuts were collected by both
Blacks and Indians (West 1957:161). They were purchased by dealers and sent from the various points throughout the Lowlands to the U.S. and Europe. The development of synthetic materials in the 1930s led to the sudden collapse of the tagua nut market (Whitten 1974:75).

While Indians in the Choco are not isolated from the market economy, their participation is certainly much less than that of Blacks. According to Whitten (1974:9), Blacks combine a proletarian strategy, "investment of time and energy and bringing in money," with a peasant strategy, "pursuits bringing in a direct harvest, supplemented by some cash gain." This enables Blacks to take advantage of cash "boom" periods as proletarians and revert to peasant strategies during "bust" periods. On the other hand, Indians have a more "tangential relation to the uncertain and fluctuating money economy thrust into the Wet Pacific Littoral from time to time" by practicing a peasant strategy with reliance on few industrial goods (Whitten 1974:53). As a natural consequence, Blacks are more dependent on the market for goods, while Indians enjoy a higher degree of self-sufficiency. It seems that this greater market participation has not had altogether positive results for Blacks, especially in terms of diet. Many researchers (e.g. Isacsson 1976:35, Riechel Dolmatoff 1977:552, Arauz 1975:254-257, Morales 1975:93) state that Indians fare much better than Blacks in terms of the variety and healthfulness of their diet. Arauz (1975:295) states that the Chocoes have a varied diet consisting of plantain, rice, corn, yams, some gathered goods, and fish with few, but increasing purchases of imported foods. Morales (1975:93) similarly found the Cuna to be better nourished than Blacks. Blacks rarely hunt and rely much more on imported foods.
(Arauz 1975:295). These include excessively salted meats and fish, a heavily salted cheese imported from Cartagena, canned goods, infant formulas and sweets, all of which are uncommon in the Indian diet. Given the excessive salt and fat content of the Black diet it is not so surprising that hypertension is endemic.

The irregular intrusion of market activities allows Blacks to move between wage labor and subsistence agriculture activities. Yet the money earned in the market does not lead to higher standards of living for Blacks. First of all, inferior cash goods substitute for goods previously produced in the home.

People giving proportionately more time to wage labor make choices invariably costing them more money when they go to buy subsistence goods; while those choosing to produce subsistence crops, to fish or to hunt may also make the amount of money which allows them to purchase goods. (Whitten 1974: 77, emphasis in the original.)

More and more goods once produced in the home are purchased in the marketplace. With inflation and the augmentation of "needs" entanglement in the cash economy becomes absolute. Yet, as Statvenhagen (1977:70-71) points out, the goods needed by such populations cannot be purchased individually at the local store or even in the nearest town. Only collective consumer goods such as potable water, access to health care and educational facilities, the development of roads and access to agricultural inputs and assistance could lead to higher living standards. Furthermore, because external demand is the motor force of market demand for Black labor, it is an unstable and precarious relationship.
Wage labor in the Pacific littoral does not provide any measure of security for black frontiersmen. Money is a basic necessity but there is no institutionalized means within the purchase society to guarantee a worker a subsistence income....

Black settlers in the wet littoral are in partial control of natural resources, but they are not in control of the money economy which so effects them (Whitten 1974: 77, emphasis in the original).

At the same time, because Blacks are at least partially responsible for the reproduction of their own labor power, wages are below the level necessary to guarantee subsistence.

Blacks are exploited as proletarians and also as peasants. While the classic form of peasant exploitation—the extraction of rent—is negligible in the Choco, many other forms do operate. Lack of proper storage facilities means high crop losses and the necessity of selling food stuffs at harvest time when prices are low and buying back later at higher commercial prices. One or two comerciantes frequently control an area's commerce and peasants must sell to them at prices below market value, while paying above market rates for their own consumption goods. Unable to receive credit from official agencies such as the Caja Agraria, poor peasants must take what they can get at usurious rates. They pay more per unit for transportation costs than do capitalist farmers and also pay more for any commercial inputs they might want to use. Whether involved in the market as wage laborers or as agricultural producers, this form of market "development" offers little to the Black population.
...despite the wealth extracted from gold and platinum bearing gravels, poverty has been the keynote of the local economy for the last 300 years. Most of the lowland people still eke out a miserable existence through mere subsistence activities... In the larger towns white and colored merchants often do a thriving business, supplying the surrounding rural folk with imported items such as cloth and metal ware... Probably the only ones to gain substantial wealth from the lowlands have been owners and stockholders of mining concerns. Most of these people have been outsiders who were little concerned with the economic improvement of the area aside from their local interests (West 1957:126).

Given the unpredictable nature of the boom/bust economy, access to land is pivotal to the Black survival strategy. While Blacks have adjusted well to the natural environment of the Choco, harsh as it is, and are able to eke out subsistence from the land, the market offers no subsistence security. The following section discusses how new "development" trends in the Choco threaten this subsistence strategy by requiring not just extraction of resources, but control over the land itself.

Colonization and Resource Exploitation in the Darien

My introduction to the Darien and consequently to the effects of colonization in the Choco was by chance. In December, 1978, my husband and I began what was to be almost four months of looking for a suitable village to live in while he completed his year of rural medical service. We spent two months in Quibdo, one in Riosucio, and several days in Acandi, Bagado and San Jose del Palmar before deciding on Unguia. In April 1979 we settled in Unguia where we remained until March 1980. Having by that time experienced towns with grossly inadequate diets, totally unsuitable water supplies and complete isolation, Unguia's relatively varied diet, unlimited supplies of well water and comparatively easy access to Turbo (three hours in a medium fast outboard motorboat) meant that I was quite happy with the
final selection. Much of my information on Unguia, as well as Riosucio, comes from first hand experience.

