From Local Legends into Globalized Identities: The Devil, the Priest and the Musician in Tumaco

resumen

Hoy cuando culturas se están construyendo para expresar identidad, el recurso a símbolos privilegia emblemas diacríticos, haciéndolo más fácil leer “identidad cultural” en redes globales. Una creencia sostenida en la eficacia de estos emblemas no parece ser factor en escogerlos; sin embargo, un caso de estudio sobre un drama de carnaval en el pueblo de Tumaco (costa Pacífica sur colombiana) muestra cómo una presentación local de identidad conduce a una serie compleja de influencias. Programas de desarrollo regional, leyes multiculturales del estado y hábitat urbano son algunos de los nuevos contextos que los antropólogos pueden tomar en cuenta para situar y entender la dinámica cultural.

Francisco Saya was a marimbero who slept, thought and played with the marimba. He loved the marimba so much that one day, he said that he was going to defy the wild forest, the forest where man could not enter, because there he would find the thickest and driest palm wood to make the best marimba, and that’s what he did. But all the devils got angry, because he had encroached into the virgin forest. Although the Tunda had cursed him, Francisco Saya escaped from her spell and arrived with his marimba, and constructed the most beautifully sonorous marimba of all the southern Pacific region [...] But, displeased with him, the devil came to take his marimba. He came to take away his marimba and that night, he duly arrived and appeared before him in his house.

This transcription of an oral account is a variant of a legend, recent in some aspects (for example, the musician who plays marimba, Francisco Saya, was born in 1913 and died in 1983), and very old in some others (the symbolic association, made by the Catholic missionaries, between the devil and the marimba is attested from at least the 18th century). The legend is also part of the mythical underpinning of a very new carnival play, the Return of the Marimba, performed in the town of Tumaco, in Colombia’s southern Pacific coastal region. The play can be understood as a situated “performance of identity” (Kapferer 1995; Agier 2000), the authors of which aim to dramatize
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cultural difference by means of a ritual and its associated interpretive rhetoric, created and newly unified from fragments of regional legends and beliefs. As I shall try to argue, this performance is strongly influenced by the contemporary regional and urban contexts of the creation of new ethnic identities (Mitchell 1956; Rogers and Vertovec 1995), by the national institutional context—including an emerging “multicultural ideology of the state” (Kapferer 1995:69)—and by global cultural “flows” and “scapes” (Hannerz 1992; Appadurai 1996). Yet, I will not treat cultural globalization as a homogeneous or autonomous process, as if it could exist outside of (local) contexts. I will see it as globalization in loco and as integrated into the ethnographic situation of one of multiple “contemporary worlds” (Augé 1994). In other words, following Burawoy, I will treat Tumaco’s Return of the Marimba play as a case of “grounded globalization,” in the sense that the global scale gains in reality to the extent that anthropologists do not “simply evacuate their villages and communities and move straight to the global arena” (Burawoy 2000:6, 34) but instead explore the emerging situations and contexts of its manifestation. Regional development programs, multicultural state laws and urban habitat are some of the new contexts that anthropologists should take into account to situate cultural dynamics.

The Return of the Marimba, a Performance of Identity

An equatorial zone of rainforest, rivers and mangroves, the Pacific coast of Colombia extends over more than 800 kilometers, from the Panamanian border down to the frontier with Ecuador. It is generally accepted that the population consists of nearly 90 percent blacks, who consider themselves to be nativos (natives). The remaining ten percent are Indians (Embera peoples in the north and especially the center; Awa more in the south) and whites. The white minority, made up of business people, traders and civil servants, is present particularly in the few small towns in the region, including Tumaco, which is near the border of Ecuador and is the main city of the southern Pacific coastal
region, with nearly 100,000 inhabitants. It is the framework for the ritual under analysis in the present article, the Return of the Marimba float, which since 1998 has been featured in the relatively new Tumaco carnival and which was devised and presented by members of the town's cultural sector. Like a small play, this feature is the official opener of the carnival. It is composed of a selection of different mythical elements, largely drawn from the regional memory, and arranged in an original production. A marimba, held on four stilts two meters above the ground, is located on the stage just behind a legendary priest figure: Padre Jesús María Mera, who was moving around the region at the beginning of the 20th century. It is said that he forced the blacks, under pain of excommunication, to throw their marimbas in the water because they were the instruments of the devil. On the carnival float, two characters (also on stilts) play alongside the marimba: one is the devil dressed in red and two horns on his head, the other is the famous marimba player (marimbero), Francisco Saya, who died in 1983, and who was the maker and the owner of the marimba displayed in the procession. A legend tells how he dared to defy and eventually triumphed over the devil at playing the instrument. Throughout the procession, the drama continually shows a burlesque fight between the devil and the marimbero. Surrounding them are three enactments of some of the region's best-known apparitions or spirits (visiones): the Duende (a goblin, musician and seducer of young virgin girls), the Tunda (a female figure from the mangroves and the forest) and the Viuda (the widow who generally appears in cemeteries). Also featured is the green and white flag of the town of Tumaco, borne at the front of the marimba.

The Return of the Marimba sets upon the stage, side by side, two myths in which this instrument is the leading character. One concerns the battle of the priest, Father Mera, against the marimbas, considered instruments of the devil, and against all those who play music, sing and dance around the marimbas. The other myth involves the combat of the "greatest of the marimberos," Francisco Saya, against the devil, the marimba again being the instrument of this duel. The two legends are as follows:

1. Father Mera Combats the Marimbas.

It happened that a priest arrived at Barabacoas; his name was Jesús Mera. Seeing that people enjoyed so much dancing to the sound of the marimba, the priest saw that the marimba was diabolic and, therefore, whoever had been baptised (salva) could not dance to the marimba (bailar marimba). This is why, when the dance organizers, owners of the marimba or of rooms where the marimba was played, came to confess, he told them that he could not take their confession because they had a marimba on their premises. And that if they wanted to confess, they had to get rid of the marimba, they had to throw the marimba in the river or
burn it. That is why the town of Barbacoas was designed without a marimba hall. Still not satisfied, he went to the River Patía and traveled down it doing the same thing, throwing the marimbas into the river. Anyone who had a marimba, he would not take their confession and, to be able to take the confession, that person had to throw the marimba in the water. That’s how it [the marimba] got as far as Salahonda [the mouth of the River Patía] and, from there, went up again to the River Chagüí. On the Chagüí, the marimba lived on. That’s where there was the greatest marimbero ever, Francisco Saya.

