

UC Santa Cruz

UC Santa Cruz Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Articulations of blackness: Journeys of an emplaced politics in Colombia

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4p712313>

Author

Cardenas Gonzalez, Roosbelinda

Publication Date

2012

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

SANTA CRUZ

**ARTICULATIONS OF BLACKNESS:
JOURNEYS OF AN EMPLACED POLITICS IN COLOMBIA**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

ANTHROPOLOGY

by

Roosbelinda Cárdenas González

September 2012

The dissertation of
Roosbelinda Cárdenas González
is approved:

Professor Mark D. Anderson, Chair

Professor Eduardo Restrepo

Professor Lisa Rofel

Professor Anna Tsing

Tyrus Miller
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

Copyright © by

Roosbelinda Cárdenas González

2012

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of tables	v
Abstract	vi
Acknowledgements	vii
Chapter 1	
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2	
Emplaced blackness.....	37
Chapter 3	
Competing landscapes of blackness.....	94
Chapter 4	
Displaced blackness.....	150
Chapter 5	
Victimized blackness.....	200
Chapter 6	
Conclusion.....	261
References	276

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Afro-Colombian Displacement.....	163
----------------	----------------------------------	-----

ABSTRACT

Articulations of Blackness: Journeys of an emplaced politics in Colombia

Roosbelinda Cárdenas González

This dissertation explores the changing relation between Afro-descendants' ethno-racial identities and territoriality in Colombia. This interest emerges out of two key events in recent Colombian history. The first is the passage of Law 70, which granted cultural and territorial rights to black communities of the Pacific watershed and institutionalized the relation between "territory" and "black culture" in Colombia. The second is an important shift in the logic of Colombia's armed conflict, which in the late 1990s increasingly focused on territorial control. I analyze the current moment of exacerbated violence as a critical conjuncture in which the articulation of blackness and territoriality is unmade and remade; as both tragedy and opportunity.

The historical turning point for this analysis is a 1996 paramilitary attack in the department of Chocó, which marked the beginning of a brutal wave of violence that has since enveloped the Pacific region. I contend that this irruption of violence created a new conjuncture that brought about a significant rearticulation of ethno-territorial blackness. In order to trace the multiple shapes that black politics have taken since, I follow a multi-sited ethnographic approach that looks at processes of political mobilization, local livelihoods and landscapes, and dynamics of violent and nonviolent mobility. In Bogotá, I examine processes of subject formation amongst black IDPs (internally displaced persons) in an urban peripheral neighborhood. I also

analyze the shifts in discourses and strategies employed by Colombia's two main black organizations, as well as their changing dynamics with state entities and NGOs that deal with forced displacement. Finally, I analyze the practice of "emplaced" blackness by looking at land tenure, landscaping practices, and livelihoods in a black community with a titled collective territory.

Overall, I argue that ethnic blackness in Colombia has become linked to an emergent politics of victimization and a resurfacing of African diasporic networks of racial solidarity. Thus, I show that the various articulations of blackness are not only matters of identity politics, but also lie at the heart of struggles over the definitions of nature, the right to dwell and move, and the creation and management of victimized subjects.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Several institutions have made this research possible. Mexico's CONACyT and California's UCMexus jointly funded five years of my doctoral studies. I also received research funds from the Social Science Research Council, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the UC Pacific Rim Research Program, and UC Santa Cruz's Chicano-Latino Research Center as well as the Anthropology Department. I was also fortunate enough to receive grants to fund my writing, which came from the Land Deals Politics Initiative and the UC's Chancellor's Dissertation-Year Fellowship.

Throughout the years I have participated in intellectual communities that have enriched my research and writing tremendously. In Santa Cruz, I was a part of the Colombia Region Research Cluster, an interdisciplinary group of graduate students who provided much more than academic support. In Bogotá I was welcomed into the Universidad Javeriana's *Grupo de Estudios Culturales*. My participation in this group was critical both personally and intellectually. In that group I had some of the most stimulating academic exchanges I've ever had and met some of Colombia's most brilliant scholars. As an honorary "Colombiana," I was always encouraged to share my work and openly disclose my weaknesses. I am certain that without this community, I would have felt eternally lost in Bogotá.

A good number of fellow scholars and friends have commented on drafts of my work, listened to endless lists of anxieties, and patiently accompanied the writing process offering advice, insights, and many needed distractions. Among them, I especially want to thank Bill Girard, Kristina Lyons, Fatimah Williams-Castro,

Tianna Paschel, Miel Alegre, Diana Ojeda, Juli Hazlewood, Diana Bocarejo, Rose Cohen, and Julio Arias.

I'm not quite sure how to thank Juan Mejia, my partner in life and work for over ten years. Juan didn't only introduce me to Colombia and to the political circles that I now belong to, but he walked those trajectories next to me, hand in hand. Also thanks to him I have established deep and extensive networks in Colombia that go beyond academia. I wish to thank the Mejia and Botero families in Bogotá, and the Mejia-Botero's in the U.S. who I will always call my family.

My father died while I pursued this PhD, but he and my mother continue to be an unwavering source of support. My mother, although perhaps she still doesn't know it, is my biggest inspiration and the best example of the woman I aspire to be. My family in Mexico has accompanied me throughout this long journey. My mother and her husband, Antonio, were my pit stop every time I needed to refuel. My brothers, Marco and Johnny, and their families brightened my life every time I needed a break from school. And my father always silently encouraged me to pursue my unusual aspirations. He never required an explanation and he was always eager to believe in me.

Throughout the years, I have benefited from the loving mentorship of some unparalleled people. At the University of Texas, Charlie Hale, Isar Godreau, Sharmila Rudrappa, and Edmund T. Gordon left indelible imprints on my scholarship. My academic friends who did not go to UCSC were always jealous of the caring attention and endless patience with which the members of my committee guided me.

Mark Anderson has not only been the best advisor I could have hoped for, but year after year he has proven to be an amazing friend. Anna Tsing's sensitivity and passionate approach to academic work has continuously inspired me. I am deeply grateful for her faith in my work and feel incredibly privileged to have had her listen to my ideas and patiently redirect them. Lisa Rofel has been both stern and understanding. In her I found both analytical clarity and steadfast encouragement. In California, I also benefited from the intellectual guidance of Donna Haraway, Susan Harding, Jonathan Fox, Jim Clifford, Bettina N'gweno, and Andrew Matthews. Allyson Ramage and Fred Deakin, the gurus of the anthropology department, made it possible to jump through every single bureaucratic hoop.

This work would have been impossible without the generosity of the people of Cazucá and the *Bajo Mira*. Also, the trust with which the people of AFRODES and PCN welcomed me was critical not only for my scholarly pursuits, but for my personal and political journeys in Colombia more broadly. Specifically, I am indebted to Aurora Casierra, Luz Marina Becerra, Eusebio Mosquera, Jattan Mazzot, Geiler Romaña, Pedro Cortés, Helmer Quiñones, Diego Grueso, Carlos Rosero, José Santos Caicedo, Marilyn Machado, Francia Marquez, Lidoro Hurtado, Anderson Orobio, and Mailen Quiñones.

The four years that I spent in Colombia would have been unbearably difficult without the unorthodox family that sustained me there. *La Perrera*, my home and workspace; my refuge and getaway; and its fantastic members, Sonia, Marisol, Juliana, Eudes, and Erik, were critical in keeping me well fed and reasonably sane.

And finally, some people have had to bear this process more closely than others. Eduardo Restrepo has been the most generous mentor and friend on the planet. I simply have no words to thank him for everything. Shane Greene has offered his academic wisdom as often as he has showered me with his gentle and unwavering love. He had to stomach my tantrums and my doubts and he deserves credit as both a silent mentor and an amazing companion. He and Sonia Serna have seen me at my worst and at my best. They have nurtured and humored me when I needed it most. I simply cannot imagine writing this dissertation without Sonia's unparalleled intelligence, love, cooking, and sense of humor. As far as I'm concerned, I wrote this dissertation *with* her. And last but not least, I have to thank my beautiful little daughter, Lucía, for always finding ways to drag me away from my computer. This dissertation is for her.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The conjuncture

*Wars in Colombia have always been paid with lands.
Our history is one of incessant displacement, which is only interrupted at times.¹*
-Alfredo Molano, 2005

Since 1994, the total number of internally displaced people (IDPs)² in Colombia has surpassed three million, making it the largest in the world. This crisis has been brought about by the recent intensification of an ongoing civil war and recurrent cycles of violence that have stretched throughout most of Colombia's republican history. Most importantly, territorial control is at the heart of much of Colombia's violence, as *desplazados* are caught amidst competing projects that seek to literally ground political and economic power in territory (Ng'weno, 2007). As the State, two major guerrilla groups, right-wing paramilitaries and other private militias vie for power, increasing numbers of *desplazados* seek refuge in the substandard neighborhoods of the nation's major cities. Of these *desplazados*, a large and disproportionate number are Afrocolombians who had recently been granted communal land titles as members of black communities. This dissertation departs from this critical conjuncture, seeing displacement as a rupture experienced by black communities from Colombia's Pacific Coast.

¹ All translations are my own.

² I use the standard acronym IDP to refer to internally displaced people, who, contrary to refugees, have not exited their home country. It bears to note, however, that in Colombia the term that circulates in common parlance is *desplazado*, and institutionally, *personas en situación de desplazamiento*.

My research was initially motivated by an exploration of how this rupture had transformed two intertwined relationships between ethnic blackness and senses of place among these black communities: 1) the historical *longue durée* of community life along the rivers and tributaries of the Pacific basin that has entailed a close coexistence between rural black identities and the “aquatic space” organized by the river (Oslender 2002); 2) a more recent relationship organized by activists and codified in Law 70³ after the passage of Colombia’s new multicultural constitution, when the term *comunidades negras* (black communities) became a juridical category through which black cultural difference and territoriality were officially sanctioned. Through these two intertwined processes of territorialization, as activists eloquently point out, the right to be black has become inherently tied to securing a space in which to exercise that right (Grueso and Arroyo 2002; Escobar et al 1998).

However, having worked with Afrocolombian IDPs since 2003, I soon began to question the definition of displacement that circulated in humanitarian aid circles, which focused exclusively on the forced departure of people. Instead, I started to pay attention to a broader spectrum of deterritorialization processes, of which the literal movement of human bodies is but one manifestation. Understood as the disruption of an intricate pattern of social relations, cultural constructions, economic practices and political belonging (Ng’weno 2007), the concept of deterritorialization furnished me with a more solid analytical tool with which to understand this conjuncture. For this reason, I began to see that displacement was only one among other forms of

³ I explain the content of this law and the historical context within which it emerged below.

Afrocolombian deterritorialization. Consequently, I expanded my research to look at both forced displacement to Bogotá and competing landscaping projects on newly minted “black territories” on the Southern Pacific coast as inter-related forms of deterritorialization.

By undertaking ethnographic fieldwork with both black IDPs in the urban margins of Bogotá and members of black communities who have remained in rural communities on the Southern Pacific coast, this project explored the ruptures, continuities, and rearticulations in the discourses and grounded practices of ethno-territorial blackness.

The puzzle

In May of 2011 I received an invitation to the UN’s inaugural celebration of the International Year of Afrodescendants in Colombia. The event, a photographic exhibition in Bogotá’s most prestigious public library, was scheduled to open on May 20th, the eve of Colombia’s anniversary of the abolition of slavery. The invitation, which was jointly circulated by the UN’s High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the National Association for Displaced Afro-Colombians (AFRODES) included two pictures taken by the featured photographers.⁴ The first shows a middle-aged woman, barefoot and sitting on a plastic chair in the middle of a desolate and derelict room. Three young girls, also barefoot, are standing around her. The four of them look straight into the camera lens without the slightest hint of a smile. Although it is impossible to identify the nature of the room, the viewer is tempted to

⁴ The photographers were Alvaro Ybarra Zavala <http://www.alvaroybarra.com/>, and Juan Manuel Barrero Bueno <http://www.jmbb.net/>.

surmise that this was the women's home but is left wondering whether the marks on the wall behind them are the "normal" result of the passage of time and the scarcity of money, or the product of a relentless barrage of bullets. In the second photo we see an older man with his face opposite to the camera, hands behind his back, head tilted down, contemplating the room before him in a gesture of resignation. Strewn across the floor in front of him are the contents of a battered file cabinet and bookcase. Unlike the first picture in which we are unsure whether the deterioration is due to abandonment or violence, this room has unequivocally been the target of a concerted attack. Below the photos, there is a short testimony from a black woman who was forcefully displaced from her home in Chocó and now lives in Soacha, an impoverished municipality on the southern border of Bogotá:

When we look for a job we are discriminated against because we are black and women, and some of us have to sell our bodies to feed our children. We too are Colombians; we are brothers and sisters. What happened to us was very sudden, and we lost everything.

Over the last ten years, I have attended countless public events of this sort, which seek to denounce the pervasive human rights violations committed against Afro-Colombians.⁵ In many ways then, I found the elements in the woman's testimony and the photographers' images unsurprising: the emphasis on forced displacement, the denunciation of racial discrimination, the suddenness of the loss,

⁵ A thorough explanation of the various terms that signal blackness in Colombia today—*negro*, *comunidades negras*, *Afro-Colombianos*, *Afro-descendientes*, *negridades*—is beyond the scope of this work. However, it bears to clarify my own usage of these terms. In general, I try to respect people's preferences and so use each term whenever it was used. My own preference is for the term "black Colombians" because it has not yet been appropriated by the multicultural establishment, because it can signal both cultural and racial affiliations, and because it is heir to histories of both popular parlance and political mobilizations.

the overall experience of victimization. In fact, by 2011, most observers familiar with Colombia's armed conflict might have found this invitation unremarkable, yet another example of the recent escalation of a bloody war that continues to victimize innocent *campesinos* in new corners of the country.

My own involvement with AFRODES, with whom I have collaborated since the early 2000s when they were just a small grassroots organization of black IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons), almost blinded me to the uniqueness of this invitation. I had become so accustomed to seeing victimized representations of Afro-Colombians, to hearing narratives of loss and mourning, that the occasion for the event nearly escaped me. This was not a forum for humanitarian organizations; it was the annual commemoration of the National Afro-Colombianness Day (*Día Nacional de la Afro-Colombianidad*), allegedly an occasion for the celebration of Colombia's cultural diversity. It was therefore, in the language of Colombia's official multiculturalism, a date to celebrate blackness (*las negritudes*).

Surely, launching the UN's yearlong activities on the National Afro-Colombianness Day made sense both logistically and politically. It was a way to maximize the visibility of Afro-Colombian issues by concentrating the public's attention for a short period of time rather than diluting the impact of the celebration by sparsely scheduling events throughout the entire year. At the same time, this scheduling decision suggested that the UN's offices in Colombia hoped that their activities would dovetail with the Colombian State's official celebrations. But if we look beyond the practical scheduling decision, it is curious that these two

commemorations of blackness, which have significantly different histories, coalesced in what seemed like a shared political agenda.

On the one hand, Colombia's National Afro-Colombianness was decreed by Law 725 in 2001 with the stated objective of "recognizing the Colombian Nation's pluriethnicity and the Afro-Colombian population's need to recover its historical memory" (Congreso de Colombia, 2001). Its passage was in keeping with Colombia's "multicultural turn," which by 2001 had been more than a decade in the making and had become an institutionalized logic of the State. The law's wording makes explicit reference to ethnicity and history, but although it was passed on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery, it does not mention racial discrimination. In fact, the bulk of the events that local, departmental, and national governments have held to commemorate this day have until now focused on celebrations of "Afro-Colombian culture" such as music, gastronomy, and dance. The more deliberately political interventions have been academic conferences and public debates on issues such as Afro-Colombians' socioeconomic indicators and political participation. Thus, to date, the main outcome of the National Afro-Colombianness Day has been to solidify Colombia's image as an inclusive nation that celebrates cultural diversity and publicly recognizes the historical contributions of its various population subgroups.