The Darien of Choco consists of four municipios: Acandi, Jurado, Riosucio and the new municipio of Unguia which broke away from Acandi in 1979. The Darien of Choco is considered part of the larger Colombian Darien, of which some municipios of Antioquia also form a part. With the exception of Jurado, which has more contact with Buenaventura, most produce leaves the Darien of Choco for Turbo, a port on the Gulf of Uraba in the department of Antioquia. Chocoanos in this area who need to go to a "town" for any given reason usually go to Turbo as well. Travel from Choco to Turbo is usually in outboard motorboat although air taxi service is sometimes available.

The Darien of Antioquia has already experienced colonization, leaving it an area of large scale banana cultivation, producing 80% of Colombian bananas destined for export (PD 1978:10) and cattle ranching, with over 234,000 hectares in pastures (PD 1978:13). It is characterized by depressing social and physical conditions. The situation of the large agricultural proletariat in this region is characterized as "muy poco satisfactoria" and precarious; "Employment opportunities are not abundant and when they do exist they amount to jobs with exceedingly low wages" (PD 1978:16). The inadequacy of services and infrastructure in the region further prejudices the situation of wage laborers (PD 1978:16). The situation of minifundistas is also described as precarious; the largest 4.4% of all farms occupy 43.3% of agricultural lands while the smallest 46.5% occupy only 2.5% of the land (PD 1978:13). In short, the penetration of capitalist agriculture in the Darien of Antioquia was
The Colombian Darien (Antioquia and Choco)

Source: Proyecto Darien 1977
facilitated by colonos. The result for the Black population, colonos and other elements of the peasantry has been loss of land, proletarianization and integration into the wage labor force at the lowest level. This has created an atmosphere permeated by violence and despair.

The Darien of Antioquia, where colonization is a fait accompli; contrasts with that of Choco where it is only beginning. As the Proyecto Darien, a study prepared by the OAS and Colombian government states:

While in the Antioquena part development is being carried out with good techniques, greater concentration of the means of production and an important extension of cultivated areas...in the Choco there is only incipient subsistence agriculture with little access to markets of other areas or regions (PD 1978:9).

Indeed, as the following chart demonstrates, while the portion of the Darien pertaining to the Choco is larger than that pertaining to Antioquia, it is only of minor importance in terms of the region's population and production.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Darien</th>
<th>Darien</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chocoano</td>
<td>Antioqueno</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of territory</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of population</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of regional product</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Proyecto Darien 1978:1, 5, 6

Furthermore, as the following statistics reveal, the composition of the regional product is quite different in the two areas.
Sources of the Darien Regional Product (rounded to nearest percent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Darien Antioqueno</th>
<th>Darien Chocoano</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>agriculture</td>
<td>74%*</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>livestock</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forestry</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>industry</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commerce, transport</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>services, construction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Proyecto Darien 1978:9
* 77% of which is banana production (PD 1978:9)

Whereas in Antioquia agriculture, particularly banana production, is the primary contributor to the regional product, in the Choco forestry exploitation is the principle activity with agriculture also playing a significant role. Whereas some industrial contribution is made in Antioquia, in Choco it is non-existent.

In the following discussion of the Darien of Choco I will focus on the municipios of Riosucio and Unguia which I know best. Jurado, the most isolated area, has less than 2000 inhabitants and the population is declining (PD 1978:Part 2, 93). Acandi is experiencing a colonization process similar to that of Unguia and in addition is experiencing land grabbing by rich interioranos who buy up beach front properties to develop vacation homes and tourist hotels.

**Riosucio and Unguia: Two Towns in the Darien Chocoano**

Historically, the Darien area of Choco (also referred to as the lower Atrato River area) has had minor economic importance. The lower Atrato was originally settled by freed and runaway slaves who traveled down the river from minings areas to fish, hunt and farm.
Riosucio, according to its townspeople, was settled by Domingo Bailan who brought four families to settle there and hunt the prized manatee, now almost extinct in the area. On the Atrato towns are longitudinal along the river with cultivation occurring near the river bank. The lower Atrato is subject to flooding, leading to a high degree of insecurity for the peasants who live along its banks. They must always be able to move (ECS 1976:93). In the large villages such as Riosucio, the almost annual flooding is regarded as a customary nuisance. At times for up to seven months the town is flooded. Boats are used for door to door transportation, temporary bridges are constructed and sobre pisos, elevated platform floors, are installed in all homes and public buildings.

Referring to the land in Riosucio, students from the Universidad del Choco state that "its soils are formed by a characteristically swampy zone of abundant rain and floodings that produce the double effect of fertilizing and fecundating the land...." (ECS 1976:93). Therefore, the permanent cultivation of the river banks along the Atrato is probably best thought of as "permanent cultivation of favored plots" (Wolf 1966:21). The river is the only means of transportation to almost any point. This includes Turbo, Antioquia, which offers connections for the markets of both the Atlantic Coast and the interior via Medellin, and Quibdo.