2. The marimbero Francisco Saya combats the devil.

One night at three o’clock in the morning, Francisco got up and played his marimba and he was getting some melodies out of it, when, suddenly, a *cholo* appeared, tall, dressed in khaki, who took his sticks from him and started to play on the marimba. They started a duel, *cabo arriba, cabobabajo, agua corta, agua larga, patacoré, juga* [variations of the *currulao*], among other things that’s what he played, and Francisco, already terrified, thought, “This man is the devil,” and he played the national anthem, and as in the national anthem Christ’s name is mentioned, he succeeded in making the devil stop. That’s how Francisco Saya became the greatest marimbero of the Colombian Pacific region.6

Several different interpretations can be made of this scene. One of the town’s cultural officers, commenting on this carnival opening, stated: “To receive the marimba means to render homage to the major symbol of ancestral culture. This marimba has a legend of the defiance of the devil, which we are trying to maintain.” A powerful meaning, first and foremost a political one, has been given to the procession by the people who initiated it: the previous council administration, in power from 1994 to 1997 and run by a white politician, had not called on Tumaco’s cultural sector to participate. The latter was clearly oriented towards an “Afro” cultural policy. Everything changed with the council elected at the end of 1997: the new mayor, who was black, a local Tumaco man and close to Afro-Colombian cultural activists, called on some of them to run the town’s cultural activities; in order to celebrate this presence publicly, the cultural sector introduced the *Return of the Marimba* at the head of the carnival, as a triumphal metaphor of the “return” to Tumaco of the black culture of the Pacific region. In this way, the ritual signified the fulfillment of an identity strategy based on Afro-Colombian culture. This meaning has been transposed into the content of the rite itself: a new portrayal of identity is being fashioned, with explicitly ethnic and regionalist echoes. To situate and understand this new performance of identity, it is necessary to place this ritual innovation in the regional context in which the
actors, the concepts and the strategy it involves were formed during the two previous decades.

Regional Development, Carnival and Black Culture

The Pacific region as a whole is the subject of a law known as the *Ley de Negritudes* (Law of Black Affairs) or Law 70, passed in 1993. In relation to land titling and education, it applied the new principles of multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity inscribed in the Colombian constitution of 1991. The law's objective is "the protection of the cultural identity and rights of the black communities of Colombia considered as an ethnic group". Its definition of black community is "the families of Afro-Colombian descent as a whole who possess their own culture, share a history and have their own traditions and customs [...], which show and preserve an awareness of identity which distinguishes them from other ethnic groups". It organizes the attribution of titles of collective property to black peasants living in the low-lying coastal strip and orients the implementation of ethnically related education conceived as a means of "regaining, preserving and developing the cultural identity" of Afro-Colombians. Endowed with obvious distinguishing marks (culture and tradition), and at the same time with a political effectiveness that is currently highly relevant, cultural identity has become, in a few years, one of the main components of the regional situation, and more generally, an instrument for stimulating identity-focused movements of black Colombians.

Essentially, it is in the urban areas that the cultural and ethno-political movements and claims that culminated in the *Ley de Negritudes* have arisen, from the towns of the Pacific region (Quibdó, Buenaventura, Tumaco) to Cali and Bogotá. In these towns, for about 20 years now, various black political organizations and regional cultural groups (for dance, music, theatre, oral literature and so on) have developed. Their leaders were trained in Catholic circles (of education and social action) and in the networks set up around regional, rural and urban development programs. Such programs began to appear in the region in the mid-1970s. They benefited from a considerable amount of international involvement—Plan International (a U.K.-based international child-focused charity, commonly known as *Plan Padrino* in Colombia), Corporación del Valle del Cauca (a governmental regional development agency), the Dutch overseas development department, GEF (Global Environment Facilities, a program of the World Bank), the United Nations Development Program, UNICEF and so on. At the same time that the region, until then host to a largely rural population, became a focus for development plans, it began to be subjected to destructive land exploitation and to be prey to investment by both Colombian and foreign private companies. In the far south of the Colombian Pacific coast, around the Bay of Tumaco, thou-
sands of hectares were taken over, first by banana plantations and vast farms for cattle rearing, then, around the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, by oil palm plantations (which currently occupy at least 30,000 hectares), and finally, by more than 20 firms breeding prawns on an industrial scale. Peasants were displaced towards the towns and primarily to the nearest one, Tumaco. Although in appearance it was still rather like a large village, Tumaco’s population increased from 45,000 in the mid-1960s to nearly 100,000 today. Most of these people live in highly precarious situations. The urban environment, recently formed and fragmentary, is therefore marked by serious economic and social problems. From the mid-1980s, the development-oriented discourses coming from national and international organizations took on an ethnic character, and then an ecological hue, which substantially changed the arguments about access to land, a question to which most of the people there, whatever their origin, remain sensitive. An exploited and under-developed land of blacks and conquered Indians, the Colombian Pacific region became a world reserve for biodiversity and “Afro-Indian” ecologist communities within a few years.11

Several groups and individuals, who have been committed for 20 years to working in this situation of changing development, transformed themselves in a variety of ways into promoters of the “black culture of the Pacific.” They constitute what in Tumaco is called the “cultural sector”: this consists of a network that today brings together a few dozen leaders, organizers and creators, most of whom have had schooling and have had training in seminars and through educational activities laid out by international organizations and the Church.12 Nowadays they are students, teachers and local council employees. They earn a living through more or less regular contracts with NGOs, or themselves create local branch organizations of national or international institutions. Over 15 years or so, they have become accustomed to engaging in socio-cultural activity, along with a “project culture,” adapted to the somewhat stereotyped requirements of international financial sponsors of cultural and development projects. In fact, in a context of widespread shortage, Tumaco is one of the distribution points of manna from the world’s aid circuits. Even though it is still conveyed through national or regional administrative channels, the money comes from Europe, the United States or the UN and it always arrives with its package of associated plans and programs. Each locally led initiative must therefore pass through the sieve of legitimation, largely artificial but necessary for any hope of obtaining financial support, and neatly arranged under such headings as “target population,” “educational objective,” “methodology,” “community participation,” “cultural identity” and “ancestral practices.” These conceptual frameworks have favored a rhetoric in which culture becomes the basis for differentialist discourses and encourages the definition of micro-communities.
A conception of culture as a crucial trope of identity gradually impressed itself on and profoundly influenced the new activities and creations that drive the existence of the "black culture of the Pacific" as an urban-situated identity, created or "invented" with existing fragments of regional symbolic material and in relation to a regional development process that has strongly ethnic connotations.13

But the leaders of the cultural sector in Tumaco, who have for 20 years been anxious to defend and promote the "black culture of the Pacific," hesitated for a long time before considering their town's carnival as a forum worthy of any attention. As a popular event, this festival only dates back to the 1970s. Marked as it has been by the contributions of blacks and the poor, the technical, aesthetic and symbolic aspects of the performances were rather precarious and not seen as very status enhancing. The processions, especially on Monday, which was the most popular day, represented a rather disorderly public space of encounter and liberty which allowed the expression, in individual costumes and collective floats, of individual anxieties, fears and desires, fed by everyday received images and information (television, work, rumors). Characters from an American police series (The Incorruptibles) and evening soap operas, Caribbean-style salsa singers (Los Salserines, Celia Cruz), pop stars (Michael Jackson), heroes from Disney, media stars of international politics (Jean-Paul II, Fidel Castro, Saddam Hussein) and national affairs (guerilla movements, government, or the drug trade), are transplanted wholesale from screen to street and rub shoulders with depictions of "the millipede invasion of Tumaco," "child cardboard collectors," "the Duende and his women" or "the prawn shellers."