The UN resolution that declared 2011 the International Year of Afrodescendants has a very different history. Passed in 2009, it takes as its two main antecedents the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the Durban

Declaration Against Racial Discrimination (2001). Although it shares some of Law 725's objectives, its primary intent is the elimination of racial discrimination. If one looks at the speeches delivered by top UN officers on occasion of the launching of the International Year, for example, it is clear that the UN's main interest is the eradication of racism. The statement given by Mirjana Najcevska, chair of the UN's Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, was quite transparent on this point:

Recently, I heard that the term race and racism should not be used. The justification is that there is only one human race and the use of the term race and racism perpetuates the problem. It was suggested that we would make significant progress toward eliminating the problems of prejudice if we avoid the use of that term. [...] [But] [t]he social construct of race exists even if genetics suggests the contrary. The problem of racism is connected with privilege and power related to race. I think that eliminating the words for the different races will not result in less discrimination or prejudice (Najcevska, 2010).

The overlap between Colombia's multicultural nation-building project and diasporic efforts to eliminate racism against people of African descent that is evident in this event has become quite common in Colombia. Although the State continues to be reticent about recognizing the existence of racism, the open denunciation of racial discrimination as well as the incorporation of anti-racism into the agendas of civil society and international aid organizations has become widespread. This intertwining of ethnic and anti-racist approaches is in part a product of what Colombian anthropologist Eduardo Restrepo short-handedly refers to as "the Durban effect" (Restrepo, 2009). In other words, the fact that the UN and the Colombian State coincided in their commemoration of the abolition of slavery—despite their

differential interests and histories of involvement with this historical event—reflects the strong reverberation that Durban’s anti-racist message has had on Colombian multicultural common sense.

But while this helps us understand the scheduling of the event, it does not explain its content. Why was a multilateral aid organization whose work focuses on refugees celebrating Afro-Colombianness? Why were AFRODES and the UNHCR jointly sponsoring said event? Why did the commemoration center on Afro-Colombian displacement rather than the usual celebration of culture? In short, when and how did putting the dismal conditions of Afro-Colombian IDPs on display become a logical and appropriate way to commemorate a day like this?

In order to make sense of this seemingly odd mix of sponsors and elements of commemoration, I make use of Hall’s theory of articulation. I contend that blackness is an articulation, that is, a contingent social formation made up of diverse elements that have become provisionally conjoined. I deliberately avoid giving this articulation a name. The main reason for this is that I am much less interested in what blackness *is* than in how it operates: how it is used, by whom, and for what ends. My primary objective in this dissertation is therefore to trace the contextual and contingent meanings that blackness has taken since the 1990s in Colombia, investigating the specific conditions that have made those particular meanings possible, and reflecting on the political openings and closures brought about by said definitions.

The object: Articulations of blackness

My point of departure is the multicultural articulation of blackness, which emerged and solidified in Colombia in the early 1990s following a Constitutional Assembly that substantially reconfigured the nation's structures of alterity. This is a suitable starting point because it is the moment at which blackness became "visible" as a constituent but marginalized element of the Colombian nation (Friedemann, 1984). Before then, black Colombians were ambiguously included in the nation as both racialized (non-modern) others and fellow (modern) nationals (Restrepo, 2004; Wade, 1993). Although the pervasiveness of racism had spurred some of the first mobilizations of black political projects well before the multicultural turn, the imaginary of the Colombian nation as a product of *mestizaje*, which had been dominant since the middle of the Twentieth Century, tended to marginalize or discredit them. In other words, although in practice black Colombians (as well as non-black Colombians) were routinely racialized, the recognition of these processes of racialization and the denunciation of anti-black racism was nearly impossible under the logic of *mestizaje*.⁶

⁶ Although a thorough explanation of the concept of *mestizaje* is beyond the scope of this work, I provide a brief overview of its history and usage in Latin America. In essence, *mestizaje* was an inversion of the idea that miscegenation—or racial mixture—resulted in degeneration. In their efforts to cast the futures of their nations in a more favorable light, nationalist thinkers throughout Latin America reinterpreted miscegenation as a quintessentially Latin American contribution. Taking the indian, black, and European elements as constitutive building blocks, *mestizaje* extolled the virtues of each while claiming that their conjoining would result in a far improved subject that had magically shed the original vices of its components.

This positive reinterpretation of miscegenation, championed by immortalized scholars like Brazil's Freyre (1938) and Mexico's Vasconcelos (1948), allowed Latin America to become a potential candidate for modernity at a time when European fascism and its eugenic ideas raised important questions about the politics of white supremacy. Having turned scientific racism on its head, *mestizaje* made an important and provocative political contribution to the global scenario of the 1930s (Skidmore 1993). Furthermore, at a time of rising U.S. hegemony and imperialist threat, *mestizaje*

This was the case until the “multicultural turn” that swept most of Latin America in the early 1990s. In Colombia, official multiculturalism amounted to designating the nation’s ethnic others, that is, identifying allegedly coherent “communities” with “cultures” that were distinct from the dominant national culture (Restrepo 2004; Wade, 1993).⁷ In the case of black Colombians, their status as ethnic others was considered to be the product of particular histories that had unfolded in specific territories resulting in unique forms of political organization and traditional production practices (Restrepo, Forthcoming). In this sense, ethnic blackness⁸ was always already a statement about black people’s practices of territoriality. This shift is noteworthy not only because of the profound differences in the ways in which blackness was articulated before and after the onset of multiculturalism, but also because this was the moment at which the mobilization of organized “black” politics burgeoned. It is therefore the clearest moment at which “black” subjects began crafting political projects around various discourses of “blackness.”

solidified a sense of nationalism that refuted accusations of racial inferiority and revalorized Latin American cultural uniqueness (Euraque et al 2004).

In the period after World War II *mestizaje* reigned supreme across Latin America as the foundation of national identities. In some places—such as Mexico—the *mestizo* was composed of only European and Indian, while in others—such as Brazil—the black element was recognized and valorized. In some places, *mestizo* nationalism was taken up by the state in both its rhetoric and its policies (Vaughn 2004), while in others it became sedimented into common sense as a revolutionary idea (Gould 1998). Despite these differences, *mestizaje* acquired a number of common characteristics that included the celebration of a homogenous national subject, a re-writing of colonial history that tended to erase the memory of racial domination emphasizing instead the long history of inter-racial *convivencia*, and a profound sense of racial exceptionalism that cast Latin America in a favorable light when compared to its neighbor to the North.

⁷ This blanket ethnicization of difference was derived from a long history of ethnicizing indigeneity. By the 1900s, the *indio* was already conceived as the quintessential ethnic subject, and therefore served as the model for ethnic difference during the Constituent Assembly of 1991 (cf. Bocarejo 2008). Although an analysis of the ethnicization of indigeneity is beyond the scope of this work, it bears to highlight that this too has been produced and is neither natural nor necessary (cf. Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009)

⁸ In this text I use the terms ethnic blackness and ethno-territorial blackness interchangeably.

However, in the late 1990s there was a fundamental change in war dynamics that unexpectedly triggered a rearticulation of ethnic blackness. Although many scholars of the multicultural moment have remarked on this moment as a rupture, few have analyzed its consequences for what had been up until then the regnant articulation of blackness. My work focuses on this transition in order to argue that since then, the ethno-territorial incarnation of blackness has become articulated with two other ongoing processes: (1) the emergence of a politics of victimization that followed the intensification of Colombia's armed conflict, and (2) the expansion and deepening of African diasporic routes of exchange that was spurred by the Durban Conference. In this section, I trace the particular histories of each of these constituent elements in some detail. I do this in order to give the reader the necessary context with which to better understand the specificities of the Colombian political landscape, but above all, to show that the connections that have congealed between them have been contingent rather than necessary.

Following Hall, I stress that this particular articulation of blackness requires specific conditions of existence, which in this case include the global circulation of notions of indigeneity, the escalation of the internal war, the 1991 Constitutional reform, and the Durban Conference, among others. I do not see the task at hand as a description of a steady state, but rather I strive to trace the journeys that the ethnic articulation of blackness has taken in the last twenty years.

A second important characteristic of articulations is their political open-endedness. That is, they are not aligned with any given political project *a priori*.

Thus, in order to get a sense of the political projects that are enabled and disabled by any given articulation of blackness it is necessary to examine the contingent connections between its various components, their associated practices, and the various actors that take it up for different purposes. This requires being attuned to power and to the contextual uses that blackness is put to, asking how it operates at given moments and in given places and exploring who mobilizes it and for what purpose.

The final characteristic of articulations that I think important to highlight here is that their constitutive elements do not become identical or dissolve into one another. Rather, “each retains its distinct determinations and conditions of existence.” Thus, I do not claim, for example, that ethno-territorial blackness has been superseded by a politics of victimization; or that diasporic anti-racism is the new, unchallenged, and dominant element in black multiculturalism today. I follow Hall in acknowledging that each of these elements has conserved its particular characteristics, but am particularly interested in analyzing how they also operate together, not as an identity, but as an impermanent unity with internal distinctions.

Throughout this text I reflect on the impermanent nature of blackness. In addition to tracing and assessing some of the uses that it has been put to in recent years, I imagine its possible futures. I point out some of its seemingly ineludible pitfalls and warn about some of its imminent risks, but still, I contend that its political possibilities remain open. Ultimately, I sustain that blackness, like other articulations

is “a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time” (Hall, 1996: 141); it is thus, a political formation “without guarantees.”

Ethno-territorial blackness

The emergence of ethno-territorial blackness in Colombia is by now a well-known phenomenon. A number of scholarly works have thoroughly documented its production by tracing the ethnicization of blackness, its associated geographies, its place in the national structures of alterity, and its institutionalization as a State logic (Agudelo, 2005; Oslender, 2008; Eduardo Restrepo, 2004). Although these works focus on different aspects of its emergence, most of them agree on a few key elements that provided the necessary conditions for its existence. These elements include: 1. the increasing speed at which large capital and State development initiatives encroached on the lands that black people on the Pacific had historically inhabited; 2. the political opening presented by the 1991 Constituent Assembly; and 3. the growing popularity that indigenous rights gained in international spaces during this same period.

Instead of repeating this history, I wish to point out a few important things about ethno-territorial blackness. First, ethno-territorial blackness is itself an articulation. It was sutured together by the particularities of Colombia’s national racial formations, regional resource struggles, and global indigeneity at a strategic political moment. At the same time, it would be mistaken to see it as an artifice.

Certainly, “black communities”⁹ are not essential ethnic others, but the characteristics attributed to them as an ethnic group do resonate with their lived experience. The second point I wish to stress then is that black ethno-territoriality gained traction not only because it provided many black Colombians with a strategic tool to protect their livelihoods, but also, because it is rooted in deep histories of landscaping practices¹⁰ on the Pacific.

Finally, I wish to enumerate some of the most important political consequences of ethno-territorial blackness. The most widely known of these was a landmark piece of legislation, Law 70, which granted black communities cultural and territorial rights and resulted in the collective titling of more than five million hectares of land to date. This was an unprecedented piece of legislation across Latin America. But Law 70 was much more than a legislative victory. In the process of convincing themselves and others that black Colombians were in fact an ethnic group with territorial attachment similar to that of indigenous groups, black activists unleashed a process that fundamentally transformed Colombian common sense. On the one hand, Law 70 challenged the nation’s structures of alterity by legitimating black Colombians as *ethnic* others. On the other hand, it solidified Colombia’s racialized geographies by literally demarcating cartographies of blackness. As a

⁹ The term “black communities” was a product of Law 70 and the multicultural discourse of blackness more broadly. I put it in scare quotes here in order to highlight that it was explicitly produced as a juridical category that designates collective subjects of multicultural rights. Hereon, however, I eliminate the use of scare quotes whenever I use the term.

¹⁰ In Chapter 3 I elaborate the notion of “landscaping projects” as the material and representational practices whereby configurations of humans and nonhumans are created and maintained across a terrain. In that chapter I show that landscaping projects are at the heart of disputes over meanings and uses of blackness.

result of this demarcation, blackness became paradigmatically associated with rural, Pacific, and riverine communities. Overall, Law 70 and its attendant political effervescence from below and institutionalization from above resulted in the naturalization of the once unthinkable link between blackness and ethnicity. In this way, ethno-territorial blackness became the foundation of black multicultural common sense.

Politics of victimization

In 1996, a paramilitary attack on the municipality of Riosucio, Chocó, marked the beginning of a brutal wave of violence that has since enveloped the Pacific region. My argument in this dissertation hinges on the contention that this irruption of violence into the region created an altogether new conjuncture that brought about a rearticulation of ethno-territorial blackness. Although land disputes have lied at the heart of Colombia's violent history for at least half a century, during the 1990s crucial changes in land disputes and war dynamics resulted in the incorporation of the Pacific Region into a renewed competition for territory. Most notably, the emergence of far-right paramilitary groups debilitated the major guerrilla groups, FARC and ELN, to such an extent that territorial dominance of new areas acquired critical importance in war tactics. As both the military and the armed groups sought to establish their command over key trading posts (for drug and arms traffic) and over land on which to establish profitable activities to fund the war, they entered previously peaceful regions and significantly reorganized Colombia's geographies of violence.

On the Pacific, this meant a transformation of the region from “*refugio de paz*” (refuge of peace) to “*pesadilla de guerra*” (nightmare of war) (Restrepo 2005). By the end of the 1990s, the celebratory mood that had reigned in the region turned sour. Members of newly recognized black communities were being forcefully displaced by the thousands; black activists were being systematically silenced through intimidation or selective murder; collective territories were being emptied of their rightful owners and used as military training grounds, coca plantations, war trenches, or contraband trade centers. In this new context, it became imperative for black organizations to rework their political strategy. Confronted with the dire reality of being caught in crossfire, black activists and organizations that had formerly mobilized ethno-territorial blackness turned their attention to the preservation of human life. They dedicated their work to denouncing abuses, forestalling displacements, and protecting local leaders from death and intimidation. This implied several important changes in their political maneuvers. First, they substituted the language of ethnic rights with that of human rights. Second, they expanded their range of interlocutors to include international actors such as watchdog groups, human rights courts, and U.S. congress members. Third, rather than continue negotiating directly with the Colombian State, they re-routed their political actions through these newly established international networks.

One of the main outcomes of this escalated “turf war” (Ng’weno, 2007) was an alarming number of internally displaced persons.¹¹ But although the consequences

¹¹ The most recent government figures estimate the total number of IDPs since 1997 at 3.7 million

of forced displacement have undoubtedly been devastating, this unfortunate situation also ushered in unforeseen possibilities for black Colombians. As millions of people from across the country were forced into refugee camps and substandard neighborhoods in major urban centers, organizations of *desplazados* proliferated to such an extent that they soon became an important political force that the State had to contend with. While this may appear like a logical result of the sheer number of IDPs, forced displacement intersected with ethno-territorial blackness in interesting and even promising ways. For example, the mass movement of black Colombians to regions considered “white” or “Euro-Andean” in Colombia’s deeply racialized geographies resulted in the agglutination of black IDPs into a burgeoning social movement. This occurred because forced displacement facilitated the encounter of a very diverse set of black Colombians who due to their ethnic, intra-regional, and class differences might not have otherwise met or shared a common political agenda.

Diasporic anti-racism

African diasporic politics have had currency in Colombia at least since the 1960s when small groups of (mostly urban) black Colombians closely followed the U.S. Civil Rights Movement and were well aware of the virulent anti-black racism of colonial regimes in Africa (Wade, 1996). Although these struggles did not directly interpellate them as diasporic subjects, these groups of black Colombians recognized

(Acción Social, 2011) This figure, however, only includes individuals who reported being displaced and were confirmed as such and entered into the national *Sistema de Información para la Población Desplazada*. The estimates made by CODHES, the most reputable non-governmental institution that works on displacement in Colombia, include all individuals who reported being displaced irrespective of whether the State approved their testimony as true. Thus, CODHES reports a total of 5.2 million IDPs from 1985 to December 2010.

that their own experiences of social marginalization and racial discrimination were intrinsically linked to these global processes. The clearest example of this diasporic recognition is the case of Colombia's oldest black organization, *Movimiento Cimarrón*, which tellingly emerged in the 1970s as a study group called SOWETO and whose work focused on anti-racism and equal citizenship rights. They, like most of the other organizations that emerged during this period,¹² took the then-globally-circulating discourses of blackness as their primary referents. These discourses, which tended to privilege the African American and Caribbean experiences (and their particular distillations of African-ness), defined blackness as the common experience of the Middle Passage, slavery, and racial discrimination.