Agricultural production in Riosucucio is clearly dominated by plantain, with rice and yucca also being important (PD 1978:Part 2, 105). Plantain from Riosucio has a stable market in Cartagena (ECS 1976:99). In the Choco, Riosucio is the leading producer of both plantain and lumber (S. Garcia n.d.:13).
Large launches from Cartagena and Turbo are almost always present at Riosucio's port on the Atrato River, loading husked rice, plantain, yucca and bananas, unloading white rice, aguardiente, soft drinks, textiles and assorted manufactured goods (ECS 1976:100). The ten fold increase in the price of plantain from Riosucio to Cartagena accrues principally to the transporter. Very few animals are raised domestically, probably due to the problems associated with floodings. Nor are fruits or vegetables widely cultivated. This is reflected in the poor diet of the Riosuceno. Rice and plantain are eaten at every meal accompanied by whatever is available on a given day from the butcher, usually pork, or fish. Paradoxically, not even fish is widely commercialized in Riosucio. As one housewife said, "to get fish you have to stand out on the river bank hoping to see someone coming in with a catch." Malnutrition is rampant. Because there is no aqueduct in Riosucio, the villagers have scores of floating mini-houses along the river; each "house" has a hole in the floor. While in one house someone is having diarrhea, a few feet down in another someone is bathing or washing dishes. The same water is used for drinking and most townspeople dislike the taste of "cooked" (boiled) water. Riosucenas commonly admit to having 2 or 3 living children and 6 or 7 who have died, indicating very high levels of infant mortality. Typhoid, parasites and skin infections are all endemic in Riosucio.

According to a 1960 economic study of the Choco, almost 70% of the department is covered with exploitable trees, almost all of which are hardwoods (Fadul 1960:101-102). The most important economic activity in Riosucio is the exploitation of the forest for lumber, generated by
the demand in Cartagena, Barranquilla and Medellin as well as the U.S. and other countries. In the Darien of Choco as a whole, forestry accounts for almost three times the revenue of agriculture (PD 1978:9). Exploitation along the river banks of cativo and cativo mix is carried out during the rainy season as the growing river provides easy transportation. Exploitation is carried out exclusively on the river banks for its transport advantages, advantages of extraction, and the presence of a homogenous forest (PD 1978:Part 2, 22). The extraction is carried out without reforestation; severe ecological damage is occurring, especially with the clogging of smaller waterways by rejected logs (Rentería Cuesta n.d.:11) which threatens the volume of the Atrato and its tributaries (Morales 1975:81). Concessions to exploit the forest are granted to foreign and national companies as well as to local peasants who sell to shippers or local sawmills (ECS 1976:97). Contraband in lumber is great (Fadul 1960:107). Consider that that is one of the largest zones under exploitation in Colombia and that in Houston the amount of wood imported from Colombia is almost three times that which has officially left the country (Rentería Cuesta n.d.:12). Six small sawmills were in operation along the Atrato River in Riosucio in 1976 (ECS 1976:98). They were small units with extremely low levels of technology (PD 1978:Part 2, 27). However, they represent the only industry in the area and, with the exception of the liquor industry, in the Choco. The owners claim that they are unable to get loans from the Caja Agraria and must compete with more sophisticated mills in Cartagena and Barranquilla. The chart included shows that the overwhelming majority of the timber that leaves the Darien is unmilled.
GRAFICO VII - 1

PRODUCCION DE MADERA EN BRUTO Y ELABORADA (M³)
Región Darién- Colombia
1970 - 1975

Wood Production in the Darien: log form (bruto) milled (elaborado)

Source: Proyecto Darién 1977
Exportation of Wood

Source: Proyecto Darien 1977
Although cativo forests are the most homogeneous of all those in the Choco (Fadul 1960:102), even they are quite heterogeneous. As mentioned before, along with easy access to transport, the greater homogeneity of the forest along the river banks encourages deforestation at this point. However, given the high levels of technology currently in existence, an infinite number of uses exist for wood, making heterogeneity of the forest a potential asset (PD 1978:32). Studies already exist which classify numerous species found in the Darien as excellent to good for the production of cellulous and paper, providing a potential base for industry in the Choco (PD1978:27). Still, it is acknowledged that not enough is known about the forests of the Darien to predict what rate of exploitation can be tolerated before the reproductive capacity of the forest is threatened or how reforestation should take place (PD1978:29). Furthermore, the actions of colonos who deforest through slash and burn agriculture and eventually leave behind pastures is another dimension of the problem of deforestation. In short, ecological damage which could become irreversible is proceeding in this area. The value of many species for which data is not now available is unknown - indicating an incalculable loss of future resources for the department.

Unlike Riosucio, Unguia is not located on the Atrato River. Further up the Atrato, closer to Turbo, one arrives at Unguia by crossing a channel to the immense and beautiful Cienaga (lagoon) de Unguia. After crossing the cienaga, one leaves through another channel leading to the port of Unguia. It is a ten minute walk from the port to the village. The village is, therefore, not subject to frequent floodings. In addition, the cienaga provides an
especially abundant year around supply of fish for the community. Even though Unguia is closer to Turbo than is Riosucio, produce is more difficult to take out. The narrow channels connecting the port to the cienaga and the cienaga to the Atrato do not permit access to large launches. Most produce leaves open wooden boats run with out-board motors.