In the 1980s, a section of the Tumaco cultural sector sought to enhance the standing of regional traditions by creating the Currulao Festival.14 Between 1987 and 1992, each year for three or four days, marimba bands gave performances on stage. There were also traditional dance groups, storytellers (cuenteros) and popular poets (decimeros); plays inspired by popular beliefs of the region (about visiones) were performed. Older participants came from the villages and various districts of the town, transformed into performers for a few hours; however, most of the groups had formed in the 1970s and 1980s, stimulated by social and cultural programs devised by the port authorities of the town and by the charity Plan International.15 Then black arts groups from other countries were invited. The whole symbolism of the event—the name, the date and the hierarchy of the arts—was carefully thought out by the founders, whose overall aim was to achieve the same level and standard as the great national cultural events and the festivals, celebrations and carnivals of other towns (Aristizabal 1998:431). To them it appeared necessary to set themselves apart from all that could "contaminate" the traditional culture of blacks.
of the Pacific coastal region, whether it be modernization (in the instruments used, for example) or the importation of models from outside (concerning music, dance, objects or clothes). In this context, rap, salsa, rock or reggae, which were much played and danced to in the bars and houses of Tumaco, found no place. The town’s carnival was ignored because, it was thought, its existence did not correspond to any real cultural identity and was only a pitiful shadow of those festivals which took place in Barranquilla (the biggest carnival in Colombia, on the Atlantic coast) or Pasto (the capital of the department of Nariño, located in the Andean foothills, 300 kilometers from Tumaco). In 1992, with the quincentennial celebrations of the discovery of the Americas, the festival received the financial backing of various organizations, including the public National Agency for Cultural Policy (COLCULTURA): this was its biggest success. That year there was an expensive festival, with an official and also partly commercial character, which subsequent attempts—not sponsored to the same degree—did not succeed in reproducing. Criticism and self-criticism of the cultural sector led it to turn again to local life for inspiration. The new mayor, elected in 1997, was active in the cooperative circles and close to local black cultural activists, some of whom then entered the municipality’s cultural sector services. On that basis, they were given the responsibility for promoting the town’s carnival. At the end of 1998, the same cultural agents devised a completely new “Currulao Development Plan,” in which the possible participation of the carnival was finally admitted. Then, in the 1999 carnival, the cultural sector presented just one impressive feature in the middle of Monday’s popular procession and also organized the opening section of the carnival for the Friday procession.

By placing the Return of the Marimba scene as the official opening at the head of the carnival, the strategy consisted, in the words of a council cultural officer, of “reuniting the Currulao Festival and the carnival in order to give it an identity.” Besides this, the carnival organizing committee strongly urged the carnival participants to draw inspiration from elements considered to be part of the regional culture. These included the visiones (spirits of the forest, the rivers and the mangrove), popular Catholic rites such as chigualos (child funerals) and arrullos (venerations of saints), traditional dances (currulao) and the ecology of the sea and the forest. Scenes showing violence were forbidden (Agier 1999b). Finally, the municipal departments financed the purchase, on one of the rivers running into the Bay of Tumaco, of the “legendary marimba” from kinsfolk of the marimbero Francisco Saya, who had died 15 years earlier. This object was honored at the opening of the procession in 1998, then exhibited in the town’s Cultural Center, and feted again the following year, at the opening of the 1999 carnival.
The Many Metamorphoses of the Devil

The legends of Father Mera, the marimba and Francisco Saya are presented, in the narratives spoken and produced in the town, pared down in summary form. Arranged in such a style, the relationships of each character, either with each other or with the devil, take on the simplicity of dualisms quickly applicable to present-day distinctions of identity. Thus, in the first narrative, the church represses any demonstration of paganism. If these are black manifestations—or, possibly, indigenous—the Church is dominant and white. Indeed, in the opening act of the carnival procession, it is the character of Father Mera who comes at the very head of the procession. He is portrayed carrying the signs of authority (the bishop's miter), and he is the only character played by an actor (black) whose face is painted white. However, whereas he looks straight in front of him and sprinkles incense, the whole pagan scene (the dance and the forbidden marimba and the devil's challenge) carries on behind his back, as if without his knowing. Similarly, in the first narrative, the marimbero Francisco Saya is a rebel figure, clandestine and ethnic. He is said in oral accounts to have been a “black man with smooth hair,” or “with Indian hair.” On his river, the Río Chagüi, the same oral accounts say that the marimba has survived, as if in an enclave, because Father Mera did not go as far there, or because the marimbas thrown in the neighboring River Patía went back upstream and found their way there! The forceful return of the marimba, and metaphorically of the repressed black culture of the Pacific region, makes Father Mera look ridiculous and raises the “greatest of the marimberos” to the status of ethnic hero.

In the second narrative, the marimbero, in his turn, shows he is stronger than the devil and more effective than the priest. He succeeds in extricating himself from the curse of the Tunda, a spirit of the forest (he escapes from it on his own, after having accepted it: he “slept in the forest”). Then by singing the name of Christ (in the national anthem he plays on the marimba), he sees off the devil in the same way that priests or godfathers say the Creeds in order to exorcise someone who is possessed by a vision (visión). In this way he takes up again on his own account the Christian virtue of Good against Evil, the latter incarnate in the visiones, which were “satanic” according to the dictums of the Spanish Church of the Inquisition. The visiones, in the carnival procession scenes, are depicted but neutralized; they serve only as décor to give a local flavor. In the process, the town flag has been added by the cultural officers of the city, and attached to the marimba, the central character. Two days later, for the carnival queens, an old marimbero plays the national anthem on the stage. In these small gestures can be seen the will to integrate, on the basis of the cultural identity exhibited, local and national destinies.
The meaning that emanates from the rite and from the interpretation of its legends, for which the carnival is the theatre and the cultural sector the author. It is a double reversal and a remarkable symbolic elevation: the marimbero triumphs over the priest, who treats him as the devil, and then he himself is victor over the devil (or his avatars) in the priest’s stead. Metaphorically, the resurgent black culture overturns the white Catholic world and takes on its values and powers of domination.

Now, Father Mera was not white; marimbas did not disappear through any fault of his but rather because of the record player (victrola); and the devil was not the marimberos’ enemy but their teacher: at least, that is what is heard today, along the rivers of the region—in particular on the Patía and the Patía Viejo (where Father Mera had his mission from 1910 to 1912) and on the Chaguí (where the marimbero Francisco Saya was born and died). The dualism of the events displayed in the town is a modern reading of bits of myths and legends that people living in the region carry in their heads. In fact, the events described and the principal characters are all complex and ambiguous. Before they pass into the town and appear in the carnival scene, none of them are elaborated into a fixed and unified form. We are witnessing here a sparse set of fragments of myths (Lévi-Strauss’s “mythemes”) rather than fully constituted myths. This absence of a general coherence undoubtedly leaves them open to new interpretations and arrangements, but makes them also elusive and fleeting.