In addition to the surfacing of these various organizations, during the 1970s a number of important black conferences and *encuentros* were held in different parts of the country. Some of these, such as the 1975 *Congreso Nacional de Negritudes* in Bogotá and the 1976 conference on *Aportes del Negro a la Cultura Americana*, were regional or national in scope. But others had broader diasporic ambitions. Such was the case of the three *Congresos de la Cultura Negra de las Américas*, which were held in Cali (1977), Panama City (1980), and São Paulo (1983) respectively. These conferences brought together representatives from all over the Americas (including the non-hispanic Caribbean), Africa, and Europe to assess the social and cultural reality of Afrodescendants in the Americas. The conferences were an important

¹² Some of these included the *Centro para la Investigación de la Cultura Negra*, the *Fundación Colombiana de Investigaciones Folclóricas* and the *Centro de Estudios Afrocolombianos* (Agudelo, 2005)

milestone in continental diasporic politics, and many contemporary black activists still identify them as critical moments of political becoming (Rahier, 2012).

Still, despite their importance for the eventual consolidation of a Colombian black social movement, the activities of these first black organizations and international conferences failed to fully incorporate black Colombians into the global circuits of African diasporic exchange. This was due to two primary reasons. First, the political agendas and notions of blackness that circulated at these venues did not gain currency among the bulk of black Colombians because they simply didn't speak to their social realities. In a country deeply imbued with the ideology of *mestizaje* and with a mostly rural and poor population, discussions about African culture or the history of slavery in the Americas were seen as the privilege of a few, educated, elites. Second, the identification that these elites made of themselves (and other black Colombians) as African diasporic subjects was not reciprocated. In other words, Africans, Caribbeans, and African-Americans involved in diasporic politics had little knowledge of black South Americans and therefore tended to ignore them as members of the African diaspora. This asymmetry, which was undoubtedly due to the uneven nature of North-South exchanges, unsurprisingly mapped onto diasporic routes of exchange as well. Most of the recognition of racial sameness was therefore one-sided, and in the case of Colombia this meant that the cultural and historical referents of diasporic blackness always came from elsewhere.

I do not wish to make an inventory of the symbolic or material exchanges that have taken place across the African diaspora, nor am I proposing a new genealogy of

diasporic blackness (although I do think that work on that subject remains to be done). Quite simply, what I wish to point out is that although black Colombians have been mobilizing African diasporic politics since the 1970s, it wasn't until Durban's Conference Against Racism in 2001 that they were publicly interpellated (by non-South American blacks) as fellow "Afrodescendants."¹³ Durban was a watershed moment in that it made black Colombians visible to others as African diasporic subjects, and in this sense it facilitated a process of *mutual* diasporic recognition that had not taken place until then. By Durban, I am not only referring to the ten days during which representatives of UN member states and civil society organizations worldwide discussed the global manifestations of racism. I use "Durban" as shorthand to refer to the political effervescence that preceded it as organizations prepared for the conference; to the conference itself and the unique encounters that took place there; and to the commitments and relationships—both formal and informal—that followed from it.

Durban had several key characteristics that are important to note here. The first was its central attention to racism. After a decade of institutionalized ethno-territorial blackness and ample scientific proof on the biological falsehood of "race," overt reference to race—even as a social construct—had become a rarity in Colombia. In fact, many black activists deliberately eschewed it, arguing that its usage only reified a harmful notion that created false divisions within the human race.

¹³ In fact, this term was first coined in the context of the Durban conference and has gained wide currency as a politically correct category of blackness throughout Latin America since then. In Colombia in particular, it is being replaced by the shorter term "*Afro*," which tends to conflate the political genealogies of the terms Afro-Colombian and Afro-descendant. In my opinion, *afro* is often used as a depoliticized and near-euphemistic way to reference blackness.

By insisting on the importance of preserving the social category of “race,” Durban was critical in reintroducing and legitimating its usage in discussions about justice for people of African descent. Second, although the conference was conceptualized as a broad discussion of “all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance” and evaluated its consequences for many non-white population groups, at Durban, African descendants were identified as the population group that had been and continues to be most severely affected by racism. This further naturalized the overlap between anti-racism and African diasporic politics, which is evident in the fact that the majority of black organizations in Colombia today refer to the Durban Declaration as a landmark international document that guides Afro-Colombian claims. The third effect has to do with the memory of slavery. At Durban, the transatlantic slave trade was a central point of discussion that elicited conversations about collective memory and pending reparations. These conversations, which had been rare in Colombia until then, sparked unprecedented debates about affirmative action and historical reparations, and even inspired a few incipient (and unsystematic) initiatives such as university quotas and scholarships for Afro-Colombians (cf. Mosquera & Barcelos, 2007).

The field

Tracing every possible meaning that blackness has acquired during this period would be an impossible task. For this reason, I center my inquiry on two spaces of socio-political action where blackness is articulated: political projects and subject formation. The first is defined by the space of organized politics, which is inhabited

by a number of organizations that explicitly identify themselves as “black” and mobilize political projects on that basis. This is an uneven terrain that is made up of highly dissimilar organizations with broadly differing political objectives and trajectories. It is therefore important to carefully outline which organizations I worked with and why.

My fieldwork closely followed the political work of two of Colombia’s main black organizations—PCN (The Process of Black Communities) and AFRODES (The National Association of Displaced Afro-Colombians). The first one was created within the context of the ethno-territorial mobilization of the early 1990s. In fact, PCN was the single most active organization in the collective land titling process for black communities. PCN is an umbrella organization that groups numerous ethno-territorial organizations of various scales nationwide. Although PCN has been at the center of several academic investigations (Escobar, 2008; Asher, 2009; Oslender, 2008; Agudelo, 2005), most of these investigations analyze the work of the national organization rather than any of its local affiliates. Although I have collaborated with PCN’s *Equipo de Coordinación Nacional* (National Coordination Team) for some years, my fieldwork was not with them, but rather with one of its local affiliates, namely the community council of the lower Mira River, which I will refer to as the *Bajo Mira*.¹⁴

¹⁴ As I explain in Chapter 2, the *Bajo Mira* as a distinct area of the Mira River was delimited in the process of collective land titling in the area. It is therefore always associated with the existence of a community council and a collective territory.

Although the political work of the *Bajo Mira* follows many of the main tenets of PCN, its focus, strategies, and scale of action are significantly different from its parent organization. First, the community council of the *Bajo Mira* is a product of Law 70. In this sense, it is not a grassroots organization that emerged spontaneously, but rather its creation was prompted by PCN's organizing work. Second, although some of its members are well-seasoned activists who participate in PCN's national and international activities, most of them are local *campesinos* (peasants) whose political trajectories began precisely with their participation in the community council. Overall, the community council is a local ethno-territorial organization concerned primarily with improving the life conditions of its constituency and protecting its titled territory.

AFRODES too is an umbrella organization that groups ninety local affiliates nationwide. However, its affiliates include not only black ethno-territorial organizations, but also associations of IDPs. Because their focus is on the forced displacement of Afro-Colombians, their field of political action is in some senses narrower than PCNs. In practice, however, AFRODES has become one of the most outspoken political actors on all matters related to Afro-Colombians' rights. Although I am familiar with the work of several of its affiliates nationwide, my fieldwork centered on its two Bogotá offices. The first of these is the national office, which I will refer to simply as AFRODES. The national office is made up of an elected board and occasionally hires consultants to design and execute various projects. Their political work consists primarily of lobbying high-level government

offices, but they dedicate much of their time to grant writing and training delegates in their affiliate organizations on human rights' protection.

The second office in Bogotá with which I did fieldwork is ABCUN, which stands for AFRODES Bogotá-Cundinamarca. This is AFRODES' regional office, which was explicitly created to attend to the urgent needs of black IDPs who arrive in the capital. Technically, ABCUN is not in Bogotá, but in Soacha, the impoverished municipality to the south where thousands of IDPs have relocated. ABCUN is truly a grassroots organization. Both its affiliates and the members of its board are self-identified black IDPs with no prior political training who arrived to Bogotá from every corner of Colombia. ABCUN's work is much more focused on soliciting and disbursing emergency humanitarian aid and they routinely negotiate with city-level government offices that deal specifically with forced displacement. However, they have also acquired a reputation as a "cultural" organization that preserves, transmits, and represents "Afro-Colombian traditions" for younger generations and for non-black *Bogotanos* who are unfamiliar with the Colombian Pacific's "cultural wealth." Towards this end they sponsor a dance troupe, a traditional music school, a women's handcrafts collective, and are regularly invited to participate in events that require "authentic" displays of "Afrocolombian culture."

This is only a small patch of the complex and variegated landscape of black organized politics. Since the multicultural turn, black organizations of all scales and political affiliations have sprouted in every corner of Colombia, making it nearly impossible to make general characterizations of this field. However, my focus on

AFRODES, PCN and their respective affiliates—ABCUN and *Bajo Mira*—makes sense for three basic reasons. First, together with two other national-level organizations—Movimiento Cimarrón and CNOA (The National Conference of Afro-Colombian Organizations), AFRODES and PCN are the most visible, reputable, and politically active black organizations in Colombia, today. In addition, PCN and AFRODES are the only two organizations that sustain an international lobbying campaign. Unlike Cimarrón and CNOA, African diasporic political alliances are an explicit item on AFRODES’ and PCN’s agenda.¹⁵ Finally, because of their work’s respective emphasis on territory and forced displacement, PCN and AFRODES—and in particular their local affiliates—are excellent sites to observe grounded practices of emplacement and the changing role of ethnicity and territoriality in emergent articulations of blackness.

The political disputes that are played out on this space of organized politics have tangible effects on circulating discourses of blackness, which in turn impact the daily experiences and practices of subjects that are interpellated and identify as black. This space of subjectivities constitutes the second patch of blackness that I focus on. For example, before Colombia’s multicultural turn, which was the product of a protracted dispute over the meanings of cultural difference and the designation of cultural others, people seldom imagined blackness as a *cultural* diacritic. Today, that culturalist definition of blackness is ubiquitous and has become common sense. As a

¹⁵ In fact, for a brief moment they joined their international lobbying efforts and opened a joint AFRODES-PCN-USA office in Washington D.C. This was a short-lived effort because of both personal and political differences between members of the two organizations.

result, subjects who identify themselves as black now regularly imagine and produce themselves as cultural others. But this relationship also operates in the inverse direction. Sometimes the daily experiences that individuals or groups undergo in a disarticulated fashion are extrapolated and turned into the substance of broader political struggles. This is in fact the case that I trace in detail in Chapter 5, where disparate experiences of victimization have become articulated to sedimented and emergent notions of blackness and then crafted into a self-aware political project. My point here is that the relationship between these two registers of analysis—subjectivities and political projects—travels in both directions.

Because my research field is made up of organizations and their people, it could be said that this is an ethnography of “activists” or of a “social movement.” However, I do not think that these categories adequately describe my approach. Saying that this is an ethnography of activists is too narrow, whereas claiming that it is an ethnography of a social movement is an overstatement. What I strive to do here is to provide an analysis of certain patches of a social movement, trying not to divorce activists from their various forms of activism. Thus, I look at both activists’ personal trajectories and the ways in which these trajectories congeal in particular political projects. Stylistically, as well as analytically, this implies tacking back and forth between critical biographical descriptions and discourse analysis of organizations. This is a way of highlighting the two-directional impact of people’s daily experiences and their political work.

This approach helps me understand why certain discourses of blackness circulate more than others, if and how they resonate with people's daily experiences, and how these experiences in turn shape organized politics. I see this as an attempt to move beyond simply taking what organizations do and say they do at face value, which has been a recurrent problem in analyses of social movements (cf. Wolford, 2010). It is also a way of fleshing out the category "activist" by underscoring the uneven participation, hierarchical positions, and varied experiences of differently positioned actors. And finally, it is a way of simultaneously situating individual agents in broader social processes and tracing the ways in which they impact them.

Naturally, this method has clear limitations that must be made explicit. First, this is not an ethnography of a community, a coherent social movement, or even a particular organization. It does not outline a collectivity of sorts, nor does it trace the quotidian experiences of people in a delimited space—whether literal or figurative. The experiences and patchy activisms that I trace are too dispersed to be attributable to a collectivity. Second, I do not collect or analyze the experiences of people that do not in some way or another—to greater or lesser degree—participate in this patchy social movement. In this sense, it does not reflect the realities of "ordinary" (ie. politically unaffiliated) people. However, my back-and-forth approach between ethnography and biography, and between organizations and their people, seeks to question this very divide between activists and "ordinary" people.

Organizations are groups of people seeking to mobilize political projects, they congeal discourses and subjectivities, and in them one can trace the traffic between

the two. This is one reason why they constitute an ideal research site to analyze articulations of blackness. The second reason is much more contextual to the case at hand. As I explained above, in Colombia the first “visible” articulation of blackness as a politicized subjectivity emerged in the context of the multicultural turn. But this was a State-sponsored shift as much as the result of activists’ work. It was therefore an unprecedented moment in which black organizations were invited to negotiate with the State and many activists heeded the call by creating organizations that met the new requirements for political participation. As a result, much of the dynamism that had been dispersed in other kinds of political work—such as artistic projects, labor unions, and peasant associations for example—was reconfigured as black organizations. In other words, since the onset of the multicultural turn black organizations became the preferred site that concentrated much of the political effervescence around blackness in Colombia.

The method: Resolving blackness

Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter around it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? they say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or, I fought at Mechanicsville; or, Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word.
-W.E.B. Du Bois, 1903

When I asked the current president of AFRODES to narrate her arrival in Bogotá after being forced to leave her hometown of Condoto, Chocó she recalled many difficult experiences. She spoke nostalgically about everything that she left behind. She enumerated the difficulties of arriving empty-handed in an unknown city. But

mostly, she remembered how that move had impacted her experience of being black. In Condoto, she said, “we were all black and we knew it, but there was no reason to speak about it.” In Bogotá, however, things were different. In fact, she recalled the specific moment in which she realized that she was different from others, or in her own words, that she was “made to feel different; different but inferior.”

I was looking for an apartment. I was still with my ex-husband and we looked at newspaper ads and marked several places. Then I called them to set up an appointment. I was so excited that day that I went to see the apartment. And then I got there and saw the rental sign on the window, but when the woman saw me she said, “no, we don’t rent to *negros*.” I felt like my heart dropped. That was such a horrible experience; it was a blow. I walked away and then sat on the curb and cried.

Her story reminded me of the first chapter of Du Bois’ *The Souls of Black Folk* in which he recalls his own moment of realizing that he was “made to feel different” because he was black. As the epigraph for this section shows, for Du Bois this realization was accompanied by the distinct sensation that his blackness was a problem.

My analytical approach to blackness departs from Du Bois’s insight that blackness is a problem: an embodied problem, a spiritual problem, an epochal problem. For Du Bois, blackness is a problem inasmuch as its production results in harmful situations that need to be overcome. It is a problem because it marks differences and assigns asymmetrical places in the world according to those marks of difference. And although these marks of difference are the source of both pride and injury, and the basis of both repression and rebellion, ultimately, they assign uneven

privileges. They parcel out worlds. In other words, blackness continues to be a critical diacritic.

My approach to blackness as a problem sees it as a category of difference that is over-determined and contingent. With this I mean that it is not always nor exclusively a racial category. Or an ethnic category. Or a category at all. As it traverses across time and space blackness articulates with other categories of difference and becomes more or less salient. As such, blackness is a problem in a second sense of the word: it is an object of inquiry whose formation must be actively investigated.