Traditionally, Unguia has been an area of subsistence peasants and specialized farmers growing a variety of crops. While maize is the most important, rice and cacao are also produced and exported to Turbo (Garcia 1979:79). However, the diet is rich in other foods locally produced such as mango, papaya, pineapple, avocado, banana and plantain. Milk, beef, fish and eggs are also plentiful. This is the area of Choco undergoing the most rapid change, being the area receiving the strongest influx of landless peasants from other areas. The absence of hoof and mouth disease (representing the still unrealized possibility of exporting cattle to many countries), and the high expectations raised for the Darien as a whole due to the numerous development projects in the Darien Antioqueno, have helped attract investments from capitalists who have established large cattle ranches in this area. In a region without roads, where land travel is limited to foot or horse, families such as the Guarniso have cleared roads through their vast holdings and imported trucks and tractors. In the country set of Unguia, where the public landing field was closed due to a new construction, the Guarniso operate their own landing field and monopolize commercial flights. There are flights the days that they feel like flying. In an area where the importation of cattle from other areas of Colombia is prohibited
for fear of the spread of hoof and mouth disease, seriously
limiting the ability of small farmers to increase their stock, the
Guarniso and others import prize bulls from Costa Rica.

The greatest initiator of change in this region is the colono.
It is estimated that colonos represent about 17% of the agricultural
families in the Darien as a whole and that the number is increasing
(PD 1978:11). With regard to the Darien of Choco it is noted that
"there is a heavy migration to the municipios of Riosucio and Acandi... in the districts of Riosucio and Unguia" (PD 1978:Part 2, 22).

It is difficult to get statistical information Unguia; until
1979 it was part of the municipio of Acandi so all statistical informa-
tion is included, basically undifferentiated, with Acandi. In 1979,
due to its exceptional growth, Unguia was made a municipio itself,
with the seat in the village of Unguia. The following data reveals
that strong growth trends in the municipio of Acandi occurred outside
of the village of Acandi and can probably be attributed to Unguia.
This assumption is supported by the Proyecto Darien's discussion of
population growth in the Darien Chocoano: "In the Choco, Unguia
stands out for its growth in the last years stimulated by the increase
in cattle and crop cultivation on the plain in which it sits" (PD 1978:
Part 2, 102).
Projected Population Growth in the Municipio of Acandi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1976</th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>1985</th>
<th>%growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cabecera (Acandi Village)</td>
<td>2603</td>
<td>2941</td>
<td>3362</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remainder (includes Unguia)</td>
<td>10374</td>
<td>13231</td>
<td>17933</td>
<td>6.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12977</td>
<td>16172</td>
<td>21295</td>
<td>5.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Proyecto Darien 1978:Part 2, 94

Furthermore, as dated as 1964 census materials may be, they indicate that 39.8% of the residents of Acandi were born in other departments, compared with an average of 6.9% for the department of Choco as a whole. While 25.0% of those living in the village of Acandi were born in other departments, 44.4% of those living outside the village Acandi were migrants.

To understand the reasons for the movement of colonos to the Darien, it is necessary to understand the severity of the inequitable distribution of land in Colombia. According to Barraclough (1970:17) in 1960 the distribution of land among rural families left 23.2% of rural families landless and another 47.0% on sub-family sized plots. Only 23.2% of rural families had family sized holdings and 5.0% of the families had multi-family sized holdings. Another 1.5% of the families' heads worked as administrators, undoubtedly on the larger holdings.

Seventy percent of the rural families in Colombia were landless or on sub-family plots in 1960. These families supplied seasonal wage labor for latifundistas growing commercial crops which demand between 60,000 and 390,000 laborers per month depending on the crop.
being harvested (DANE 1974b:112). They provided labor in other ways as well—such as sharecropping and occupying the land as colono-tenants. The *colono* form of tenancy is dominant only on the Atlantic Coast, an area where land concentration is especially high, landlessness is greatest and tenure security is lowest (Soles 1974). Most colonizers in the Darien are from this area and as colonizers their function is similar to that of *colono* tenants, as we shall see. In the *colono* form of tenancy the *colono* tenant gets permission to clear a certain amount of land and cultivate subsistence crops for 1-3 years, at which time the land must be planted with pastures and vacated (Soles 1974:13). This method of tenancy, historically widely used in the clearing of lands, has led to considerable rural conflict.

The *colono*-tenant, after clearing the plot of land, would like to prolong his stay in order to cultivate and harvest his subsistence crops without repeating the backbreaking task of feeling and clearing away the trees and bush. The owner, on the other hand, desires the cleared and seeded pasture lands as quickly as possible...Consequently, disputes often arise as to the proper time for the *colono* to move on and clear a new plot of brushland: is he to be allowed another month for his corn to ripen...?The *colono*-tenant has very tenuous usufructuary rights indeed (Soles 1974:19).

The agrarian situation was regarded as grave enough in December, 1961, that an agrarian reform law was officially enacted. According to Albert Hirshman (1963:158), this law created a "Trojan Horse, an infernal machine called INCORA" which he asserted, unlike previous attempts at agrarian reform, could be a viable institution for the transformation of the inequitable distribution of land which had plagued Colombia for so long. Yet, according to DANE (1974a:98), the period from 1960-1970 saw the most accelerated development of
capitalist agriculture in decades which resulted in increased land concentration. Between 1960-1970 farms of less than ten hectares lost both in absolute number and in area, while every group over twenty hectares made at least small gains, with the strongest expansion occurring in farms between 200 and 500 hectares (DANE 1974a:95).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farm Size</th>
<th>Share of Farms (%)</th>
<th>Share of Area (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>under 10 has.</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>73.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-20</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-50</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50+</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DANE 1974a:96

According to the Area Handbook for Colombia land concentration increased due to INCORA's policy of "parceling out relatively poor public lands rather than expropriating better lands in the face of strenuous opposition of owners" (Blutstein et. al. 1977:36).