At the beginning of the 20th century, a Tumaco newspaper linked to the Liberal Party took marimba dances to task and decried “the immorality of the verses that some individuals sing at these dance events.”20 The paper spoke out against the prolongation of the same dances, in the villages, beyond the official feast days: “in the country, whole weeks are spent at these dances, in gambling, drunken binges and general corruption. The harm suffered by the people’s morality by way of such dissipation is incalculable.”21 At about the same time, the missionary priest Father Bernard Merizalde del Carmen, author of a detailed enquiry into the history of the Pacific coast, commented, referring to the Tumaco area: “the marimba, the bongo drum and the conuno are indispensable in houses of any importance and their sound makes the most barbarous noise” (Merizalde 1921:153). Having described how, in such a house in Tumaco, in 1917, the marimba only had to begin to play before the living rooms were filled with “dancing blacks,” he continued:

The dance event of the blacks on the coast is one of the most vulgar and wildest that we have ever seen. When, by chance, on a river where a dance is going on, a canoe arrives bringing a missionary, the music and shouting cease instantly; and if the Father goes up to the house he finds it com-
pletely empty, because all those who were participating in the party jumped out of the windows and fled to the forest. This we have witnessed several times; and that proves that the blacks are not ignorant of the work priests do to eradicate these abominable orgies. [Merizalde 1921:153]

If the missionaries considered the marimba to be “the devil’s instrument,” it was the dance itself and sometimes the words of the songs that were the target of accusations. The currulao in the strictest sense mimes, to a fast rhythm, the provocations, chasing and sometimes acrobatic gestures and movements of a lively amorous encounter between a man and a woman; such a show progressively incites the audience’s laughter and encouragement. Isabelle Leymarie observes, concerning the currulao, that “sexual contact in former times more openly expressed is symbolized [...] by the motion of handkerchiefs” (Leymarie 1996:154). However, many variations of the currulao exist, such as agua corta, agua larga, juga, patacoré, berejú, in which everyday work or encounters with the devil are mimed. The different forms can be danced for instance in a circle, in a cross formation, in facing lines or as a quadrielle. Today in Tumaco, they are found in their most extensively worked form in cultural groups intending to give shows, or even readapted to the rhythm which animates the carnival. They demonstrate, according to the Colombian folklore specialist Guillermo Abadía Morales (who observed them at the beginning of the 1970s), “all the characteristics of a sacramental rite [...] It could be said that the dancers send themselves little by little ‘into a trance’ and that, taken over by the mysterious undercurrent of the music, they show themselves to be possessed by a higher spirit, of which they are the unwitting instruments” (Abadía Morales 1983:310). The same author, impressed by the “frenetic momentum of the dancers,” draws an analogy with the rites of possession, in the same way that various different authors see in the dance the ritual expression of absent orishas. 22

Unlike in Cuba, Haiti or Bahia, there was in Colombia no pantheon of African or syncretic origin that organized beliefs, rites and dances into a whole system, but the devil first and foremost occupied a symbolic mediating role. The demonization of black beliefs and dances prevailed throughout the colonial period over a long stretch of territory reaching from the province of Darien (in present-day Panama) to the Peruvian coast. The devil was a creation of the inquisitorial mind confronted with pagan worship. Both these phenomena had been highly active in 15th-century Spain, which was mostly rural and pagan, but also politically conquering, Catholic and colonizing. 23 Fitting well with the spirit of the age, the Inquisition and ideas involving the devil served the Spanish as an understanding of the New World, where they found themselves uprooted and frightened: the wild animals, the harsh natural conditions

150 Journal of Latin American Anthropology
of the tropical forest, like the gods and beliefs of the Indians and blacks, seemed to confirm in every aspect that the land had been "abandoned by God" (Borja Gómez 1998:97). Themselves uprooted and demonized straight away, the blacks took up "elements of European socialization and evangelization, seizing on the devil which was being offered to them in order to resist a culture which was mistreating [them]" (Borja Gómez 1998:126). Thus, colonial society, where Spanish political and military domination combined with the struggle of Christianity against all forms of paganism of African or Indian origin, was the context in which the multiform figure of the devil emerged. Primarily, its role was that of a common symbolic meeting place, which even if full of conflicts and ambiguities, allowed exchanges between the Christian and pagan worlds.

Starting from his intermediate position, the devil became a paradigm that facilitated the revival and, in a way, the organization of a set of pagan figures (the visiones, whose most ancient origins are themselves extremely heterogeneous: Spanish, Amerindian and African) to which were added "paganized" Christian entities. The devil was in this way considerably multiplied in form. Those who were his target first met demonization with derision. Later he was incorporated in their dances and beliefs as the main mediator of meaning. Several variations of the curulao are dances for the devil's avatars (like the patacore or the berejú). The devil, it is said, is "hidden under the floor of the room where the dancing is taking place." When someone plays the marimba well, they say that it is the devil that has taught him. And many stories tell of the devil's presence in the marimba dance events: he can take on human form, that of the most brilliant marimbero or of the best dancer—"it can only be the devil" (éste tiene que ser el diablo), it is said when one has been discovered. He can be both admired and feared. The devil as met by the marimbero Francisco Saya had a variety of appearances depending on the particular narrative. He was "an ordinary man, he was neither white nor black ... but his body, yes, that terrified him (ya el cuerpo le terrorizo)," explains one of his cousins living on the banks of the River Chaguí. Another says that the marimbero did not see the devil's face. According to other accounts, Francisco Saya's devil was of mixed race (cholo), or a white, or was dressed in white, or in khaki, and all his teeth were gold. The circumstances were also distinct: one says that the devil came at dusk, the other at midnight. He first started to play the marimba in a duet with Francisco Saya and then the house started shaking.

The devil makes his appearance in situations beyond the marimba dance houses, in the forests and the villages, thanks to the innumerable forms he takes which include, from the inquisitor's viewpoint, the visiones. For example, it is said that the Duende, a goblin charmer and "macho," was an angel
so disruptive that God changed him into a goblin, thus repeating the genesis of the devil in Christian terms as a fallen angel. Concerning the teaching of the marimba, a storyteller associates the devil and the Duende in one and the same character: “the Duende walks in the forest and it is he who comes to play the marimba and to fight”; “the Duende plays the guitar very well [... and ...] he also plays the marimba, he also teaches how to play the marimba.” And, in the end, the Duende has the same force as the devil: “the Duende’s prayer, it is he who knows it, because it is found in the book of Hell.”27 In the narrative given at the beginning of the present article, it is after the marimbero Francisco Saya has defied the visiones of the deep forest that the devil himself feels attacked and that he goes to the marimbero’s house to provoke him. It is precisely because their strength is given them by the devil that all the visiones lose their powers to cast spells on beings when faced with exorcism. In ordinary times it is the victim’s godparent who chases away the visiones and frees those who are termed entundados (bewitched by the Tunda) or embolatados (lost). The godparent has a whole set of powers to counter these, such as the Creed, the cross, candles, coconut-fiber smoke, beating the bombo drum, insults, rifles, and so on; however, the godfather never acts without being delegated by the priest who, in this imaginary world, is the first among the exorcists. It is in this capacity that Father Mera was able in fact, in the name of a centuries-old missionary tradition, to burn marimbas or throw them into the river, because he had to show that he was stronger than the devil, whether the latter sprang up in the form of a vision or a demonic dance to the sound of the marimba. The 18th century had already seen Church prohibition of “black festivities or fandangos under pain of excommunication” (Borja Gómez 1998:149). And the reports of Franciscan missionaries, in 1730, indicate that already marimbas were burnt in Barbacoas at that time.28 The priests were therefore convinced that the dance events held by the blacks were the celebration of their pact with the devil.