This dissertation is an attempt to do just that. I try not to assume what blackness is from the onset, but rather to investigate its different manifestations in concrete places and at specific moments. However, it is important to recall that its meanings and uses are not entirely open. My analysis, like all analyses, is situated at a particular historical conjuncture. And as such, it is heir to prior iterations of blackness that have left an imprint on current ones. This approach follows Stuart Hall's famous assertion that blackness is not a floating signifier; that is, it cannot be anything, anywhere, at any moment (Hall, 1997). And yet, its meanings cannot be predicted *a priori*.

If blackness is a problem in Du Bois's sense of the word, then the most logical response should be to resolve it. If the embodied difference that interpellates subjects as black is experienced as a problem, then blackness requires a solution. Such a solution might entail finding ways to expose and do away with the uneven privileges

that are assigned whenever blackness is invoked. In this sense, the problem of blackness is without a doubt a problem of hierarchical difference, of asymmetrical power. And therefore, its solution is necessarily revolutionary; it requires a substantial undermining, an outright inversion, or a deliberate appropriation of these asymmetrical privileges.

But if we also think of blackness in the second sense of the word that I outlined above—as an inquiry that must be investigated—then, the process of resolving it is not as conclusive. For that second meaning of “problem,” I wish to evoke the second meaning of the word “resolve,” which though older, is not as well known. The word’s Latin root, *resolvere*, refers to the repeated process of loosening and undoing. The act of re-solving therefore describes a cycle of settling and unsettling; that is, of arriving at temporary “resolutions” only to undo them over and over again. In this sense, any given articulation of blackness can be thought of as a temporary solution that will inevitably be undone and reconfigured. Thus, resolving the problem of blackness necessarily involves the work of constructing and mobilizing provisional meanings *and* constantly destabilizing and remaking these meanings.

Rather than seek out a single definition in an attempt to pin it down once and for all, the process of resolving blackness requires analyzing any of its particular articulations as forces that are made up of various components and act in different directions. I see the entire analytical process as being made up of three steps. The first step involves an examination of the stated claims of any given articulation. By

definition, articulations are enunciations, outright statements that must be made with a certain degree of firmness, with a certain degree of purpose. This step therefore requires an investigation of the more stable meanings that an articulation acquires and of the determination (or resolve) with which those meanings are mobilized. The second involves an active investigation of the constituent elements that make up any given articulation. In this sense, blackness must be resolved in the same way that physicists resolve vectors into their components. The final step involves an exploration of its dissolution, whether this takes the form of a dispersion into its constitutive elements, of a reconfiguration into a new articulation, or of a total disintegration. And then, the process begins again.

Admittedly, the two meanings of the term resolve that I have chosen to emphasize are not simply divergent but contradictory—settling a matter and undoing it. Although this might be read as an endlessly ambiguous position that refuses to take a firm stand, the notion of resolve is not meant to enable a fickle or uncommitted analysis. Rather, it is a way to remain aware of contingency and impermanence while also mindful of the definitiveness with which articulations are mobilized. Towards this end, it is important to recall that resolve is not only a verb but also a noun. And while the first describes a dynamic process, the second denotes a firm determination to do something. In the field of politics both qualities are of essence. Flexibility without grit results in aimlessness; purpose without limberness eventually breaks. Overall then, the notion of resolve enables me to think about blackness as both a

political and an analytical problem. In this sense, resolving blackness refers to a limber but determined mode of analysis *and* of doing politics.

Outline of the chapters

I find the concept of resolve helpful in tracing the emergent articulations of blackness in contemporary Colombia. At an analytical level, I aim to resolve the problem of blackness by following the three steps that I outlined above. First, I examine the multicultural articulation of blackness (Chapter 2) and analyze its constitutive components (Chapter 3). I then trace its partial dissolution (Chapter 4) and the process whereby it is gradually transforming into a new articulation (Chapter 5). But although the dominant narrative of the text stresses contingency and open-endedness, in the final chapter (Chapter 6) I evoke the conclusive potential of resolutions.

Overall, this concept allows me to evoke the interplay between settling and unsettling that lies at the heart of my analysis and to describe the process whereby provisional meanings of blackness are constructed, mobilized, destabilized, and remade.

Chapter 2 begins with a critical description of the emergence and practice of ethnic blackness in a paradigmatic black community in Southwestern Colombia: that of the *Bajo Mira*. Although much has been written on the multicultural turn in Colombia and more specifically on its impact on the recognition of black communities as ethnic others, my emphasis here is not on national-level politics but rather on the concrete consequences that these legal *resolutions* have had for the people of the *Bajo Mira*. In this chapter I use some of the main tenets of Law 70 as the central analytical lens with which to dissect the impact of this articulation of

blackness. My purpose is to denaturalize the culturalist meanings of blackness that this ethnic articulation produced and to evaluate its political successes and limitations.

The settling of blackness into a territorialized form of ethnic difference entailed its articulation with many other forces that need to be carefully analyzed. Like a physicist who *resolves* a vector's force into its constitutive parts, in Chapter 3 I analyze the ways in which ethnic blackness has become entangled with global environmental discourses and its most recent iterations of the noble savage. To do this, I take a close look at land tenure and agrarian practices on the titled territory of the *Bajo Mira*. Specifically, I examine the three modalities of oil palm cultivation that co-exist today: the agro-industrial plantation, independent farming, and small-scale cooperatives. In order to analyze how each of these agricultural modalities expands and retreats at different moments across this territory, I elaborate the concept of *competing landscaping projects*. This term allows me to look at the joint formation of humans and non-humans, but it also helps to reveal the ways in which agricultural practices are not simply innocent livelihood efforts, but also fierce struggles to fix people and plants in particular relations of power. Overall, I argue that the landed character of ethnic blackness has resulted in an articulation of green capitalism and multiculturalism and I outline its principal consequences for the recipients of ethnic land rights.

In Chapter 4 I analyze the consequences of the sudden threat on ethno-territorial blackness that has been brought about by the shifting geographies of violence in Colombia. I first trace the outlines of a new historical conjuncture on the

Colombian Pacific in order to argue that in these circumstances the ethno-territorial articulation of blackness has begun to come undone. Like chemical substances, this particular solution is being broken up under the increased fire of the war. However, rather than become completely disintegrated, I argue that ethno-territorial blackness is being transformed; it is *resolving* itself into new forms. Specifically, I show that although the recognition of ethnic rights initially entailed a rigid spatialization of blackness in Colombia (which equated being black with being rural, Pacific, and riverine), the *de facto* deterritorialization of black communities—which followed mass displacement—has challenged this spatialization in interesting ways. I analyze the political mobilization that emerged in response to this dramatic situation to show that in addition to unhinging place and culture in significant ways, the experience of forced displacement triggered an important change in the ways in which race and ethnicity are thought about and employed. In essence, I contend that the defense of ethno-territorial blackness in Colombia has enabled rather than hindered a more open denunciation of anti-black racism.

Chapter 5 examines one of the more obvious transformations of ethnic blackness in the moment following this new historical conjuncture. Namely, I trace a significant transformation in the struggle for ethnic rights, which in the face of emergency turned into a struggle for the defense of human rights. Analogously, I examine a shift in the formation of black subjects from ethnic others into racialized victims. Specifically, I trace the emergence of the *afro-desplazado*, a simultaneously racialized and victimized subject that is being produced by various technologies of

difference. I analyze one particular site of this intersection: the discourses and technologies employed by governmental and non-governmental organizations in their various “differential” programs designed specifically for *afro-desplazados*, and their impact on black subjectivities in Bogotá. I suggest that these interventions, which include emergency assistance, psychosocial treatment, and socioeconomic stabilization programs, create and naturalize an apparently inherent link between blackness and victimhood thereby victimizing blackness. When appropriated, this emergent articulation of blackness can admittedly create some unforeseen opportunities for political participation, but I argue that the overall effect has been a shift from the more stable recognition of ethnic difference to the transitory recognition of misfortune.

Chapter 2

Emplaced blackness

Introduction

The emergence of the ethnic articulation of blackness in Colombia is by now a well-known phenomenon. Its history and consequences have been documented by a number of scholars (Asher, 2009; Escobar, 2008; Oslender, 2008; Restrepo, 2004) who trace the process whereby it became common sense to say that black Colombians are ethnic others with cultural characteristics that distinguish them from other ethnic groups and from ethnically un-marked Colombians. This was not always the case. In fact, in Peter Wade's well-known ethnographic analysis of blackness in Colombia, which was based on fieldwork done prior to the 1991 constitutional assembly, the absence of ethnic discourses of blackness is evident. At that time, it would not have occurred to anyone to use words such as "ancestry" or "cultural difference" to refer to Colombian blacks. Wade's work makes it clear that at that time, though racialized, blacks in Colombia were regarded as fellow nationals with cultures similar to those of non-black and non-indigenous (i.e. *mestizo* or "white") Colombians (Wade, 1993).

Restrepo has written extensively on this process, which he has dubbed the ethnicization of blackness, in order to historicize its emergence, dissect its components, and analyze its political vicissitudes (Restrepo, Forthcoming; Restrepo 2004). In general, he describes the ethnicization of blackness as one that follows the indigenous-rights model, which had become popular in Latin America by the 1990s. This meant arguing that black Colombians were *not* simply fellow, modern nationals,

but rather “noble savages” with cohesive “traditional” cultures, and unique attachment to “territory.” The strength and resilience of this articulation of blackness has been notable and is therefore worth analysis. In my view, ethnic blackness became entrenched as the most dominant articulation of blackness in recent history because it simultaneously addressed the political interests of black organizations and of the Colombian state. For the former, it was an efficacious means to halt the speed at which large capital and State development initiatives were encroaching on lands that had been historically inhabited by black Colombians. And for the latter, it was an expedient way to regain much of the political credibility that had been lost in the prior decade due to the armed conflict; to rationalize many of the nation’s previously un-inventoried lands; and to jump on the multicultural bandwagon that was spreading across Latin America and continue presenting Colombia as a modern nation (Van Cott, 2000). Though their political motivations may not have been aligned, in practice the Colombian state and the burgeoning black social movement coalesced around the ethnic definition of blackness.

The fact that ethnic blackness was codified into an important piece of legislation, Law 70, also had important consequences for its dissemination and entrenchment. At a concrete level, Law 70, which also became known as “The Blackness Law” (*La ley de negritudes*), literally demarcated geographies of blackness in Colombia, setting aside “lands of black communities” (*tierras de comunidades negras*) from those that were not marked by blackness. But as Restrepo notes, the mediations and technologies involved in this process of demarcation also had an

impact on people's own perception of self. Put bluntly, in the process of convincing themselves and others that black Colombians were in fact an ethnic group with territorial attachment similar to that of indigenous groups, black activists unleashed a process that fundamentally transformed Colombian common sense. The State, of course, also played a crucial role in this naturalization by sanctioning this ethnic definition of blackness, which over the years has become more and more susceptible to being co-opted by the government's political machine (Pardo, 2003; Villa, 2001).

Over the last twenty years, the analysis of Law 70, multiculturalism, and its concomitant ethnic incarnation of blackness have been the subject of much reflection—both academic and non-academic. Its virtues and its faults; its emergence as a promising political discourse; its subsequent naturalization and co-optation; and its still unfulfilled promises have sparked much debate. In general, these analyses are broad and comprehensive. They can be roughly characterized as belonging to one of three camps. The first of these include those scholars (Arocha, 1996; Díaz, 2003; Escobar, 2008; Oslender, 2008) and activists (Cortés, 1999; Grueso, Rosero, & Escobar, 1998; Rosero, 2002) who support the ethnicization of blackness as a potentially emancipatory basis from which to construct an advantageous cultural politics for Afro-Colombians. The scholars and activists who fit under this rubric are by no means homogenous and their work reflects several different theoretical approaches, but they share a commitment to the defense of ethnic blackness and its attendant multicultural politics. The second camp can be characterized as those who are skeptical and strongly critical of the political project behind ethnic blackness in its

multicultural guise (Agudelo, 2005; Hoffman, 2002; Pardo, 2003; Restrepo, Forthcoming; Rojas, 2011). Again, this is a rough description that fails to capture the nuances of their work, but characterizes the main gist of their central differences with the first group. And finally, there is a middle camp, which includes scholars who straddle the two perspectives. They include historians (Almario, 2002; Arboleda, 2002) who are keenly aware of the contingency of this social formation, and political analysts who have devoted a good deal of effort to dissecting its many shortcomings (Asher, 2009; Mosquera, Pardo, & Hoffman, 2002; Ng'weno, 2007; Villa, 2001). Some of the differences between particular authors are related to specific theoretical disagreements, such as the oft-noted chasm between those who believe in "*huellas de africanía*" (roots of African-ness) and those who don't¹⁶; and those who take a (strategically) essentialist position versus those who adopt a more radically deconstructivist perspective.

I am of course, providing a very crude description here. However, my point is that seldom have the concrete, contradictory, and complex realities of ethnic blackness been shown ethnographically. And this is precisely my objective in this chapter. Rather than provide a broad and comprehensive analysis, I sketch a detailed description of the grounded experience of ethnic blackness in one particular place. The description on its own is intended to evince this articulation's constructedness, rigidities, and inadequacies; but also its genuine resonance with local practices and

¹⁶ This debate shares some parallels with the well-known Herskovitz vs. Frazier debate. I am referring to the argument where the latter sustained that enslaved Africans had lost their culture during the Middle Passage whereas the former assured that they had retained it (Frazier, 1957; Frazier & Glazer, 1966; Herskovits, 1958). This argument held within it the basis of subsequent disagreements between those who believed an essential blackness and those who did not.

experiences, its crafty appropriations, and its persistent allure. I try not to come too hard on either end of the critical vs. celebratory dichotomy but rather attempt to let the description itself do the critical work of evincing when there is reason to celebrate and when there is reason for concern. Of course, this is not an innocent distinction. Although I attempt to keep my analytical voice to a minimum, the underpinning criteria that guide my descriptions are best captured by Stuart Hall's statement regarding the usefulness of multicultural politics at large. For Hall, the multicultural question is only useful insofar as it is capable of meeting "the double demand for greater equality and social justice and for the recognition of difference and cultural diversity. Or, to put the problem more colloquially, the determination of minority populations to have their cake and eat it".

My ethnographic account is intended to explore how ethno-territorial blackness, in all its contradictions, has come to mean something for the people of the *Bajo Mira*. I explore the complex ways in which it is appropriated and accommodated—sometimes smoothly and other times awkwardly; sometimes advantageously and other times ineffectively—into local histories, landscapes, and identities; how it has simultaneously transformed and been folded into their everyday practices and aspirations for the future. Despite its rigidities, the concept of ethnic blackness is always in motion and acquires new meanings every time it is put into practice. To say that blackness, territory, and ethnicity take on new meanings is not to say that they have become ideal carriers of everyone's hopes. On the Mira River, ethno-territoriality has been both a gift and a limitation, and I hope to show this

complexity by focusing on three basic areas where there exist significant gaps between the way it is instantiated in Law 70 (and its attendant multicultural policies) and the way it pans out in the lived realities of the people of the *Bajo Mira*.

Specifically I focus on the gaps between: 1. The discourses of “collective occupation,” ancestry, and implied permanent presence of black communities on a given territory, and the realities of constant mobility and flexible notions of belonging, place, and community; 2. The discourses of “traditional production practices” and the realities of coca cultivation and the international aid projects that have mushroomed in its aftermath promoting the introduction of unfamiliar agricultural products and techniques; 3. The ideal of autonomy and the reality of community’s increasing dependency on external actors for funding and legitimation, as well as the violent impingement of paramilitaries on local forms of governance.

Accordingly, the chapter is organized in three sections that are inspired by the main tenets of Law 70, and a final section that explores people’s collective and individual hopes and aspirations. The first two concepts are taken directly from the text of the law. The first refers to the idea that black communities have historically settled on certain lands where they have carried out unique cultural practices such as collective and sustainable use of the “natural habitat.” The second concept is an elaboration of these unique cultural practices to which the first concept makes reference. Specifically, it refers to the idea that black communities have developed specific productive practices—farming, mining, forest gathering, etc—that are environmentally friendly and sustainable. The third concept is not taken from the law

itself. In fact, the concept of autonomy is not defined in the normative framework that supports the law, but rather, it is implicit as one of its central objectives. The closest direct reference that I have found to this idea is in the decree that regulated the implementation of Law 70 (Decreto 1745), which was passed in 1995. However, the concept is routinely used in activist circles, where black communities' autonomy can mean anything from the right to construct livelihoods that stand outside capitalism to the right to control the capitalist development machine that operates in their territories; from the right to receive cash transfers (*transferencias*) from the State to the right to complete administrative independence. These conceptual disagreements notwithstanding, in general, the idea is synonymous with self-determination and is usually tied to an argument that black communities “do things differently” than non-black Colombians, thereby making reference to the law's injunction to respect “the integrity and dignity of black communities' cultural life (Congreso de Colombia, 1993).”