Colonization projects were believed to provide a painless alternative to land reform. Such programs received "enthusiastic support" from international agencies such as the IDB and IBRD in the 1960s (Schuurman 1980:107). Land colonization does not fundamentally affect the distribution of land, so it does not threaten large land owners. In fact, it serves their interests; labor expelled from the countryside (maybe because their land was needed for capitalist agricultural production) does not migrate to the city to join the marginal masses so often viewed as a threat to political stability. Instead, the colono alleviates pressure on the system by heading to the jungles to colonize new lands. The colonos' unpaid labor invested in clearing the land is eventually appropriated at low cost by capitalist cattle ranchers;
the colono moves on to continue the process. The similarities with colono - tenancy are striking.

Despite the attractiveness of colonization programs for the growth of the capitalist agrarian sector and from the perspective of stabilizing a potentially explosive situation, INCORA has failed to take seriously its mission to guide them. Although INCORA has sponsored directed colonizations in the Darien of Antioquia, in this region and in others in Colombia, most projects have been disastrous due to poor planning, lack of technical assistance, the small number of families affected, etc. (Shuurman 1980:100, 109-110).

Given these pressures on the land in the favored Andean and Caribbean areas of the country and the failure of "directed" colonization programs, "Spontaneous settlement of virgin public lands still remains an outlet for the most hardy of Colombia's campesinos" (Barraclough 1973:184). Many colonos have gone to the Eastern Plains (llanos) of the Orinoco and Amazon River Basins. However, the Choco is clearly more accessible to many areas of the country. Almost twenty-five years ago when West (1957:4) studied the Choco, he predicted that the "encroachment of the white Antioqueno peasant...indicates that the eastern boundary (of the Pacific Lowlands as a Black cultural area) may eventually retreat westward." Today this is a real source of anxiety for Choco's politicians as it is sometimes predicted that the advent of large numbers of white and mestizo peasants in the Darien may facilitate the breaking off of this area from the rest of the Choco.

In the 19th century poor peasants and miners from Antioquia began the colonization of the central cordillera of Colombia, solving "the traditional land problem...through spontaneous migration and occupa-
tion over a period of more than half a century" (Hirschman 1963:100). These settlers eventually became successful coffee growers. Today, however, the situation is quite different and the net effect of colonization has been to reproduce in these territories the same latifundio-minifundio problem that exists in the rest of the country (Thome 1965:97, Dominguez 1976:120). Recent spontaneous colonization efforts and their effects have received the most study in the Eastern Plains, especially in the department of Meta. Therefore, it is useful to look at the consequences in this area and compare them with those documented in the Choco.

According to Camilo Dominguez (1975:298) who has extensively studied colonization movements in Colombia, colonos represent the lowest segment of the Colombian population. Landless or with sub-family sized plots, they are generally the illiterate and uneducated who would have no chance of success if they were to migrate to the cities. They come from the regions characterized by the strongest latifundio-minifundio division.

In the Eastern Plains, as in the Darien, colonos too frequently have insufficient knowledge of the techniques needed for cultivation in these areas (Proyecto Darien 1978:17, Dominguez 1976:120). They generally can get only two harvests from their cleared fields and then must move on to repeat the process of clearing fields or plant pastures to invest in cattle ranching (Dominguez 1976:120). The high costs necessary to make a minimal investment in cattle (15-20 cows), high transportation costs and high costs of the necessary inputs mean that most colonos end up selling the cleared land, often at 50% of its value to comerciantes with whom they have incurred debts (Dominguez 1976:
120). Thome (1965:92) also notes an extremely high turnover rate as
land is sold to other colonos or adjoining neighbors. As tenure is
generally precarious, this is usually done through a carta venta,
"a contract through which the seller transfers whatever rights he has
over the Land" (Thome 1965:92). Both Dominguez and Thome state that
this process has facilitated the formation of latifundios in the
llanos. Unless colonos are given security of tenure, credit and access
to markets, they will continue to clear the land while "the benefits
are reaped by those who can afford a long term investment" (Thome 1965:
97). Colonos have facilitated the process which has made Meta the
area of Colombia with the greatest inequality in land distribution
(Soles 1974:10).

Ortiz (1980:204) outlines four factors which characterizes the
plight of colonos.

High rate of failure during initial years leading to
secondary migrations and further deforestation.

Difficult conversion of initial subsistence farms into
commercial farms, leading to high failure rates in
subsequent years.

Transfer of property from failed settlers to the local
commercial and farming elites.

Imbalance of contractual marketing agreements that cut
into the settler's earnings.

The process occurring in the Eastern Plains is being repeated in
the Darien where the situation of colonos is described as "precarious"
and "unstable" (PD 1978:17). They practice slash and burn agriculture,
transfer ownership to cattle ranchers when productivity goes down,
moving on to clear new lands (PD 1978:Part 2, 46, 102). As in the
llanos, there is a great deal of difficulty in obtaining and clarify-
ing land titles (Fadul 1960:73, West 1957:153-154). The principle effects of colonization in the Darien are said to be 1) the systematic destruction of the environment through deforestation and the planting of pastures and 2) the lowering of the cost of cleared lands to those who are able to invest in them (PD 1978:17). Indeed, in the Darien of Choco the stereotype of the peasant from Cordoba is the man who breaks his back clearing the land, only to sell it at a fraction of its value after a short period of time. While in 1967 4-5,000 heads of cattle were thought to exist in the Darien of Choco, by 1972 the estimate had tripled to 15,000 (Myer 1972:153). By 1976 the estimate was over 24,000 (PD 1978:111).