The particular fate of Father Mera in the region’s imaginary is due to the fact of being situated in the field of popular beliefs, in other words of having shared a common language with the devil and the visiones which he confronted so violently in the daily round of his priesthood. Later, another priest, Father Garrido, sought to retrace Father Mera’s life’s journey, at the risk of also being taken, because of the same empathy, for an incarnation of his subject. Charismatic, even prophetic according to some, the “little father” (el padrecito) Mera was born in 1872 in Florida, near Cali, and died not far from there, in Palmira, in 1926.29 “With slightly frizzy hair, he was brown, tending towards black.”30 His grandfather was thought to have been a slave (Garrido 1980: 202). Ordained in 1906 as a diocesan priest, his relations with the Church hierarchy were difficult and even conflictual. This was especially so with the
Augustinian friars, an order which had responsibility for evangelizing the Colombian southern Pacific region from 1899 to 1927. Father Garrido observed that Mera’s mission always led him into places settled by black populations and where there was no priest: Florida, Guapi, Barbacoas, Puerto Tejada, Palmira. He thus spent two years between Barbacoas and Salahonda, from 1910 to 1912. There he drew attention to himself with his powerful, even scandalous sermons.31

The arrival of Father Mera in the region’s world of legends is told in the following narrative, recounted rather hesitantly by an old man from El Carmen, on the old Río Patía. A rich and powerful “farán” (Pharaoh) had seduced a woman and wanted to dominate the river; he had put everyone under a spell. While the people waited for him to come, it was Father Mera who appeared, in the middle of a storm. In another narrative, the priest also discovered the devil under an attractive but evil character, and he showed he was stronger than he. The devil there took on the appearance of a rich and powerful man (with gold teeth). In this way he seduced a young woman, until Father Mera discovered him and chased him away:

And when Father Mera arrived that night, the young woman went to confess before the priest, and the priest told her “No,” because she was under the devil’s influence (endemoniada), because the man who had visited her was the devil. And there was a struggle until the priest took away the demon that was upon the girl, and the devil did not come back. That is why people say that Father Mera was a saint.32

In other variants of this initial account, the devil can take on several different names or aspects: the Pharaoh, Aaron, the dragon “arriving with a sect to talk in the name of God,” or a gold prospector (Llano n.d.). It may be thought that this is, more generally, a question of various versions of the story of the coming of Christ, of which Father Mera himself would have been the storyteller: Aaron, a Biblical figure, is the first of the priests, whose order is abolished because of its “ineffectiveness and uselessness” at the moment of the arrival of Christ, who takes his place by divine will (Heb. 7). In the stories of the river areas, Aaron is seen as a sort of devil, and Christ becomes Father Mera himself.

The wonders, miracles and other signs of divine election abound in all these stories of the legendary priest; he did not eat, or at least not savory food; he did not drink water that people offered him; he walked several feet above the ground; he arrived as a sudden apparition (“and no one knew where he came from and where he was going”); he did not wash and yet his long cassock was always clean; his urine was invisible; he was capable of administering curses.33 He was a preacher, and the story goes that he was put in prison, but
he got out and continued to call meetings, sometimes even using a whip to bring people to prayer, in order to “liberate them from the thorny path” that they were on. Added to all these characteristics of saintliness was the fact that he was presented very often as the incarnation of Saint Anthony: the saint was said to have disappeared from Rome and “descended from heaven to save the Río Patía.” Now, Saint Anthony himself has many forms. He is celebrated in Colombia’s southern Pacific coastal region as a pagan deity and his arrullo (saint’s day) is one of the most festive occasions. Some saints, on the old River Patía, are honored by solemn celebrations (those of Christ Nazareño and of the Virgin of Carmen), but Saint Anthony’s festival day is the liveliest and he is even a heavy drinker (borrachero). An intermediary saint, he lends himself perfectly, among Afro-American cults of different regions (e.g., Brazil and the Caribbean), to various types of association with figures of African origin that are either dual or intermediate (Ogun, Exu), themselves converted into devils in the Christian language. The symbolic power of Father Mera therefore lay in his capacity to split his personality, even as far as transgressing his own religious standards, in order to make himself heard by the pagan people. This ability to split into different forms is conveyed in the descriptions of his appearance. Although, for some, he was brown or almost black, in a village of Patía Viejo, Las Lajas, he was white one day, pink another, but not black. Further down on the same river, in El Carmen, he was identified as the “Black Father” (Padre Negro). Then, at the mouth of the River Patía, at Salahonda, he is associated with the Lord of the Sea (Señor del Mar); it is Father Mera who gave the name to the prow of a beached ship, which represented a seated Christ, and who invited the inhabitants to make it the protector of that place. This figure of Christ is “burnt”: one half of his face is black, the other white.

In the end, the Holy Father (Padre Santo) is so close to the devil that he becomes confused with him in this common zone of symbolism between Christianity and paganism where their trial of strength is a form of agreement, of mutual understanding. That explains what is heard today, that Father Mera is a “saint,” a “spirit,” and that he is “like the devil.” Among all the rumors that circulate still today on the rivers, there is one that says that Father Mera left numerous descendents in the villages he passed through. Already in 17th-century New Granada, among the many paradoxes of the process of demonization, “the Afro-Grenadians made a would-be pact with a demon who bore a ‘mitre like a bishop’” (Borja Gómez 1998:19). More than three centuries later, it was an identical visual image that was chosen to represent Father Mera in the opening of the Tumaco Carnival. And one song, from among the currulaos censured for their “satanic,” “immoral” or “barbarous” content, humorously pays a kind of homage to a priest who is undoubtedly Father Mera:**
The patacoré is soon going to catch me.
So that he doesn’t catch me, I’m going to go away.
That’s the devil coming, let him come.
If he is angry, I will make him laugh.
The devil went away up there, to lament his misfortune.
The devil did not take me away, although he was dressed as a priest.36

From Old Legends to Aesthetic Culture and “Urban Legends”