But despite the apparent focus on the law, I do not dwell on its content in and of itself. Instead, I use its founding principles as triggers for reflection, as entry points to ask the questions that I think are most important. The emphasis on the law is therefore not legalistic, but rather it serves as a tool that helps me outline some of the underlying premises of ethnic blackness and evaluate some of its most important consequences for the people of the *Bajo Mira*.

“Collective occupation”

Ocupación colectiva: Es el asentamiento histórico y ancestral de comunidades negras en tierras para su uso colectivo, que constituyen su hábitat, y sobre los cuales desarrollan en la actualidad sus prácticas tradicionales de producción.
-Ley 70, 1993

Collective occupation: The historical and ancestral settlement of black communities on lands for collective use, which constitute their habitat and on which they carry out their traditional production practices in the present moment.
-Law 70, 1993

The ancestors of the current inhabitants¹⁷ of the major rivers around the city of Tumaco migrated from the nearby mining areas of Barbacoas and Iscuandé at the end of the Nineteenth Century. After emancipation in 1851, gold mining, which was the economic mainstay of the area, went into sharp decline due to the increase in the price of labor and a substantial depletion of the mineral (Almario, 2002; Almario & Castillo, 1996; Hoffmann, 2007). These migrations of former mine workers¹⁸ from

¹⁷ The original inhabitants of the Pacific were indigenous groups that sparsely inhabited the area prior to the arrival of Spanish colonizers. As early as 1511 the Spaniards knew that there was gold in the Pacific region, but topography, climate and “fierce indians” rebuffed attempts to enter this potential *El Dorado* until the 17th century. The Spanish penetrated this region of tropical rainforests and mangrove swamps with their slave gangs only after having triggered an indian ethnocide through disease and protracted warfare. The region’s many rivers served as useful, if treacherous, transport ways to follow ore deposits. Their flows determined possible travel routes through the forested lowland areas and as a result, colonial occupation took on a riverine and haphazard pattern, making permanent settlements rare. Here, scattered and provisional mining camps served the primary objective at hand: to find and extract gold using African slave labor. Given that the hot and humid climate of the region was believed to be unhealthy for whites, most slave-owners preferred to send overseers to manage their business, and retired to a life of comfort with their domestic slaves in towns with established colonial administrative seats and more temperate weather.

Even during slavery, the frontier character of the Pacific region offered slaves and their descendants a respite from the long arm of colonial domination. This made possible the acquisition of *de facto* forms of liberty through a combination of widespread manumission and maroonage. As a result, many blacks joined “unpacified” indians to practice subsistence and commercial agriculture (which they traded with miners who were always in need of food provisions), as well as independent mining (*mazamorraje*) and contraband gold trade (Sharp, 1981). Particularly during the wars of independence, black pressure through guerrilla warfare and maroonage was relentless and helped bring about the final abolition of slavery in 1851. By this time, free blacks outnumbered slaves and had successfully settled in small aggregates away from centers of white power. Almost invariably, they had continued to mine as *mazamorreros* or free laborers. Over the next century, black population aggregates expanded at a far greater rate than indigenous populations, and Afrocolombians came to dominate the Pacific region both numerically and in relative political terms in a process that Whitten has termed “racial succession” (Whitten, 1974: 51).

¹⁸ Which included both free and enslaved descendants of Africans.

the foothills of the mountains in Southwestern Colombia to the coastal areas of the Pacific intensified at the beginning of the Twentieth Century following a bloody war—*La Guerra de los Mil Días*—that prompted people to flee from the neighboring Cauca region. Thus, by the 1920s, Tumaco was the major urban center in the southwestern coastal region and in recognition of its importance as such, the national government began the construction of the railroad that would eventually connect this port town to the departmental capital of Pasto (cf. Leal, 2004).

However, the majority of the region's population settled dispersedly along the coast and its rivers looking for places where they could survive in small groups. One of the preferred river banks for these early migrants was that of the Mira River, which provided fertile lands for subsistence agriculture, a mangrove forest abundant in game, shellfish, and lumber, and easy access to both marine and fresh water fishing. In strict geographical terms, the Mira River is quite close to the port of Tumaco, a mere 9 miles from the most proximate edge. But the social distance between this rural, riverine area and the urban center is uneven and varies according to who wants to travel, when, and for what purpose.

To get from the city of Tumaco to the villages that line the banks of the Mira River, one has several options. The first is to take a motorboat from the southernmost tip of the bay into the open sea and towards the Ecuadorian border to the mouth of the river at Congal. The second option is to take a bus or a taxi from downtown Tumaco down the main highway to first the unpaved road that connects it to the right bank of the lower river. Then, one must wait at the edge of the highway for a car or a

motorcycle willing to drive the short but dusty stretch to *La Boca Toma*. The third option is fully paved. It involves driving down the main highway further inland and then turning right onto a side road that ends at *Peña Colorada*, a village on the middle portion of the river. This last bit of the road, which is significantly better than the one to *La Boca Toma*, is not maintained by the departmental or national government, but rather by the oil palm plantations that line the left bank of the river and who need a reliable way to get their product out.

Since my first visit to the Mira River in 2007, I have taken all three routes. But even though the river stretches for more than 25 miles past *Peña Colorada* and then into Ecuadorian territory for over 60 miles more, I have always stayed on the lower portion of the river. The reason for this is straightforward. *Peña Colorada* is the last village included in the collective land title that was granted to the Community Council of the Lower Mira River (*Consejo Comunitario del Bajo Mira y Frontera*) in 2003. And this particular community council is affiliated with the PCN (*Proceso de Comunidades Negras*), the most important national-level black ethno-territorial organization in Colombia, and with whom I have collaborated since that same year. But this is getting ahead of the story. The point that I wish to highlight here is quite simply that when I refer to the *Bajo Mira*, I am only referring to a small portion of the Mira River's total course—from *Peña Colorada* to the mouth of the river at Congal. And this portion is intelligible as an ethno-territorial unit today as a result of a set of historical and geographical factors that range from the material practices of local *campesinos* to the global market's demands for local goods; from national disputes

over land tenure to the negotiations surrounding the demarcation of Colombian-Ecuadorian border. I cannot do justice to these histories here, but I do want to pause long enough to acknowledge them. And therefore to draw attention to the fact that the *Bajo Mira*, as a collective territory of black communities, is a human-natural assemblage whose conditions of possibility only emerged in the last twenty or thirty years. The point of stating this outright is not to take its existence for granted, but rather, to take it as my point of departure.

Ancestral rootedness

Aroldo, one of the oldest and most active members of the *Bajo Mira*'s community council, was born in a village on the banks of a nearby river also in the department of Nariño. Because he was born with a rare disease that disabled his speech, his parents relentlessly sought out a cure for him until they found a miraculous water spring on the Ecuadorian side of the border. Aroldo and his siblings therefore grew up in the Ecuadorian province of Esmeraldas where his father labored as a day worker in large farms and his mother tended to their numerous children. As a young man he “got a woman”¹⁹ and started working as a logger to sustain his new household, which included his common-law wife and her two young children. After a couple of years, he and his wife separated but he continued working

¹⁹ On the Pacific in general legal marriage is rare. The norm is common-law marriage, which is marked at the moment in which a man and a woman live in the same house. The phrase that is used to refer to this is “*X cogió mujer*” or “*Y cogió marido*” which can be translated as “getting a woman/husband. Hereon, whenever I mention someone’s “wife”, “husband”, or “marriage” I am referring to this practice.

for the same logging company, which eventually sent him back to the Colombian side of the *guandal*²⁰ forest.

The company, which was based in a small town along the Tumaco-Pasto highway, sent its temporary workers out far and wide to search for commercial lumber. This is how Aroldo became familiar with the timbered wealth of this lowland forested region and eventually arrived to the Mira River. During one of his logging trips there he saw a young girl that he liked and returned to woo her until she eventually agreed to become his wife. Because Cindy, his twenty year-old wife, had been born on the Mira River, she inherited a good-sized farm that the two of them began to work together. Aroldo continued his intermittent work cutting timber and with that cash and the crops from their land they raised their eight children.

Although technically a native *guabaleña*, Cindy has no ancestors in the village of Bocas de Guabal. When she was a young girl her parents sent all of her siblings to Ecuador, where one of her uncles lived, so they could go to school. Although she very much wanted to go, her mother didn't let her go because she was a sickly child who suffered from chronic stomach pains. So Cindy stayed behind and lived with her mother and father in Bocas de Guabal until she married Aroldo more than twenty years ago. Although she regularly visits one of her sisters who now lives in Tumaco, none of her siblings ever moved back to their birth village. Today, Cindy's status as a native *guabaleña* is reinforced by her marriage to Aroldo who is known and respected

²⁰ This term is used to refer to the swampy forests of the Colombian Pacific. These forests differ from those that are seasonally flooded due to the overflow of nearby river banks. *Guandal* forests remain flooded due to the abundant and constant rainfall of the region (Frazier, 1957; Frazier & Glazer, 1966; Herskovits, 1958).

along the river's villages as a hard-working *campesino* (peasant), a fellow *vecino* (neighbor), and a committed *compañero* who works on behalf of the rights of the *Bajo Mira*'s communities.

Milena Hurtado is the other *guabaleña* who is known far and wide for her steadfast commitment to the community council's political work. Like Aroldo, she arrived to the Mira River as an adult and became *guabaleña* as a result of her marriage to a local man. Although she was born in Tumaco, she spent many years in Cuenca, a city in Ecuador's southern highlands. When Milena was ten years old her mother gave her away to a nun who agreed to look after. Although the nun was sent to Italy soon after, she left Milena with her sister, Estela, who Milena still refers to as her "*mamita*." Milena recalls her childhood and early teenage years fondly except for her recurrent experiences of sexual assault. After her *mamita* Estela's son tried to rape her she embarked on a long journey that eventually took her back to Tumaco. First, she washed dishes in a small hotel in Cuenca. Then, she was a domestic worker in Cali. After that, she made her way back to Tumaco where she reunited with her birth mother and siblings. But the family reunification went sour when her sister's husband raped her and her mother placed the blame on her. Since she was no longer welcome in her sister's house, Milena rented a small room from an elderly acquaintance in town. It was then that she met Edilson, a quiet *campesino*, who convinced her to move with him to the *Bajo Mira* where his mother had a farm that they could work together.

The matter of ancestral occupation on the *Bajo Mira* is a complex one. In some cases, such as Aroldo's and Milena's, a person's legitimacy as a native is conferred after they prove their commitment to the community through marriage, residence, or work. Genealogy and birthplace can certainly play an important role as well, but they are neither sufficient nor determinant. One can be born in one place and claim native status in another. And one's affiliation to a locality can also change throughout the course of one's life. The case of Don Abel is quite telling in this respect. In 2010, after learning that all of the official documentation on the *Bajo Mira's* collective land titling process had been lost, I collected the life stories of nine of the community council's founders in an effort to reconstruct this recent history. In the process, I interviewed Don Abel, a 67 year-old man who was living in one of Tumaco's poorest neighborhoods. I began by asking him when and where he had been born and when he responded that he was born on the Río Mejicano, another nearby river which I knew had its own community council and collective land title, I responded by saying, "Oh, so you are not from the Mira River." My statement didn't make much sense to Don Abel, who corrected me quite matter-of-factly: "No. I *am* from the Mira River. Because I am here; because this is where I went through the *proceso*; and this is where I still am part of the process, on the *Bajo Mira*".

By *proceso*, (or process, strictly translated) Don Abel was referring to the organizing work that resulted in the conferral of 46,000 hectares of land to be collectively held by the members of the *Bajo Mira's* community council. He was also indirectly referring to Law 70, the 1993 piece of legislation that granted "black

communities” on Colombia’s Pacific River Basin collective cultural and territorial rights. But most concretely, he was recalling a period of remarkable political effervescence along the Mira River, which resulted in the creation of the *Bajo Mira’s* community council in 1998 and in the issuance of its collective land title in 2003. Certainly the two processes—the national lobbying that resulted in the passage of the law and the local organizing effort that put it into practice—are closely related, but they are not identical. When he mentioned “the process,” Don Abel was signaling the concrete practices that designated some people (and not others) as members of the *Bajo Mira’s* community council and delineated the borders of its associated collective territory.

“The process” involved the designation of “natives” whose legitimacy depended not only on their indigeneity and ancestry—that is, on proof of their historical occupation of the area—but also on their blackness. In fact, according to the law, the two markers of belonging are inextricable from one another. In order to be recognized as black, one has to belong to a rural, riverine, community. And conversely, in order to aspire to a collective land title, the rural riverine dwellers of the Pacific Basin must prove that they possess unique cultural characteristics that identify them as a distinct ethnic group. Only then can they be recognized as members of a black community with rights to collective property. In practice, these turn out to be thorny issues. How does one designate natives in a place where people’s histories of occupation reveal such high levels of mobility? What is the definitive criterion that makes a given person “from” the *Bajo Mira*? Is it birthplace?

Residence? Self-Identification? Is the matter of belonging to a given black community therefore a spatial, cultural, or a genealogical (historical) issue?

Of course, the matter of belonging to (or being excluded from) a given community entails significant stakes. In the case of Don Abel and the black community of the *Bajo Mira*, the most obvious stakes involved his continued access to the lands that were eventually titled to the community council. Following this logic, one could interpret his response as a strategic one intended to legitimate his seemingly questionable status as a native. But in fact, the opposite is true. It is not that Don Abel was desperately trying to validate an unusual situation, but rather that it simply did not occur to him (or to others) that being born on another river constituted an impediment to being considered a native. This is because rather than being an anomaly, physical mobility and sustained relationships with others, elsewhere are the norm on the Mira River. Fluidity, itinerancy, and expansiveness characterize the trajectories of people, places, and relationships.

Let me illustrate this ethnographically. Kinship bonds, though strong, are neither rigid nor determinant. In her ethnographic account of the region, for example, Hoffman shows that being related to the founding families of a given village can confer an individual significant status but it does not unambiguously translate into political or economic power (Hoffmann, 2007). Moreover, kinship can be determined by consanguinity or by symbolic affiliations. An individual can become so thoroughly assimilated into a family through marriage as to take on their last name, and subsequently be entirely disengaged from them, take on a different name, and

move to another river. Unlike in other parts of Colombia where “notable” last names are fiercely policed and genealogies rigorously kept (at least in theory), on the southern Pacific last names are loosely interpreted as approximate indications of kinship. Thus, people who share the same last name often treat each other as if they are blood relatives, with no need to verify the consanguineous basis of their relationship.

This expansive and flexible use of kinship is also reflected by the common practice of calling peers *primo/prima* (cousin) and elders *tío/tía* (uncle/aunt) irrespective of consanguinity.²¹ Overall, both of these terms signal a recognition of sameness, which varies according to the situation. Thus, two *campesinos* from the *Bajo Mira* who run into each other in downtown Tumaco might use it to address one another. Or, two fellow Tumaqueños who sell goods in neighboring stalls in a market in Cali might do the same every morning. Or finally, a black urban youth from the nearby port city of Buenaventura might call a quiet Tumaqueño at a bar in Bogotá *primo* upon meeting him. In each of these cases the assumed shared sameness is different, ranging from scales of geographic proximity—“we are from the same river”, or “we are both from the Pacific Coast”—to an unspoken acknowledgement of racial sameness—“we are both black.” Or, they might substitute the term *primo* with *paisano*, another sign of affiliation that can be loosely translated as “countryman” and refers to a shared geographic space but can also be used to signal racial sameness.