Another grave problem of colonization is that the lands in question are often inhabited by Indian groups (for the case in the llanos see Morey 1976). The Cuna Indians of Arquia (Unguia) claim that colonos are occupying a major part of their land. According to one source (Bellido Diaz 1979:19), 8,000 of the 10,000 hectare Cuna reserve has been invaded by over 300 colonos. In addition, indiscriminate killing of wildlife by colonos has led to the deterioration of wildlife in Cuna hunting grounds (Morales 1975:89). Having protested to the Colombian government to no avail, they are conducting a quiet, slow migration to Panama. The intrusion of colonos has caused many Blacks to talk of moving up river to more isolated areas. By responding in this way, Blacks also risk displacing Indians.
Adaptation to Change in Unguia

The aforementioned processes have drastically changed conditions for the native residents of Unguia. It is the area of the Darien Chocoano with the highest percentage of migrants, with estimates ranging from 45% of the population (Velez Suaza 1979:8) to 90% (Hinestroza Palomeque 1979:5). The true figure probably lies somewhat over the 1964 census figure of 45%. Most sources agree that peasants from Cordoba and other areas of the Atlantic Coast are leading the colonization movement. Aside from being easily accessible to the Darien, the Atlantic Coast is the region of Colombia characterized by the greatest land concentration, landlessness and insecurity of tenure (See Soles 1974). Cordoba has the distinction of being the area of the Atlantic Coast with the most unequal land distribution as well as the lowest wages (Rodriguez n.d.:42, 64). Migrants come to clear lands as well as to look for opportunities in commerce, as wage laborers, etc.

Due to population growth and more importantly, the establishment of large cattle ranches in the central areas of Unguia, land in the central village area (which encompasses about 420 houses) is increasingly scarce. Agricultural uses of the land in the village are declining as more and more space is being dedicated to commercial establishments, bars, and houses for school teachers, health center employees, local government bureaucrats and others not involved in agricultural production. Pressures on the land, the rising cost of living accompanying the urbanization process in particular (which brings with it new expectations and needs) and the changing dominant form of production in general (from subsistence to capitalist and,
within the subsistence sector, increasing production of cash crops at the expense of subsistence crops) have left the peasant in the central area with three alternatives. First, there is the possibility of migrating to a city to look for employment. Second is that taken by Maria Antonia, a native Unguiena, who with her husband and thirteen of her fifteen living children had a small farm where they produced cacao for the market in Turbo. With other small farms and residential units encircling them, they had no room to grow plantain, the base of their diet, forcing them to buy over 300 plantains a week in order to feed their fifteen family members. They decided to migrate further up the Atrato to Opogodo to clear new lands. While allowing the family to obtain the land it needed for cultivation, this move had serious drawbacks: the children would have to give up hopes of going to school, transport costs would be greatly increased for produce and necessary trips, medical services would be absent, etc. The third alternative for a peasant in this situation is that taken by Chencha, diversifying her means of livelihood, engaging in a "self-help job creation program" (Peattie 1975:109) characteristic of the so-called "informal sector" whose members are divorced from the means of production. The informal sector is "in principle the same species of productive system as the peasant mode of production" (Taussig 1978:87), in that the motive of production is to exchange for money to buy other commodities necessary for subsistence, "only less stable and productive owing to the absence of means of production such as land" (Taussig 1978:87). But Chencha still has land, although not enough for subsistence. As Taussig (1978) and Rubbo (1975) note, in the Cauca Valley of Colombia a very conscious effort was made by latifundistas to reduce the size of
peasant holdings in order to 1) accumulate more land themselves and 2) reduce peasant holdings to a size too small to produce subsistence thereby forcing them to seek outside wage-earning opportunities on sugar cane plantations. While in Unguiia no such conscious effort has been made, the increasing monopolization of land by a few, breaking up of parcels through inheritance and sales, occupation of idle lands by colonos and the switch from subsistence crops to cash crops with the risks it implies, has produced similar effects in the central village area.

As Luisa Pare notes, "de-peasantization" can result from "the sudden expulsion or dispossession of the peasant from his lands and the concentration of these in large exploitations" (Pare 1977:24) or "the slow decomposition of the peasant economy due to its incapacity to survive given the competition of capitalist production" (Pare 1977:24). In the Cauca the process was obviously that of the former. According to Rubbo (1975:335-336) the Afro-American peasantry of Puerto Tejada lost most of their land during la violencia.

...rich speculators capitalized on the fear of people and bought land cheaply. The plantations introduced serial spraying and local people tell the story of how the airplanes sprayed peasant farms, killing shade trees vital for healthy coffee and cocoa. Furthermore, farms were flooded intentionally by the plantations...Some peasants had their crops stolen or destroyed...