In the river and forest villages of the Colombian Pacific coast, in places where previously people danced to the sound of the marimba, the bombo and the cununo, there is no single unified representation of the mythical culture—no generalized myths, recognized by all, of Father Mera as prophet, Francisco Saya as ethnic hero, of the marimba as symbolic object—but scattered, even divergent fragments of legends and many individual versions. The history of settlement in the region explains this fragmentary form of the mythology. Since the second half of the 19th century, it has been marked by the individualization of settlement plans, dispersion of dwelling places and spatial mobility. There was no great unifying clan, no overall collective grouping together, no ancestral attachment to or settlement on one common territory. The grouping together of populations and “community”-based strategies are emerging together rather as the products of modernity. The reassembly of people occurs in the form of displacements (often forced, or even violent) and resettlement near roads, in villages, or agro-industrial plantations, around development projects and in towns. In this context, “community” strategies aim to build frameworks of belonging that are closer to each person and more equitable than the national “community,” distant and excluding. This is the case of the politico-identity enterprise formed around the idea of “black communities,” the fruit of a recent mobilization, which is essentially urban and fits in with institutional and global modernity. In this sense, we can say that the “black culture of the Pacific” begins at Tumaco. Father Mera believed in the devil and in visiones, for he fought them vigorously. As for the leaders of the cultural sector at Tumaco, they pay homage to these beliefs, but as an aesthetic and distinctive emblem of culture. Consequently, Father Mera is occasionally “whitened,” the visiones become innocuous moral values and the marimba is turned into a fetishized object. These reinterpretations, formulated in a hybrid urban context (at once local and global), serve in the elaboration of a fixed and translatable identity culture.

However, to summon the devil to assist in an identity-defining strategy founded on opposing dualities—black/white, pagan/Catholic, good/evil—is to risk losing control over the symbol which is itself already known locally as
white and black, Catholic and pagan, good and bad, friend and enemy. Besides, in a society entirely constructed under Catholic oppression, the devil also has the ability to “paganize” everything he touches. For, at the end of the day, on the highly urban carnival scene of the *Return of the Marimba*, there is nothing other than the devil, with a variety of faces. Other than the devil in person—portrayed in black and red, with horns, though local stories leave room for local interpretations of him as white, mixed race, dressed in khaki and wearing a gold tooth—the marimba and the marimbero, for centuries, have been leading the “demonic” dance of the blacks. Father Mera himself is an imaginary character of multiple personalities and transgression: Inquisitor priest and Saint Anthony, Christ and demon, white and black, loved and denigrated. Finally, the visiones of the Tunda, the Viuda and the Duende are avatars of the devil which carry his strength and weaknesses. Thus, the pagan multiplicity of the devil substitutes step by step for the Christian dualism in the name of which the inquisitorial Church had brought him into the region 500 years ago and which the cultural organizations in the towns have taken up as their own in their identity strategies.

Repeated, reduced and transformed as they circulate in urban areas, the legends of Father Mera, the marimba and the devil can also, in the image of “urban legends,” be embellished with personal touches and in this way be spread further, while remaining rooted in a powerful symbolic design, that of the devil as principle, multiform intermediary. When I asked the actor who played the devil (and who had directed the scene) if he knew about Father Mera, he answered with the summary explanation which is usually heard in Tumaco: “Yes, it was he who said that the marimba and the dances were satanic events and made people throw away the marimbas,” and when I asked the man who was in the role of Father Mera “who” he was, he simply replied “the priest,” not knowing exactly the name of his character. Finally, these characters are present among the costumes and scenes in the rest of Tumaco’s popular carnival. Several creators who, in their everyday life, take part in or have taken part in a number of activities of Afro-Colombian cultural groups in the town, show the beginnings of various individual projects inspired by this knowledge. A few visiones, rapidly covered with the flour and mud of the carnival, move in the procession next to Donald Duck, a caricature of “Macho Man,” or a drunk and lecherous priest (Padre Mera?): they are the Duende, with his guitar and large hat, the Viuda, the Tunda and the *Madremontes* (forest spirits). Some creators become celebrated in their neighborhoods for “cultural” specialization in the carnival. One of them, age 31, has been involved over 15 years with the training and presentations of a regional dance group, Ecos del Pacífico, which he left recently. For nearly the same length of time, he has been taking part in the carnival with sketches that are inspired by
his Afro-Colombian training, but that lay more emphasis on magic and the extravagances of the devil—and which have already earned him several prizes: "The Devil's Carnival," "Currulao," "La Viuda at the Carnival," "Satanic Sorcery of the Pacific," and "The Infernal Kingdom" (where several portrayals of the devil were paraded). In the 1998 carnival, a sketch mimed the town council's cultural activities: behind a placard announcing "Here it is! We've got the marimba back," a group of five people played a scene of "Francisco Saya and the devil," with the latter character's only special costume being a red shirt.

In this way, by resorting to the process, simple and common in the global repertoire, of the reversal of a stigma in order to found a morally "positive" strategy for identity, and by drawing on local sources for their "cultural identity," the black culture leaders in Tumaco have re-launched the heterodox, unpredictable symbolic zone between paganism and Christianity. The devil, however, has more of a carnival spirit than the cultural agents who call on his services. He is festive, a good drinker (borrachero) like Saint Anthony, ambiguous and non-dualist. The recent revival of the "carnival of the devil," in another part of the country, is witness of the interest in this multiform pagan figure in a society which has been marked by the oppression of personal destinies by religious and political powers.

New Contexts and the Invention of Cultural Identity

It is in modernity with its multi-ethnic situations that the idea of "cultural identity" arises. The idea induces the inventory and fixation—as much by cultural anthropology as by the actors themselves—of any elements that could make a human community recognizable and differentiate it from other groups situated in the same social and historic context. In spite of its traditional appearance, the culture displayed in this way can only exist in contexts where multi-ethnic social exchanges take place and gazes meet—above all, in towns and cities. That explains why in urban areas the display of cultural difference becomes not only a factor of identity, but also a political or economic resource, both for individuals and for networks. From the perspective of adaptation to modern urban conditions, neo-ethnic groups and identity-oriented movements invent themselves at the same time as they seem to defend a rather museological definition of material culture. In political, land or urban conflicts, each group displays its "cultural identity," in the face of others or before the state, as a source of present-day legitimization. In this context, those involved deny, either through interest or deep personal conviction, the work they do on various bits of culture, diverse and accessible to varying degrees, in order that their "culture" might be the mark of identity. The identity of one moment will later perhaps be forgotten, when other contexts and
other relations will prevail; however, the culture of the places where these processes are operating today will itself be changed, extensively “reworked” by identity-related processes.

The current force of cultural identity—in politics as well as in certain individual trajectories—results from the encounter of two contemporary processes. First, identity has a reflexive side produced, and now amplified, by the multiplicity of movements and contacts (“who am I in the light of all these reflections?”). Secondly, there is an increasingly rhetorical dimension to culture. Jean-Claude Passeron designates this as declarational culture:

This refers to the aspect of a culture by which it manifests itself as oral or written discourse, whether this be sporadic or knowingly built up into a system. This culture, which we call “declarational,” lends itself therefore to observation in the often wordy language of self-definition, especially when it manages to make itself into a theory (myth, ideology, religion, philosophy) in order to express everything that those who practice a culture make it signify when they claim it as the mark of their identity, in contrast with others. [Passeron 1991:325; italics in original]

The contemporary development of multiple collective rhetorics or narratives of identity reinforces the declarational dimension of culture: increasingly objectified by social actors, culture is thought to be able to recreate the basis of lost, dreamed and invented communities. That is why, in the field, the ethnologists find themselves more often faced with identity cultures in progress, than with “cultural identities” fixed as ready-made wholes, open for simple recording.