²¹ In fact, the two sets of terms are analogous and their only difference is generational.

In all of these cases the explicit use of a relationship marker invokes a community of belonging. It also implicitly parcels out insiders from outsiders—people who are not from a given river; people who are not from the Pacific; or more broadly, people who are not black. None of this is surprising. But what I find remarkable is the fact that the same term can be used so versatilely and stably at the same time. In all of these cases there is indeed a community that is being signaled. But in each of them the relationships that define that community are different, making it unclear whether they indicate the existence of various, discrete communities or of a single one with porous and unstable limits.

Places too are simultaneously fixed and variable. The importance of the *finca*, or farm, is perhaps the most illustrative example of this. On the one hand, settledness in a particular place—such as a given river—is signaled by the act of clearing an area of the forest to turn it into a *finca*. Thus, before one can work a farm, one must “make” it. That is, literally convert it into an agricultural space.²² When recalling his arrival to the Mira River, for example, Don Abel described the moment in which he “made his farm” as the biographical marker of adulthood and stability. After his childhood on the Río Mejicano and early teenage years on the Río Chagüí, he spent

²² The difference between the wilderness and an agricultural area is understood as a matter of degrees and it is highly fluctuating. People designate different levels of wildness that range from “*monte bravo*” to “*monte alzado*” and “*monte biche*.” Agricultural areas are also heterogenous and highly mobile. In addition to the *finca*, whose location in space can shift over time, people keep *zoteas*, which are herb gardens that are maintained next to the household in old canoes, and *colinos*, which are single-crop parcels that are usually for plantain. Furthermore, farmers continually build mobility into each of these agricultural patches by actively soliciting seeds and cuttings from a wide network of kin and friends. Thus, the farm itself is both the epitome of settledness and an exemplification of mobility, which again suggests that when the time came to build “territory,” mobility was already built into it (Cohen, 2010).

his youth cutting lumber in Ecuador. Don Abel recalled those years as a carefree period in which he liked to chase adventure and did not hesitate to get on a boat, join a group of fellow travelers, or follow a new boss to unknown destinations. Like Aroldo, the timber routes eventually took Don Abel back across the border to Colombia. Thus, in his early twenties he started working for a timber contractor who lived in San Lorenzo (Ecuador) but had business in Nariño:

I worked with him for a while and then I worked with another man, who took me to Sagumbita (on the Mira River), and that was when I stayed and made my farm. [...] That was the beginning of my stability. That was when we started working to make the village (*hacer el pueblo*). Before that, there was no school; there was nothing there. There was just the forest and a few houses, and people survived with just their plantains. They would exchange the plantain for fish and that's how they lived. There was nothing there.

Although the farm and the village (*pueblo*) are important markers of stability, neither one of them is fixed in time or space. It is undoubtedly important to have a *finca*; to turn a portion of the forest into an agricultural patch of land and designate it as one's own. Furthermore, the moment and geographical place in which one decides to do so is of consequence because it produces one as a local; as a resident and fellow *campesino* of a concrete place such as the *Bajo Mira*. But the physical location of the *finca* and the village can change. Any given *campesino* can work a *finca* for several years and then clear a new patch of land elsewhere. He can alternate work on both *fincas* or phase one out and let it turn into forest again. Then, he might decide to clear it again.²³ Even the village, the place-marker that one might be tempted to imagine as the paradigmatic example of settled-ness, is often transient and mobile. Like Don

²³ In collective territories with higher population density this is no longer possible. However, on the Mira River, which is still sparsely populated (under 10,000 people), it is a common practice.

Abel reveals, in a single lifetime one might help create a village and see others disappear, all the while maintaining a firm sense of rootedness in a given place.

In order to dispel suspicions of bias or exaggeration that may arise by thinking that the biographies that I chose to recount above are somehow atypical, I want to dwell on the life stories of some of the *Bajo Mira*'s indisputable natives: those who were born, raised, and live there today. And who in addition to having all of the credentials of autochthony conferred by time and space, have dedicated much of their lives to producing the *Bajo Mira* as the place that it is today: a *bona fide* black community complete with a titled territory.

At 75, Don Claudio is the oldest founder of the community council alive. He and his current wife were both born on the Mira River and two of his sons are active members of the current community council's board. Although two of his daughters moved to Cali at a young age (12 and 14 respectively), he still has many children and grandchildren in the *Bajo Mira*. He is, by all measures, a local and a respected elder. And still, his own trajectories as well as those of his ancestors reveal a great deal of itinerancy. His mother, for example, moved to Ecuador with her second husband and all of his siblings when he was a young boy. Thus, after his father's death he became the oldest member of his family to live on the Mira River. And like most other men (and in fact, many women as well) on the *Bajo Mira*, he spent a good portion of his youth traveling. This practice, which people refer to as "walking" (*andar*) is in some senses a rite of passage, an important biographical marker that separates childhood from adulthood. In his case, unlike the ones I described before, traveling came after

“making a farm.” But nonetheless, “walking” constituted a central aspect of his adult life. Thus, although life on his *finca* was plentiful and pleasant (*sabrosa*), when he was a young man he took to traveling to Ecuador: “My little business was doing well and so I took to traveling, drinking, and walking” (*Me iba bien con mi negocito yo viajaba sabroso y tomaba trago y andaba*).

Don Germán, who was born in a village on the Mira River, also traveled back and forth to Ecuador throughout his life. He made money buying and selling contraband goods across the border. Like Don Claudio, his mother and siblings moved to Ecuador following her mother’s second marriage to an Ecuadorian man, but he stayed behind. However, rather than narrate it in terms of a loss, he describes it as an expansion of his kinship lines, saying “I have a large family in Ecuador. The name of the village where they stayed is Concordia, and then from there they started spreading out [...]. They never came back, they became Ecuadorian.”

In the paradigmatic heart of ethnic blackness, the fluid realities of people, places, and the relationships between the two do not follow the dichotomous logic described by categories such as native/outsider; resident/traveler; transient/permanent, which have become entrenched in the discourses and politics of ethnic blackness. Also, the networks of relationships (kinship, friendship, *convivencia*) that make up communities branch out in complex and fluid ways that are not adequately reflected by the rigid borders of a land title and the juridical notion of *territory*. And yet, every

single one of the people whose trajectories I described was unequivocal about “being from” the *Bajo Mira*.

What should we make of these life trajectories? How can we take account of people’s extensive journeys *and* of their attachments to place? Is it possible to imagine natives that are not required to sit still? Or conversely, might it be possible to conceive of travelers as place-makers? The grounded but expansive histories of the *Bajo Mira*’s “collective settlement” beg for new ways to think about dwelling, moving, and grounded communities of belonging. They also make it painfully evident that the rigid dichotomies that undergird ethnic blackness are simply inadequate to describe the complexity of people’s life trajectories and the ways in which they define the communities to which they belong.²⁴

“Traditional production practices”

Prácticas tradicionales de producción: Son las actividades y técnicas agrícolas, mineras, de extracción forestal, pecuarias, de caza, pesca y recolección de productos naturales en general, que han utilizado consuetudinariamente las comunidades negras para garantizar la conservación de la vida y el desarrollo autosostenible.
-Ley 70, 1993

Traditional production practices: Are the techniques and activities of agriculture, mining, forest extraction, cattle farming, hunting, fishing, and natural product gathering in general that black communities have customarily used for the conservation of life and sustainable development.
-Law 70, 1993

At the time of my first visits to the *Bajo Mira*, the community council was carrying out a series of food security workshops in all of the river’s villages. The project was

²⁴ The point is not to suggest that these black *campesinos*’ itinerancy is evidence of the “spuriousness” of ethnic blackness; of a “false” autochthony enacted purely for material gain. This would be both false and ingenuous (if not ill-intended). Or alternatively, to claim that they are well-travelled citizens of the world unconstrained by parochial attachments to locality. To do so would be to obviate the profound power differences inherent in the motivations and the means through which different travellers travel. Because although it is critical to remain attentive to the emancipatory potentials of deterritorialized ways of being, we should also be wary of uncritically celebrating mobility.

a joint effort of USAID's operator MIDAS (which stands for "More investment in alternative sustainable development" in Spanish) and the national government. More specifically, it was a program called ReSA (which stands for "Food Security Network" in Spanish) that was being carried out by *Acción Social*, the gigantic government office in charge of poverty alleviation, war victims, and the management of all international aid monies. Alexander, the president of the community council's board suggested that we join the workshops so that I could become acquainted with the river itself, the community's situation, and the community council's work. And so, on an early September morning we set out to follow the workshops to several villages in the middle portion of the *Bajo Mira's* "territory."

"Territory" was the term that Alexander used when he invited me to join the workshops and made one of the community council's motorboats available for that purpose. His choice of term was a direct result of "the process." In other words, prior to the passage of Law 70 and the organizing process that took place in the region, people did not refer to the forests, rivers, and mangroves in which they lived, farmed, fished, and gathered goods as their "territory." But people like Alexander, who had attended numerous meetings and workshops with other affiliates of PCN—the oldest and staunchest national-level ethno-territorial organization—used the term regularly to refer to several overlapping concepts.

At its most concrete and material level, "territory" referred to the 46,000 hectares of land that had been demarcated as the collective property of the *Bajo Mira's* "historical inhabitants". Thus, Alexander might use it when explaining that

“in order to get financial support for this food security program, MIDAS and *Acción Social* require that we eradicate all of the *territory*’s coca plants.” The term might also be used in accordance to PCN’s definition, which refers to a set of symbolic and material relations that include but also exceed the concept of land. It is most often used in the phrase “defense of territory” and when asked to explain it, people (mostly activists) might (somewhat mechanically) say that territory exceeds land in two senses. First, it includes other material elements of the ecosystem such as the subsoil, the rivers, the oceans, and the skies (cf. Escobar, 2008). Second, it includes intangible elements such as spirits of ancestors and other non-humans, ritual grounds, and historical sites that are essential for the cultural reproduction of the community. Most specifically, it is important to point out that in Colombia the term is always already ethnicized. It automatically elicits the association between blackness and rootedness that was created and solidified by the process surrounding Law 70. It has become a common sense term that is unreflexively used and routinely taken for granted to signal the allegedly natural relationship between being black and being settled in a given territory. Thus, it has become a platitude to say that black people have/belong in collective *territories*, just like indigenous people have/belong in reservations (*resguardos*).

Being the politically savvy person that he is, that morning Alexander used the term in its most comprehensive sense. Perhaps he was hyper-conscious of his audience and wanted to impress; perhaps he was taking advantage of the occasion—he rarely had time to attend local village meetings—to extol people to participate

more directly in the community council's activities. Over the twelve years of its existence, the community council had seen a steady decrease in locals' participation and unsurprisingly Alexander was adamant about reinforcing a sense of appropriation among the workshop's attendants. He wanted to inspire them to feel entitled to "their territory." Despite his relative youth—he was only 29 at the time—he delivered a pontificating speech that used the official language of ethnic blackness masterfully. He made reference to the community's ancestors, to their traditional practices, and to their blackness. He was, by all measures, employing the (by then naturalized) ethnic definition of blackness:

When you see us [board members] on the community council's motorboat, you shouldn't think that this work or this struggle is only ours. This territory belongs to all of us; to all of us who feel black.

To this, an elderly man who had been sitting quietly in the back of the room added in a confident voice: "and who cultivate the land." This comment stood out for me as an important moment in which the various sedimentations of the current articulations of blackness were evidenced. While Alexander was trying to emphasize the community members' blackness as a territorial (an implicitly ethnic) identity, for this man the most salient commonality that the people of the *Bajo Mira* shared was the fact that they cultivated the land. In other words, while "territory" and "feeling black" addressed some of his daily experiences and aspirations, they did not fully describe the reasons that inspired him to attend the meeting that day. On their own, blackness and territory were not a sufficient motivator to create the sense of belonging that Alexander wanted to instill in him. What has the language of ethnic blackness, with

its embedded and uncritical celebration of (biological and cultural) diversity, and its rigid notions of identity and territory silenced or obscured? What has it been simply unable to communicate, to visibilize, and therefore, to defend?

Love

Bocas de Guabal, Aroldo's village of a couple dozen families sits on the bank of a quiet side stream of the Mira River. If you continue down the side stream past the village and into the depth of the mangrove estuaries, you will eventually hit the river mouth and the last village on the *Bajo Mira*, *Congal*. This is why it made sense to take people out to *Congal* whenever we had sufficient gasoline. The trip was less than an hour long and of exceeding beauty and calm. One late afternoon, after a busy day in Tumaco, Aroldo and I rode out to *Congal*. We weren't alone. Although we dropped people off on several villages along the way, his daughter, Aura, decided to accompany us on the last stretch of the trip to drop off Doña Estela, a resident of *Congal*, and her two kids. The sun had set while we were still on the river's main course and by the time we turned into *Guabal*, it was completely dark. Perhaps the combination of elements, the crisp night, the tentative moonlight, the foretelling lightning, made me feel particularly contemplative, almost melancholic. I think Aroldo felt the same way, because he started to speak in a beautiful narrative style, not overly poetic, but certainly nostalgic. He spoke in a soothing voice and reduced the motor's roar to a hum to tell me about "the way things were."

He told me that on that stream *sábalos*, one of locals' favorite fish, used to be so plentiful that you could see them jumping out in swarms to feed on mosquitos. He

recalled seeing *babillas*²⁵ (small caymans), *tortugas* (turtles), and *iguanas* swimming towards the shore. He began to list the types of fish that people caught in those waters but was interrupted by a rustling inside the boat. Doña Estela had been carrying a small animal inside a plastic bag on her lap and it had suddenly jumped out onto the bottom of the boat. There was laughter and excitement as Aroldo used his flashlight to find it. He picked it up, cupped it in his hands while he took a close look at it, and after a few seconds declared, “it’s an anteater.” The small, furry animal did not have the long nose characteristic of what we think of when we imagine anteaters. Perhaps that’s why Doña Estela looked dubious, although she confessed that she herself had no idea what it was. She told us that her daughter had found it while they waited for a boat to take them home, and she thought it looked lost and should be taken back to its “habitat.” Aroldo continued as he sat back down to steer the boat, “It’s small, but it’s an adult. It got scared with the lightning. Those little guys disappear during thunderstorms. No matter how tightly you keep them at night, they find a way to escape. If there is thunder tonight that little guy will not be there in the morning. I’m not quite sure what the mystery is with that *animalito*.”

And so the conversation went on, Doña Estela, her kids, Aura, and I listened attentively. But as we turned onto a new stream we saw one of the lumber rafts (which are locally known as *chorizos*²⁶) that loggers build to transport wood floating in front of us. Aroldo’s face went blank as the *chorizo* floated slowly by the side of

²⁵ I believe that *babillas* are *caiman crocodilus fuscus*,

²⁶ In a richly descriptive piece on the *tuqueros* or loggers of the southern Colombian Pacific, anthropologist Eduardo Restrepo minutely lists all the terms that are locally used in the process of identifying, producing, and transporting commercial wood from the *guandal* forests (Restrepo, 1996).

our motorboat. He shook his head and went quiet for a couple of minutes. I knew that the community council's internal rules (*reglamento interno*) had prohibited commercial logging. I also knew that they had signed a contract with USAID—MIDAS more specifically—for a forest conservation project that required their commitment to abstain from logging. In exchange, the community council received an annual pay in kind per hectare of “conserved forest.”²⁷ As the community council's legal representative, Aroldo was obviously concerned. But truth be told, his biggest preoccupation was not liability, it was the forest. Doña Estela could tell that Aroldo was distressed and she immediately assured him that it was not people from *Congal* who did it. “The problem,” Aroldo said after giving her a lesson on the economics of illegal and legal lumber extraction, “and the main difference between now and before is that now they are cutting trees that are too small.” “They will cut any tiny *palo*,” he said holding up his index finger to show how thinly people were willing to cut down tree-trunks. “They don't let the forest recover. This pace is not sustainable; it is devastating.”