In such cases, the proletarianization process is swift, allowing for little or no transition period. Sugar cane is harvested year around in Colombia's Cauca Valley, meaning that at least the men were able to find wage labor, although the wages offered allow only for a life of misery. Women forced to the town had a much harder time finding work (Rubbo 1975:347).
In contrast, the Darien seems to be experiencing the second phenomenon described by Pare, that of the slow "decomposition of the peasant economy." The Darien, although still dominated by subsistence agriculture, is feeling the impact of large-scale capitalist agriculture as it deteriorates the subsistence economy, slowly but steadily. Land once used as part of a rotating fallow system are taken; hunting becomes more difficult, new needs are created and entanglement in the cash economy increases. This allows for a long transition period in which subsistence may be met from any combination of garden plots, service activities and wage labor. Each additional income source provides not "complementary income" but serves as an "integral part" of the peasant family income (Stavenhagen 1977:69). In Pare's terms such a mix of activities is characteristic of the "pre-proletarization" period since the wage is still not the principle element of subsistence. Classically, the wage is the element which increases in importance in the subsistence packet. But in this area dominated by cattle ranching, wage labor opportunities are especially scarce, particularly for women. An increasingly important service industry appears to be absorbing many people who need extra income but cannot or will not engage in wage labor. This is characteristic of Chencha's adaptation to the changing environment, as well as that of many other Unguienos. In a non-randomized survey of 50 of the 400 houses in the central area of Unguía, I found that 60% of the families had at least one secondary source of income. Eighty two percent of those whose principal economic activity was agriculture had secondary incomes as did all those who depended on wage labor. Common sources of secondary cash income included fishing, sewing, selling goods from the house, washing and ironing, baking bread
or sweets, distributing fish from the port and having "mesas," or food stands, on Saturday nights and Sundays, market day. Significantly, all of these activities with the exception of fishing fall into the realm of "women's work." This means that in a nuclear family the man can engage in agriculture, wage labor, transport or some other occupation while the wife engages in "informal" activities in the home. Of course, many women rely on a combination of these activities for their sole means of support. The following case study is illustrative of the various strategies used by Unguienos to meet subsistence in a changing society.

**Adaptation to Change on Chencha's "Urban" Farm**

At 42, Inocencia, Chencha, Baldrich is a strong and healthy Black woman. She lives on the same plot of land left to her by her parents, where she herself was born, with the youngest of her ten living children. Each child, as she says, "tiene su apellido," meaning that each one has a different father. It is her land, she claims, that allowed her to leave each of her maridos when she felt like it and maintain her independence. Chencha spent a few years in Cartagena, Turbo, and other parts of the Atlantic Coast, returning to Ungua in her mid-twenties to claim her land on the death of her parents. Since then she has sold the major part of her farm and now has somewhat less than two hectares. At the front on the road leading to the port stands her bohio. On the far left stands a smaller one and a half room structure where a widowed cousin with four children stayed for several months. At other times "El Senor Ventura," who seems to roam the Darien, stays there in exchange for helping Chencha with her...
farm work. Chencha's house has no electricity like the vast majority in Unguia, but neither does it have any provision for water (well, rain water tanks or close access to the river) as most houses do. This is ironic seeing that Chencha is one of the very few persons in town to own such coveted items as a casette player and a battery operated t.v. set (which can't be used as signals are not received in the Darien). Undoubtedly, having spent time in Cartagena made her a more conspicuous consumer than most Unguienos. These goods, along with a shotgun given to her by an older son to protect the chickens from the wolves, are her most cherished possessions.

Chencha's small wooden house rests on stilts which serve the dual purpose of providing a cool resting place for her animals as well as providing extra height for protection during infrequent floods. Surrounded by mango and caimito trees, the house is always cool, even during the hottest part of the day. Cooking is usually done on a kerosene burner in the back part of the hallway in the house. When kerosene (or money) are in short supply - or to take advantage of the special flavor wood gives to certain foods - a wood fire is built outside. Marlenis washes the clothes and dishes at the river, a ten minute walk, where she also bathes. As Chencha is somewhat of a loner and not given to gossip, she prefers to stay away from the river, a social-work gathering place for women. Instead, she collects water from neighbors' wells to bathe and for household needs.

Chencha's main basis of economic support is her land. It is abundant in fruit trees such as mango, guava, guama, coconut, lemon and plantain, caimito, cacao and soursop. Tomatoes, peppers and other
plants are also grown. Reading Taussig on the Cauca (1978:70-71) brings Chencha's farm to mind.

All crop species are interplanted one next to the other in seemingly random array, together with a large variety of tall shade trees and other natural vegetation of all heights. The tall shade trees are considered essential for the health of the cocoa...and greatly reduce weed growth, a factor of prime importance in tropical agriculture.

As in Cauca, gourds for washing, wrapping leaves and medicinal plants are also grown. According to Taussig, "this type of agriculture preserves most of the pre-existing structure of the ecosystem, as well as the fertility of the soil which is constantly nourished by the heavy tonnage of naturally falling compost" (Taussig 1978:71).

Mango, coconut, and plantain are good sources of income for Chencha. During mango season she keeps a barrel of the mangos collected that day at the door. People come from all around to buy from her since, most of the land in Unguia having been cleared, fruit trees are not terribly common in the village. The other fruits are sold in much the same way but don't appear to bring in as much income. Bunches of plantain are sometimes sold to retailers and occasionally Marlenis is sent out, basket of fruit on her head, to sell in the town. Chencha also raises chickens, usually maintaining from 10-20. They are consumed only on very special occasions. Generally they are maintained to sell, or to sell their eggs from the house. For Chencha, eggs are regarded as too valuable to be eaten by the family. They are best sold or put away to allow the hens to sit on them. Her 7-10 pigs subsist largely on rotten fruits and roaming the streets in search of garbage. They are eventually sold, usually in Turbo where they bring in a better price.
The income brought in from the land is often insufficient. At the same time that her widowed cousin and four children were staying with her, an older son, Jairo, came home with his new "wife." Since the cousin was only bringing in a few pesos daily doing laundry, more income was required. Chencha sold two pigs in Turbo and bought a cart and mule. The mule-drawn cart was driven by Jairo and Delio daily back and forth to the port carrying goods and produce people were either bringing in or taking out to Turbo. For a few weeks it seemed like a good source of income. But Chencha soon fought with her new daughter-in-law, Jairo left and Delio refused to drive the coach or else would drive it and pocket the cash. The coach and mule were left to sit in the back.