To speak of urban and multi-ethnic modernity is not sufficient nowadays to understand the contexts and dynamics of culture. The cultural changes described above are inscribed within a very particular temporality and set of networks: those of the global discourse of the “African” diaspora as a case of imaginary and, to some extent, organizational “diasporic public sphere” (Appadurai 1996:22). The political and cultural strategies of those who organize themselves and define themselves as black or Afro-Colombians are “sucked into” the political and economic networks which disseminate on a global scale the “cultural identity” model of the African diaspora. The program entitled “The Slave Route,” conducted for several years by UNESCO, is an element of this global network. However, the diaspora also operates as an interest group at the scale of large international institutions. The globalization of ethnicity-based aid action—the economic and ideological effects of which have been mentioned here with reference to the Afro-Colombian cultural sector of Tumaco—is also a way in for economic neo-liberalism. For example, at the end of 1996, a meeting called “AfroAmerica XXI,” held in Washington under
the combined aegis of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), an international NGO and the Canadian overseas development agency—which brought together black organizations from Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, Dominican Republic, Uruguay and Venezuela—decided to encourage the setting up of an Afro-American economic network. This would be based on various black organizations already existing in these countries. The search for supra-national partners (OAS, UNICEF, UNDP, ILO) and the setting up of “Afro-American banks” and associations of black business leaders were encouraged as being effective instruments for economic and social development which could take place outside the national structures that were widely criticized, on this occasion, for their clientelism (Charier 1999). These strategies induced local claims couched in a neo-ethnic language and, consequently, favored a reflexive return to culture and ancestry.

The actors involved in such a global organization of cultural identities are “ethnically” different from each other but socially quite similar. They are the neo-ethnic agencies or individual activists. They tend to be young, urban and educated and to liaise regularly with global institutional and informational networks. These agencies and their leaders (often self-proclaimed “community leaders” or “spiritual leaders”) become specialists, or even professionals: their aim is to display the identity of “communities” and to “regain” or “safeguard” traditions considered to be “disappearing” or “under threat.” Unlike their elders, they can communicate with the whole world. This world gives them the instruments of thought to which they turn in their local strategies. In this sense, a certain standardization is emerging. This is seen in the form, if not always the content, of identity-driven movements, where the more effort groups make to differentiate themselves, the more they seem like others who are doing the same. The local actors tend to use the kinds of simplification that give them access to the political and economic circles of the global network and that might enable them to communicate more effectively with “partners” and “sponsors.” The agents of cultural and identity-based projects therefore present themselves locally as mediators in the hierarchy of geographical and political scales of operation. This is expressed by their skills in linguistic and cultural translation and their ability to access networks beyond the local world. It is on such skills that their recognition—social in their local domain, “ethnic” in their global context—is founded and occasionally brings them certain delegated powers; however, these abilities also bring them the pressures of a constant tension between the call of the global and attachment to their “home” locality.

Like the cultural interbreeding of former times, today’s hybridizations are being formed in this context of a permanent “play of scale” which manifests
itself in tensions, conflicts and relations of force among political actors and cultural activists.\textsuperscript{40} Going back to the case study in Tumaco, it is hardly possible that the urban ritual of the \textit{Return of the Marimba} could have existed without the social, cultural and educational activity sponsored in the region by various international organizations, both public and private, over the previous 20 years or so. In this context, the culture of the diaspora is expressed locally in terms that can be comprehended externally. Hence there is a certain mimicry and simplification of ideas. However, on the symbolic stage of the city's carnival, the Self—identity—breaks down again into a multitude of possibilities. These are the forces at play in the present fascination with cultural identity, which is the driving determinant of cultural mixing, hybridization and change, running counter to the very uniqueness it purports to assert. It is therefore important to know what, in the coming years, will become of the devil and its possible avatars in that little carnival at Tumaco where he has just taken up prime position at the head of the procession.

Notes

1. The marimba is a kind of suspended xylophone, inspired by the Mandingo \textit{balafon}. It consists of 24 hard \textit{chonta} palm-wood keys, which are arranged above resonance tubes made of \textit{guadua} bamboo wood. The marimba is made in principle as a four-handed instrument. Each player holds two sticks with raw rubber tips that he uses to beat one half of the keyboard. One plays the lower register (\textit{bajos}), the other the high notes (\textit{tiple}). This marimba is also found in the Pacific coast region of Ecuador (Whitten 1986). In the colonial period and with some differences in the shape of the sound box, it also appeared in Peru (Leymarie 1996:216). The marimba is central as an instrument in marimba dances, or \textit{currulaos}: these festivities were held in the past in the river villages of the region and in Tumaco. In that form they have now disappeared, but from the 1960s they have been depicted on stage, with some choreographic modifications, in urban shows featuring traditional music and dance.

2. All translations by author, unless otherwise noted.

3. On the formation of Tumaco's "cultural sector," see below.

4. The accounts reported here are generally accepted, in this form, in the Tumaco cultural sector, with certain possible subtle differences in description, but with the same sequencing of events. I have transcribed them from interviews conducted with Francisco Tenorio, about 55 years old, who is one of the main organizers of the cultural sector, in which he has been active since the mid-1970s, and is currently cultural officer at Tumaco town hall. In this capacity, he runs the Cultural Center that was opened in 1997.

5. \textit{Cholo} is a complex word in Latin American usage. Its meanings include (1) mestizo (with putative indigenous and white ancestry); (2) an indigenous person seen as urbanized and hence supposedly "acculturated"; (3) a person...
classed as indigenous; and (4) a person with putative black and indigenous ancestry. In the Tumaco region, the word is generally used in the last sense, which is the sense it carries in this narrative.

6. The variant that appears as an epigraph to this article can be seen as an introduction to the legend reproduced here. The epigraph recounts the initial battle of Francisco Saya with the visiones [spirits], considered by the Catholic missionaries to be incarnations of the devil. It sets the scene for the arrival of the devil at the house of the marimbero, presenting this as vengeance for the defiance of the marimbero in the face of the visiones.

7. Law 70, clause 1.
8. Law 70, clause 2.

9. For an account of the political negotiations and the use of ethnological works to define “black communities” as an “ethnic group” endowed with a “cultural identity,” see Restrepo 1998. On the importance of the Indian model for defining the “ethnicity” of black communities in the institutional context, see Wade 1994. Concerning its application in the territorial domain, see Agier and Hoffmann 1999.

10. For information on black identity in the city of Cali, see Wade 1999 in particular. In Cartagena de Indias, on the Atlantic coast, a key expression of black cultural identity is that of the palenqueros (people originating from Palenque de San Basilio). See Cunin 1999.