Doña Estela insisted. She was sure that it was people from other villages who came down to *Congal* to cut wood and sell it despite the internal prohibition. I wasn't sure if she was trying to comfort him, but in any case, it was too late. Aroldo was already lost in his memories of abundance and his lament of devastation. He told us

²⁷ Aroldo told me that whereas the going market price for a hectare of conserved forest could be as high as \$800 US dollars, they were currently receiving 40.000 Colombian pesos in-kind (approximately 22 US dollars) per conserved hectare. This still amounted to more than 200.000 US dollars of income for the community council, and while the market was far more profitable, intermediaries could take as much as fifty percent of the going price. In his view, the MIDAS project was a dress rehearsal for the community council to enter incipient the market for environmental services.

about how people started using dynamite for fishing. He explained the difference in destruction inflicted by various fishing technologies: the *atarraya*, the *trasmallo*, the *chinchorro*,²⁸ even the use of *barbasco*, a local vine used to poison and collect fish on river creeks. And just when we thought we had lost him, we saw the outlines of *Congal*—a few lights, a makeshift dock, and two heavily armed soldiers guarding the entrance—and the mood changed. Aroldo turned the motor off and we hopped onto the densely populated village. The air had turned salty. Don Hugo, another elder who had been active in “the process” gave us a quick but exhaustive tour.

On the way back we talked about politics. The conversation was sparked by the visit to *Congal*, which Aroldo assured me was a major site of all kinds of contraband traffic. From *Congal*, one could get to Ecuador in only 45 minutes, or head north on the open waters of the Pacific immediately. This was why the village was patrolled by the army night and day. This is why they had ID-ed me and inquired about my business there. This is also why the army had recently found the abandoned bodies of fourteen young women strewn in the forest. This is why the paramilitaries had set a training base in the neighboring villages of *Terán* and *Milagros* in 2000. And this is why the majority of the residents of *Milagros* fled, and the village had disappeared entirely.

²⁸ These three fishing methods range from the least to the most invasive. The *atarraya* is a hand-held circular net that is usually operated by a single person who can be standing on a boat or on the water’s edge. The *chinchorro* is a long netting with lead weights on the bottom that is dragged along a circular area, scooping up all the fish in that space. The number of people required to operate it depends on its size and the associated volume of fish that it can catch. And finally, the *trasmallo* consists of several layers of variously weaved nets that create pockets where the fish are caught. On the Mira River’s smaller streams people sometimes place them across the entire course of the water, thereby catching everything that flows downriver.

Like most conversations about politics, the topics were volatile, and so we quickly went from cocaine and arms traffic to President Obama. And when we were in the middle of a joint exegesis about Obama's foreign policy, Aroldo hushed me. He turned the motor off and guided the boat to the other side of the river. He quickly fetched his machete and wacked a large fish that was gasping for air on the top of the head. Then we waited in silence for the fish's body to float back up to the surface so we could take it back with us for dinner. While we waited, he told me it was a *cubo*, a tasty salt-water fish that he hadn't eaten in a long time and was very excited to bring home with him. But the fish's body didn't surface that night, so we headed back empty-handed and disappointed. That night before going to bed we ate a plate of rice, boiled plantains, and canned tuna, which we washed down with a warm cup of powdered milk that had been flavored with instant coffee and heaps of sugar. When I got up the next morning, I saw Aroldo putting on his rubber boots to head out into the *monte* (forest) with the party of *técnicos* (technicians) who had come from Bogotá to monitor the forest conservation project. I was still rubbing my eyes when he told me he had gone back out at sunrise to fetch the fish and found it! He pointed to the back of the house where Cindy, his wife, was busy gutting and scaling it.

What is the best descriptor of what Aroldo and others like him deeply care about, depend and thrive on? At the risk of being accused of romanticism or blind sentimentalism, in this section I have decided to use the word that I think best describes the caring attention, the intimate knowledge, and the mutual flourishing that

characterizes the relationships that Aroldo recalled and desperately sought to rescue that day.

Contradiction

The first time I attended the ReSA food security workshops, Alexander and I arrived just in time for the participants' group presentations. There were four groups, which had been assigned different but complementary tasks. Each group had to explain, by drawing on a sheet of posterboard, how each of the steps of corn and bean cultivation was "traditionally" done. The various steps included topics such as: adaptation of the terrain, cultivation methods, fertilization, and harvest. The workshop facilitator was Andrés, a tentative eighteen year-old from a nearby village who had recently received his degree as "*técnico agrónomo*"²⁹ in Tumaco. He sat quietly as each of the groups, composed of four or five well-seasoned *campesinos*, described how they picked an adequate plot of land, cleared the brush, cut the trees down, and then strewed the seeds. Then, he stood up and drew on the whiteboard:

"Well, the main difference is that *these people* do not want us to strew the seeds. *They* want us to cultivate in rows. Corn seeds should be planted one by one, 5 cm deep and 20 cm apart. There should also be a distance of 80 cm between each row. Beans, on the other hand should be planted in perfect squares of 40cm by 40cm. It is also important to place stakes so that this shrub species, which is called *Calima*, can wrap itself around it."

He then proceeded to give the participants a lesson on organic fertilizers such as tree leaves, cacao peels, and plantain shoots. He explained that they contained nitrates, phosphorus, and potassium, which were rich nutrients for the crops. He also outlined, quite mechanically, a set of "natural" pest control methods, which ranged from

²⁹ Which would be roughly equivalent to a U.S. associate's degree in agronomy.

making scarecrows to preparing a concoction of organic pesticides. Then, he ended by saying “*these people* don’t want us to abandon our manual ways, they just want us to combine our knowledge [with theirs]. *They* don’t want us to use chemicals, so we have to use compostables.”

After the workshop ended, everyone was treated to lunch in the village school. I sat down with Andrés, Alexander, and the other two workshop facilitators, a local *campesina* and a Tumaqueña social worker. I asked them many questions, which they patiently listened to. Why was the project giving out bean and corn seeds in communities that didn’t consume beans and corn? Why not plantain and rice? How did they balance out the injunctions of the project sponsors—MIDAS and *Acción Social*—with local agricultural practices? Were the *campesinos* actually changing their cultivation methods to meet the sponsors’ demands? But most importantly, why was it necessary to teach farmers how to farm? Alexander, who had spent many hours listening to my incessant questions, answered all of them with a single sentence, “*Compañera*, the entire purpose of these workshops is to recover traditional cultivation practices that were lost due to the use of illicit crops.” I knew enough about illicit crop substitution programs to know what he meant. It didn’t really matter that locals didn’t eat very much corn and didn’t care for beans. It was highly unlikely that in the ten years since the entrance of coca in the region³⁰ people had forgotten how to cultivate foodstuffs. The priority for this program—and its associated forest

³⁰ (Oficina de las Naciones Unidas contra la droga y el delito, 2011)

conservation, governance, and environmental management programs—was to lure local *campesinos* away from coca cultivation. The rest were collateral benefits.

The topic of coca cultivation on the *Bajo Mira* was unpredictable. Sometimes, when coca was mentioned people spoke in a hushed voice or denied it outright. Other times, people would candidly speak about cultivating it, processing it, or occasionally harvesting it for a day's pay (which is commonly referred to as *raspar*). They would share with me the details of how they got involved with it. The stories were all quite similar. First, a handful of *paisas*—which is the local term to refer to white outsiders—had given them free imported seeds and handed them a generous advance payment. Then, they came back to collect the bulks of leaves and promptly paid the remaining balance. It was a perfect commodity chain. Or as Aroldo put it, “coca came in a full package: the seed, the money, the technology, the market, and the protection strategy.”

But the honeymoon didn't last long. *Campesinos* were then taught to make cocaine paste in makeshift labs in the forest and required to sell in that form. The problem with that was that it made the transaction highly time-sensitive because the quality of cocaine powder is inversely related to the age of the paste with which it is processed. And since the sale of coca came with an exclusive sale “contract” that was enforced by violence, farmers sat on a steadily decreasing income. They knew that any attempt to sell to other “buyers” would most likely result in their death. Sometimes “buyers” would use time as leverage to pay farmers extremely low prices, well below the going market rates. Sometimes their delay was due to armed combat

with other “buyers,” or to having to wait for the right moment to collect their product. It was then that it became clear that coca cultivation was not just a smooth commodity chain; it was the driving force behind Colombia’s civil war.

After a four or five-year bonanza, things started spinning out of control. As a local elder put it, “coca was the master that came and radically changed everything.”

Everyone started getting money. People who had never held more than 100,000 pesos (approximately 55 US dollars) in their hand all of a sudden were getting five million (2,800 US dollars). People weren’t ready for that; they went crazy. If a guy drank *charuco*, he started drinking whisky. If he owned a wooden canoe, he bought a boat and a 200 motor. And when his neighbor saw that, well he wanted the same thing. And then “the buyer” would say to him “go ahead, I’ll give you the seed.” And that neighbor was no longer aiming to get five million; he now wanted ten million. And that’s how this time bomb was built.

Then, around 2004, the aerial fumigations that were being carried out in the upper portion of the Mira River started moving towards the coast. But despite the incessant showers of Round Up (glyphosate), according to the UNDP, in 2008 Tumaco was still the Colombian municipality with the largest concentration of coca cultivation.³¹ “The master” was resilient; much more so than other crops; much more so than the forest, the rivers, and *campesinos* themselves.

But the Colombian government, aided by the U.S. government’s military muscle, was determined to exterminate coca in Nariño. Or so they said. Just a few years earlier they had eradicated coca in the neighboring department of Putumayo. But the costs had been extremely high, and their draconic measures had gotten a lot of bad press. None of this was a secret. In fact, a USAID officer once bluntly admitted

³¹ <http://www.pnud.org.co/sitio.shtml?x=53528>

to me (off record, of course) that “in Putumayo we [USAID] came in like it was Afghanistan. We were the government. The governor would call us before he made any decisions.” In the case of Nariño, they had to proceed with greater care. They needed illicit crop substitution programs. Call it food security. Call it forest conservation. Call it strengthening the local governance bodies of Afro-descendant communities.

Local *campesinos* report that today, on the *Bajo Mira*, coca cultivation is “in a coma.” Official figures on total cultivation area in the municipality of Tumaco show a steady decrease since 2008.³² The stupor is evident, but the question of how coca cultivation has been folded into the “traditional production practices” of these black communities remains ambiguous.

“Autonomy”

Una comunidad negra podrá constituirse en Consejo Comunitario, que como persona jurídica ejerce la máxima autoridad de administración interna dentro de las Tierras de las Comunidades Negras, de acuerdo con los mandatos constitucionales y legales que lo rigen y los demás que le asigne el sistema de derecho propio de cada comunidad.
-Decreto 1745, 1995

A black community can become a Community Council, which as a juridical entity exercises the maximum authority of internal administration inside the Lands of Black Communities, according to the constitutional and legal mandates that govern it and to whichever others are assigned to it by each community’s own laws.

“Now everyone is armed” (“Ya todos están armados”)

On any given day, as one travels down the Mira River from the first entry point at *La Boca Toma*, one might undergo several armed checkpoints. The first one is right across the river at the army’s station in *Descolgado*. During my visits there, this

³² (Comité Municipal de Prevención y Atención Integral a la Población en Situación de Desplazamiento, 2010)

was a routine stop before heading anywhere along the river. Because of this, the exchanges that took place there were laced with an air of familiarity. I particularly recall one instance in which Aroldo, in his characteristically good-natured way, stopped the boat and assured the young men in uniform that there was nothing to search. Instead of descending and doing a full search, they stayed on the edge of the river bank and took a quick glance at us. When they saw that most of us were women they jokingly told Aroldo to leave some of us behind arguing that he had no use for so many women himself. Aroldo responded with an equally witty remark at which they all laughed and then they waved for us to go ahead.

Paramilitary checkpoints were more itinerant. Although there was a general pattern of paramilitary presence throughout the river, in my experience the question of whether and where we might be stopped for a search was highly unpredictable. Thus, I could go days without encountering a paramilitary soldier, or I might have to sit next to a couple of them at a village meeting. My presence could be vouched for by a quick visit to the home where I was spending the night or by a full search at a checkpoint. And unlike the exchanges with the army, which had the full weight of legitimacy, my encounters with paramilitary men were always marked by a heavy sensation of covertness. Their presence, though always recognized and pointed out to me, was done so surreptitiously. For example, one evening on our way to *Terán*, a fishing village near the ocean, it got dark fairly quickly. I wasn't sure what time it was, but I knew that Aroldo was hurrying to make it there before the military curfew, which had been set for seven. As we turned around a bend on the river I saw a couple

of lights being flashed our way and Aroldo immediately headed towards them. It was so dark that I couldn't even make out the men's silhouettes, and although Aroldo had a flashlight, he didn't point it at the men with whom he spoke. I could hear that they had a radio that they spoke into after asking us where we were going. And while we waited for clearance, Aroldo picked up the oar that he was slowly steering with and leaned over to place it next to me. Then he whispered in my ear: "These guys are crooks" (*Estos son bandidos*).

Unfortunately, when Doña Emilia complained that everyone on the *Bajo Mira* "was now armed," she was not only referring to the proliferation of military checkpoints. The ubiquity of arms was certainly related to these checkpoints and to the scattered presence of paramilitary men throughout the river. But the most profound impact had to do with people having to live next to them, with them, on a daily basis. The situation could no longer be described as an external phenomenon where armed outsiders kept locals under siege. Instead, the logics of the war, which had at one point been entirely alien to locals, had penetrated into their most intimate social dynamics. And the fact that "everyone was now armed" was simply the most obvious evidence of this transformation.

Since the official demobilization of the AUC, the united national paramilitary army, in 2005 and their (alleged) transformation into more fragmented "criminal bands," (known as *bacrim*) the *modus operandi* of paramilitary forces on the *Bajo Mira* had changed significantly. *Paras*, as they are commonly referred to, no longer set up military training grounds of spectacular proportions. Instead, they settled in a

scattered fashion along the river's villages: two or three men every two or three villages. They would take over a home, set up their radios, and patrol a portion of the river. They would attend local village meetings, woo or coerce women into sexual relationships, and spend most of the day idling around. Although they no longer wore uniforms or were visibly armed, they were still easily recognizable. They didn't fish or farm. They simply hassled locals for subsistence items, killing their livestock, stealing their crops, demanding that the women cook for them.

At one point, there had been a very simple way of identifying *paras* on the *Bajo Mira*: they were not black. And if melanin was not an unambiguous marker, social relationships were. Thus, it had been safe to conclude that any young man that didn't have any relatives or other significant social bonds with locals was most likely a *para*. Over the years, however, this distinction had begun to erode. Now one could see a teenage boy from *Terán* patrolling a paramilitary checkpoint elsewhere on the river. And if the long-distance radio didn't give him away, his outfit certainly did. No one else on the river wore hiking boots, gold chains, and black t-shirts with shiny prints. *Paras* successfully recruited locals with the allure of this symbolic capital and an attractive monthly salary well above the minimum wage. This was what Doña Emilia was referring to when she said that “now everyone was armed.”

But her statement was also figurative. The impact was not limited to those people who had arms; it entailed a profound reconfiguration of social relations. These changes became sorely apparent during a group meeting of the community council's elders (*mayores*), where the topic of conversation centered on the

deteriorated *convivencia* (coexistence) on the river. The matter of living in fear was at the forefront of everyone's preoccupation. When he recalled the past, Don Amalio compared the safety of being in one's village to the feeling of security of being in one's bed: "We used to feel safe. But not anymore. Now we live with insecurity. Anyone can come and abuse us. They kill people and no one even picks up the dead anymore." The women in the group pointed out that women were now treated like commodities. "Women are like tobacco, today" said Doña Emilia, "anyone can send someone out to buy some." They also constantly complained that where there were arms there was no sustainable way of establishing credible authority. Although there was an inevitable degree of nostalgia in their rendering of the past and its comparison to the present, what they were referring to was not some vague and idyllic past. There was a clear point of rupture that they implicitly evoked and that referred to the moment in which the imbricated dynamics of coca and militarization penetrated and transformed social relations as they knew them. Aroldo, as usual, described the change quite poignantly. "Suddenly there were teenagers with paramilitary salaries and even kids who started growing their own coca. So then we started seeing kids with money. What kid with money does what his father says?"