The location of her house, directly in front of the hospital, presented another opportunity. Often hospitalized were persons whose families lived deep in the mountains and were therefore unable to provide the patient with meals. For added income, Chencha began to provide meals in such cases and to provide lodging for relatives and outpatients in her home.

The last two summers Chencha undertook a new venture. With a friend she traveled two days by bus to Maicao, a free port near the border with Venezuela. There they purchased large quantities of clothes at low prices which were re-sold in Unguia. The profit itself was consumed in the personal goods bought in Maicao - the tape recorder one year, the t.v. the next, a new dress or two for Marlenis.

Chencha's life is not easy. The garden requires work. She must collect the ripe fruits, cook in 90 degree weather over wood fires and kerosene stoves, and make several trips daily to collect water from
nearby wells. In the dry season she must dig ditches and fill them with water for the pigs to wallow in. Only very rarely does she receive cooperation from her son Delio. Only if an old friend from Turbo visits will she go into town to sip a cold soda or listen to music. Otherwise that money would be better spent buying corn for the pigs or milk for the dog that just had a litter. Yet, because she has her land, she is assured that she can subsist.

Conclusion

The question raised by Chencha's case is what will happen when these peasants lose the small parcels of land that they still have? Development in the Darien is based on deforestation both for wood extraction and cattle raising. Current practices of lumber exploitation pose a serious ecological threat to the region and its waterways as well as a loss of potential benefits as lesser known species are burned or rejected. Extensive deforestation, even without the subsequent planting of grasses, threatens to reach the critical point when secondary forest will no longer be able to grow back due to soil exhaustion and change in the water content (See Sioli 1980:260 for a discussion of this process in Amazonia). Cattle raising in Colombia is notoriously extensive. In 1970 cattle ranches occupied 80% of all agricultural lands in Colombia while employing only 20% of rural workers (DANE 1974b:114). In the Darien it is reported that cattle raising generates two man years of employment per 100 hectares while intensive cultivations generate from .7 to 1.2 man years for each hectare (PD 1978:Part 2, 100). In other words, intensive cultivations generate almost 50 times more employment than does cattle raising.
Furthermore, as we have seen, cattle raising requires an investment far
above that which colonos are able to make, meaning they clear the lands
for the benefit of cattle ranchers. The net result is that coloniza-
tion threatens the continued subsistence of both Blacks and Indians
while offering no solution to the colono. The only beneficiary is the
large rancher.

Cattle raising in the Darien of Panama, an area with striking
similarities to that of Colombia, has been severely restricted to
help prevent the spread of hoof and mouth disease (aftosa) when the
Pan American Highway is completed. Initially viewed as a serious
obstacle to the development of the area, it was later held to be a
"blessing in disguise" as it prevented massive deforestation for the
establishment of cattle ranches ("fiebre de los porteros") by halting
the same type of colonization that is occurring in the Choco (Mendez
1979:290).

In the Darien of Choco, cattle raising occupies increasingly
greater tracks of land, employing few workers, to produce a good beyond
the consumption capacity of most Colombians. At the same time, cacao
and maize, two products easily produced in the Darien, are among the
principal Colombian imports (DANE 1981:153). Given an appropriate
strategy for rural development the production of these and other food-
stuffs, such as plantain, could be significantly increased in the
Choco. While in looking for a solution to colonization problems some
(e.g., Ortiz 1980), have placed emphasis on the development of policies
which would allow colonos to make the necessary transition to ranching,
given the priorities which should be placed on employment generation,
reducing food imports and maintaining a proper ecological balance, an
agricultural strategy for the region is probably more appropriate.

Before any rural development strategy is undertaken in the region it must be determined who is to benefit. Unless security of tenure is established for Indians, Blacks and those colonos already in the Darien this population will be displaced leading to their further impoverished as well as to greater irrational exploitation of the environment (PD 1978:23).

DANE (1974a:100) has documented the existence of four fincas which encompass over 210,000 hectares in the Choco. The Proyecto Darien (1978:Part 2, 32) predicts the same forces which operated to displace subsistence farmers in favor of cattle ranchers in Antioquia will continue to operate in the Choco. If gross inequalities such as those which exist in the Darien of Antioquia are to be avoided, security of tenure and a program for rural development must be developed quickly, especially if plans to complete the Darien Gap of the Pan American Highway are undertaken. Such a highway would undoubtedly cause land values to soar, leading to massive displacement. The latifundio-munifundio problem which exists throughout the Andean and Caribbean areas of Colombia would be reproduced in the Choco. The issue of whether the area is dominated by cattle, bananas or sugar cane will be of little significance for the people of the Darien in such a case.

The outlook for progressive policy action is not good. INCORA has had a sad history in implementing land reform. The current problems in the Darien are to a large extent a direct reflection of this failure which has sent landless peasants to colonize public lands. If the problems of mal-distribution of land have not been tackled twenty-two years after the passage of land reform legislation, it is dubious
that policy implementers will become motivated to protect the future of Blacks, Indians and colonos in an area as marginal as the Choco.
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