11. See Escobar 1997; Pedrosa 1996. In the medium term, application of the laws that resulted from the new constitution should result in a systematic distribution of the Pacific region’s low-lying lands amongst Indian reserves (resguardos) and collective lands of the “black communities,” at least in the areas which have not been appropriated by the large agro-industrial plantations or occupied illegally by the drug traffickers.

12. The branch of the Church involved is part of a missionary endeavor, and supports efforts to enhance popular identities. Taking its inspiration, in historical terms, from the Jesuits, this wing aligns itself with the Church of the poor, which resulted from the Vatican II council at the beginning of the 1960s.

13. Various pieces of research have recently been conducted around this question. Peter Wade (1999) observes, in studying an “Afro” cultural group of young people in Cali, that a whole set of different investments—in financial, human and political terms—construct culture as a “commodity.” Odile Hoffmann (1999) has shown how, in the context of a village in the southern part of the coastal Pacific region, and following the identity-driven mobilization stimulated by the Ley de Negritudes, wide-ranging activities of selection, censorship and an inversion of relationships between older and younger generations tend to redefine local memory (see also Hoffmann, this volume).
14. The currulao is the traditional dance of blacks of the southern part of the Colombian Pacific. Beyond the fact that it designates a particular dance, although this does exist in various forms, the term has, since colonial times, also denoted the marimba dances. In fact, the common characteristic of all the choreographic forms of the currulao is that they are always accompanied by the following percussion instruments: the *bombo* (a large bass drum), the *cununo* (a more elongated, conical drum), the *guasa* (a tube filled with seeds, more commonly called *maraca*) and the marimba, the primary instrument of the whole group. In a generic sense, the currulao signifies the whole set of artistic and ritual events and elaborations, and the myths and legends of the region; one can thus talk of the “currulao culture.”

15. This NGO, which appeared in the region in 1971, started ten years afterwards to develop social and cultural activities, in addition to providing direct assistance to its “godchildren” (the poor children it sponsored). In the 1980s, it employed 200 people locally and it had a bigger budget even than the Tumaco town council. The organization financed cultural activities in the poor districts, which were then growing enormously, and the training of leaders in the cultural field. The social policy of the Plan International was completely rethought in 1992. See Pardo 1997.

16. “It is when Father Mera is given the task of starting to throw away the marimbas [...] that the black and indigenous rhythms disappear,” observed the man who gave the above narratives.

17. A symbolic function in the widest sense is conferred on the visiones today in the identity-oriented Afro-Colombian culture of the Pacific region as expressed in the town. There, the visiones are held up as valuable, as protectors of the forest or as family moral traditions. The fact that they are demonized and individually feared therefore recedes into the background. More generally, the visiones make up a collection of beliefs which nourish “fables” and ideas of “magic” and, to the present day, feed into the prolix and poetic language of the storytellers (see Vanin 1998). For Anne-Marie Losonczy (1997:130-140), the visiones are supernatural figurations that belong to the *selva* (the forest). For my part, I have seen in the town of Cali a revival in the belief in visiones, for example, in the context of urban violence (see Agier 1999a:142-148). This indicates that the predisposition for using visiones can accompany Pacific coast migrants to Tumaco or Cali.

18. In the same process, the urban promotors of the marimba narrative are forgetting that, in the legend, it was the fact that the name of Christ was sung in the anthem and not the fact that the anthem was national that made the devil flee. However, the nuance is very slight, because, up to the 1991 constitution, the country was officially Catholic (in the new constitution, the preamble states simply that it is placed “under the protection of God”).
19. Victor Turner, for whom ritual is all about liminality and inversion, talks of “periodic reclassification” and “imaginary structural superiority” (1990:163).


22. See Borja Gómez 1998:151 and Friedemann 1995. According to Anne-Marie Losonczy, although the trance itself has disappeared as the means of communication with the supernatural, the body language and gestures that express it are embedded in “the deepest foundations of the motor memory of the body” (Losonczy 1997:181).

23. The Court of the Inquisition was established in Seville in 1480, a few years before the conquest of the Americas. The Inquisition of Cartagena de Indias was in operation from 1610 to 1821.

24. “Los que estan bailando/ bailen con cuidado:/ a debajo de casa/ está el diablo parado” (Friedemann and Arocha 1986:416).

25. The storyteller Melanio González, talking about an old marimba player, commented: “That man played the marimba a lot, it seems that the devil had taught him” (Bellavista, Río Mejicano, Apr. 12, 1998).

26. The same appearance is found in Panama, in a song dedicated to the devil on Ash Wednesday:

> Yesterday, I dreamt of a man with golden teeth. And he wanted to take me away. Ah, you know who it is, the Devil Tum-Tum. Oh, let him go away. Ah, you know who it is, the Devil Tum-Tum (Ayer soñé con un hombre/ De dientes en oro/ Y me quiso lleva/ Ay, sabes quién ayayay!/ El Diablo Tum-Tum/ Ay, que se vaya/ El Diablo Tum-Tum). [Leymarie 1996:189]


31. A raging controversy blew up in 1911 between Tumaco’s liberal newspaper, *El Litoral Pacífico*, and the Barbacoas Church paper, over “troubles” and “nervous suggestions” and a certain “hypnotism” induced by his sermons among the “throng of women” who made up his audience in Barbacoas church (*Revista Parroquial* [Barbacoas], Año 1(2) [Sept. 19, 1991]:3).


33. He was considered symbolically as the cause of the sinking of the steamer *Tumaquito* in 1912, bound for Tumaco, because the captain had refused to let him board.

34. “Perhaps the secret of his existence was this: to become like them.” Father Garrido concluded thus his enquiry into the life of Father Mera (1980:202).
35. The patacore is a fast currulao. The term itself, here, denotes the devil. Other versions of the currulao, such as the berejú, are currulaos that also talk about the devil.

36. El patacore ya me va a coger/ El patacore ya me va a coger (chorus)
   El patacore/ ya me va a coger,
   Para que no me coja/yo me marcharé.
   Allá viene el diablo/ déjalo venir,
   Que se viene bravo/ yo lo hago reír. [chorus]
   El diablo subió p’arriba/ el diablo bajó p’abajo
   El diablo no me llevó/ porque había mucho trabajo [chorus]
   El diablo subió p’arriba/ a llorá su desventura
   El diablo no me llevó/ aunque se vestió de cura [chorus]

[Lyrics dictated by Julio Cesar Montaño of the dance group Ecos del Pacifico. Tumaco, Apr. 9, 1998; June 3, 1999]

37 According to Renard (1999), the urban legends’ firm rooting at a “deep anthropological level” is one of the conditions of their success.

38. This carnival is held in Riosucio (Caldas). There, “the devil is pleasant, smiling, friendly, amusing, a joke-teller and messenger of the lightheartedness of the world” (Friedemann 1995:162).

39. Africans, Afro-Americans and Amerindians are all touched by the same repertoire of neo-ethnic language, which for research purposes invites a bringing together of studies of such efforts to assert identity, beyond the geographically based—and simultaneously, discipline-based—divisions into which classic anthropology has separated them. See Agier 1997 for an account of the relations between anthropologists and neo-ethnic agencies.


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