Internal authority

When I first attempted to reconstruct the history of the land titling process, I spent some time at the community council's office in Tumaco. I had already been told that all of the documents that had been produced to meet the government's requirements for collective titling—maps, community census data, local histories—had been lost,

but I nonetheless insisted on going through the office files. During one of those morning office sessions, I was invited to join a meeting that the board was holding with a FAO representative. Rather than have me standing around fumbling through papers, Aroldo encouraged me to sit down and participate. The matter at hand was a food distribution program that the UN's FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) and WFP (World Food Program) were jointly carrying out in the area. The program was not exclusive to the *Bajo Mira*, but there was particular interest in covering that area because since the 2009 floods caused by the overflow of the Mira River, the *Bajo Mira* was being carefully observed by humanitarian aid and emergency relief organizations.

Because it was designed to address current and future food scarcity, the program was delivering both food and edible crop seedlings, namely plantain and cacao. Ernesto, the FAO representative, explained that they had allocated a total of 200.000 seedlings for the *Bajo Mira* to be distributed to a total of 500 families. He also explained that 60% of those seedlings would be purchased and the rest would be produced by the project itself. Finally, he explained that the project's terms of reference restricted the FAO's purchases of "vegetable material" (ie. seeds and seedlings) to sellers that had been certified by the ICA (*Instituto Colombiano Agropecuario*).³³

Armando, the board's treasurer, was visibly irritated. He got up from his seat and paced around the room. What followed was a long and tense negotiation in

³³ The Colombian Institute of Agriculture and Livestock

which Armando proceeded in a carefully organized and politically savvy manner. He began with the matter of the seedlings to be purchased. According to Armando, during a prior meeting, another FAO representative had committed to purchasing 30% of all the seedlings from the community council, irrespective of the fact that they were not certified by ICA. Ernesto resisted and made a final offer of 10% of the cacao seedlings and 30% of the plantain. But he immediately bargained on the sale price, arguing that the FAO's purchasing power was dramatically diminished due to the steady decrease of the U.S. dollar's exchange rate.

Armando continued with the issue of the beneficiaries. The community council had given the FAO their most updated lists of the *Bajo Mira's* inhabitants in order to keep adequate records of the distribution. But instead of using the community council's lists, the FAO had been using some lists that MIDAS had put together. The inconsistency caused considerable confusion. At a logistical level, it made it extremely difficult to keep track of who was receiving what and to attempt to make sure that everyone was more or less equally covered. Because most projects did not cover the total population of the *Bajo Mira*, the board constantly attempted to cobble various projects together in order to even things out. Although it seemed like a purely technical issue, Armando explained, this was a delicate matter with deep political consequences. Because the community council was in charge of announcing when and where the distributions would occur, *they* were the effective face of the donations. In other words, according to most beneficiaries the community council, not the FAO, was *the* donor. This was a double edge sword. On the hand, it provided

an opportunity for the community council to build up its popularity as a generous “internal administrative authority” that looked after its constituency. But, if the distributions didn’t go as planned—if they were inequitable or unreliable—it was their reputation that was at stake.

The argument surrounding the lists sparked a broader discussion about the community council’s effective role in the project. Was the FAO simply using the community council’s information infrastructure? Were they riding on the credibility that the community council had carefully built over the years? Would they jeopardize it? For Armando, the crux of the problem was that the community council was not a full and equal participant. Instead, they had been awkwardly inserted as the official face of the project but had no effective say in how it was actually carried out. For him, the solution was simple: the community council should be a full partner in the implementation process. At this point, Norberto, the secretary, intervened. He told Ernesto that by circumventing the community council’s authority, the FAO had effectively foregone the possibility of working with them as partners. And then he arrogantly proceeded to list all the resources and connections that the community council had access to. When Ernesto attempted to explain why they had used MIDAS’s lists Armando burst into a polished but exasperated monologue:

This community council has existed for twelve years. Every three years we hold a general assembly at which our board members are elected. This is a democratic ethno-territorial organization with clear political objectives. We do not exist simply to execute projects. Therefore, we must have absolute clarity on what the political consequences of our involvement in any given project can be. Otherwise, we can end up harming “the process.” It is very important for people to see that we keep our word, that’s the only way that we can preserve our credibility. We are not like the municipal government,

which simply imposes decisions on its constituents. The community council is a democratic organization. We need to consult both internally with the board and with the communities themselves before we make decisions.

At this point, Ernesto became more conceding. Another contentious issue had been the total number of beneficiaries that the FAO had contemplated. In order to balance out their internal accounting of beneficiaries the community council had been pushing the FAO to add another 180 families to their roster. Although Ernesto had been reluctant to commit himself to increasing the number of beneficiaries throughout the meeting, all of a sudden he loosened up. And once the balance had shifted a bit, Armando and Norberto pounced on him. They demanded resources to set up an experimental garden of cacao varieties. Then they pushed Ernesto to admit that the certification from ICA could be circumvented and to commit to purchasing the seedlings from them. They negotiated a set amount of money that the community council would be given to pay for gasoline. And finally, they addressed what they saw as a structural problem that ailed most of the projects funded by the international cooperation. In general, projects contemplated paying salaries only to people who were certified “*técnicos*” (technicians), and they saw this as both financially and politically unjust. On the one hand, the money allocated for experts always ended up going to people in Tumaco, or worse yet, in Bogotá. And on the other hand, it was an insult to local knowledges. Overall, it was a structural mechanism that perpetuated the privileging of the same people—white, educated outsiders—while failing to recognize the members of the community council as integral members who contributed essential knowledge.

After Ernesto left, the board members stayed on to comment on the meeting. They seemed satisfied with the outcome. Comparatively speaking, the balance had shifted in their favor. And yet, I couldn't help but wonder whether what had just happened could in fact be interpreted as a victory. Certainly, they had defended their role as *the* legitimate internal authority of the *Bajo Mira*. This was a right granted to them by Law 70 and it was not an insignificant source of political leverage. But had they actually placed themselves in a more advantageous position of power? As I listened to their complacent narration of the events, I scribbled my own thoughts silently in my notebook: "In my view, they are highly dependent on international cooperation monies to cover their most basic operative costs. They rarely participate directly in project design and implementation. They are usually paid in-kind and seldom given the opportunity to manage monies themselves. With so many structural deficiencies, what political decisions can they effectively enact? On the *Mira River*, gasoline is the minimal condition of possibility required to do politics."

When I picked my head up from my notebook, I noticed that most people had scattered and the meeting was disintegrating. Armando and Norberto shook my hand and left, and so I went to the back patio to join Aroldo, who was engrossed in conversation with Milena, who had been waiting for the meeting to conclude. They spoke in a hushed voice, but when I asked them if I was interrupting, they encouraged me to come closer and let me in on their conversation. Milena explained that the week before, one of the community council's two motorboats had been stolen from the harbor in Tumaco. She didn't have to explain that the motorboat was the

community council's most essential working tool and therefore the theft was a big blow for them. Without it, they simply could not carry out any of their work. "The thing is," Aroldo continued "we think we know who stole it." Milena explained that the younger members of the board—Alexander, Armando, and Norberto—had asked the local *para* commander to recover the boat for them. Aroldo shook his head at this in a gesture of resolute disagreement. "They think that because they asked him not to kill the thief, the whole thing will work out. But the *jefe* (chief) is going to do as he pleases. These people are killers, they kill on a whim." Their plan, Milena continued explaining, was to catch the guy and give him a good scare so that he would return the boat. "And then what?" Aroldo insisted, "then we'll just be indebted to those *bandidos* (crooks)."

Law 70 and its attendant regulatory decree (1745) were built on a set of assumptions—ancestrality, tradition, rurality—that produced a seemingly natural link between blackness and ethnicity. And this concept of black ethnicity, which followed the blueprint of indigenous land rights in Latin America, was always already territorialized. But although the naturalization of ethno-territorial blackness was one of the law's most evident outcomes, it was not, in and of itself, its primary objective. For the organizations that prompted its passage, the ultimate goal was autonomy. For this reason, autonomy is perhaps the best measure of the political success of ethnic blackness. Undoubtedly, autonomy is an elusive concept. There are as many definitions of autonomy as there are "communities" that seek to exercise it. This is

perhaps the first problem with autonomy. But the second problem, the one on which I attempted to focus above, is much more practical. To what extent have the black communities of the *Bajo Mira* achieved self-government? To what extent do their daily lives follow a set of self-determined aspirations? To what extent do they craft their own futures? I realize that these questions are themselves problematic; that they reek of Enlightenment notions of rational agency and liberal individuality. But I am grasping for moderately useful political guidelines. In the end, the problem with ethnic blackness is not that it's constructed; that it's not fully adequate to describe the complexity of real life; or even that it is dangerously rigid. The problem, which must be explored empirically, is whether its mobilization has resulted in giving "black communities" a relatively greater degree of autonomy.

The ethnographic account that I have given thus far provides evidence for both sides of the coin. While the ideal of autonomy has not been fully met, ethnic blackness has furnished black communities with some useful political tools to further forms of self-government. While the multicultural appropriation of ethnic blackness carries some preoccupying limitations, we cannot attribute the failures of autonomy to the discourse itself. As ethnic blackness was put in motion by the people of the *Bajo Mira* its application had to contend with unexpected historical turns. Thus far, multiculturalism and its ethnic rendering of blackness have been unable to stop armed violence from entering and doing considerable damage to the landscapes and people of the *Bajo Mira*. And while the brunt of the responsibility should not be placed on

the concept itself, it is urgent to think of new social formations that might be better suited to face the new conjuncture.

“A canalete”

Un saludo de bienvenida
y un abrazo de llegada
Estamos todos los negros
luchando la misma causa
Si esta lucha no se diera
¿qué sucedería?
Se acabarían las montañas
y terminaría nuestra vida
Los negros del Litoral
Pacífico colombiano
Vivimos en esta tierra
que nuestros abuelos dejaron
Aquí fue que ellos vivieron
y la conservaron
No la comprometieron
Porque nosotros quedamos
-Canción del proceso, CC Bajo Mira

A welcoming greeting
And a hug upon arrival
All us *negros* are here
Fighting for the same cause
If this struggle didn't take place
What would happen?
The mountains would disappear
And our life would end
We, the *negros* of the littoral
On the Colombian Pacific
Live on this land
That are our grandparents left
This is where they lived
And they conserved it
And they didn't compromise it
Because we are still here
-Song of the *Bajo Mira's Community Council*

The wooden oar, or *canalete*, is ubiquitous on the *Bajo Mira*. Although many people now have motorboats, the *canalete* continues to be an indispensable household item. But in addition to its material importance, it has also acquired broader meaning as one of the paradigmatic symbols of the Colombian Pacific's black communities. This is

probably because the *canalete* condenses many of the characteristics of blackness that Law 70 sanctioned: rural, riverine, and traditional. Perhaps for this reason, I became highly suspicious of the romantic ways in which it was used at the many meetings of black organizations that I have attended over the years. It seemed to me that the *canalete* and its associated act of rowing had become over-interpreted and abused in evocations of blackness in Colombia. In some ways, I too condensed my own interpretive biases on the *canalete*. The countless times that I had seen the image of a black person rowing on the sublime waters of a peaceful river on the covers of books, reports, films, and websites uncritically reproducing the discourse of Law 70 had produced a near total saturation in me. Over time, I became incapable of interpreting it as anything other than the official language of multiculturalism. And its evocation repeatedly produced a feeling of frustration in me: Was it not possible to imagine and mobilize blackness in ways that were not constrained by the rigidities of ethnicity?

Unsurprisingly, as I re-read and coded field notes, interviews, and documents, the *canalete* refused to disappear. At first, I ignored it, convinced that its proliferation in my own research materials was simply a confirmation of its tired usage, of its near symbolic emptiness. But after a while, I was forced to reconsider it. This became particularly apparent in my attempt to reconstruct the history of the titling process by interviewing its most active participants. After combing through every single one of those interviews, it became clear to me that I had to take its repeated mention seriously. In these accounts, the *canalete* was not being used as an ossified symbol of rurality and tradition, or as an uncritical recitation of official

multiculturalism. Instead, the central actors of the *Bajo Mira*'s collective land titling process used the phrase "*íbamos a canaleta*" to illustrate the high level of enthusiasm that accompanied "*el proceso*." Strictly translated, the phrase means, "we rowed to get there." But they used it both literally and figuratively in order to transmit to me how unique that moment had been. The overall idea, which I heard repeatedly, was that the collective land titling process had been a moment of unique political effervescence for the communities of the *Bajo Mira*; that people were so deeply committed to "the process" that they were willing to row up river for hours just to attend a meeting. The act of going "*a canaleta*" was a shorthand way to illustrate the intensity of the hopes and desires that moved them.

There was an additional moral value implicit in the phrase. When people referred to the *canaleta* they did so in opposition to the motorboat, which also carried a set of associated ideas. The motorboat was directly associated with progress, development, and modernization, which though positive in some senses, was also regarded with a good deal of suspicion by some. Unlike the *canaleta*, the motorboat required gasoline, which in turn made people reliant on money. This necessity of entering the cash economy suggested both dependence on external actors and the risk of falling prey to corruption. The desire for gasoline—whether by individual community members or the community council itself—drove people to become entangled with both licit and illicit actions and transactions. It motivated people to cultivate coca, become subservient to donors, and collaborate with paramilitaries. It was therefore seen as a symbol of moral degradation and of the erosion of autonomy.

By opposition, the *canalete* was also attached to dignity. The dignity of economic, political, and social independence. The dignity of moral righteousness. And perhaps for the first time in many people's lives, the dignity of being black. For if the *canalete* was representative of the unique culture of black communities, these traditional values which were held up against the corruptive power of capital were implicit within it.

These associations, which had emerged in individual interviews, were collectively reiterated during a group meeting that I organized for the purpose of reconstructing the history of the titling process. The meeting gathered seven of the people who had actively participated in "the process." Although some of them still worked with the community council, others had abandoned "the process" altogether and so the meeting served as an occasion for old friends to meet again. Admittedly, the very nature of the meeting may have been responsible for the fact that the conversation that day was permeated with nostalgia. But even if taken with a grain of salt, with the full awareness that memory can be deceiving, the collective remembrances that I collected that day deserve to be interpreted as more than just their propensity to romanticize the past. That day, perhaps inevitably, the memory of traveling "*a canalete*" was invoked once more:

People felt deeply moved by the idea of protecting their territory, or what was left of it. Back then, the main problems were not the guerrilla or the *paras*, so the main thing that motivated people was how to improve their conditions of life. Well, they thought that if we organized, we might be able to carry out projects to assist our communities and then maybe one day we might be able to buy a little motorboat. So people said, "ok, let's do it," and they would row harder. And sometimes the river had grown from one village to the next, but if a meeting had already been called there people were committed to making

it, so if someone had a canoe we would row. And other times we couldn't get there on a canoe, so we had to walk. And then if the river got big again we had to swim, and even if the water came up to our navels, we'd keep going until we made it to our destination. We would hold our meeting and then head back "*a canalete.*"

How do I reconcile my persistent skepticism of ethnic blackness with this image? How do I balance a healthy dose of critical analysis with the recognition that ethnic blackness was a powerful idea that moved many people? What is the point of deconstructing ethnic blackness, of pointing out its rigidities, its limitations and its problematic presuppositions if not to evaluate its political promise? In the end, ethnic blackness is only useful insofar as it is capable of facilitating the attainment of those same dreams that moved people to travel their river "*a canalete.*"

Well-being

During one of my attempts to keep up with the team of forest conservation monitors as they recorded tree measurements, I slipped off a tree branch and landed on my back. Although I managed to walk the rest of the way and complete the day's activities with the men, when we got back to *Guabal* Aroldo asked Milena to take a look at me to make sure that my limp was nothing serious. When she saw my bruised backside, Milena smiled and told me to take my clothes off. She made me a sitz bath and stroked the bruises with herb bunches. Then, she handed me a bottle of an herbal concoction that she kept atop her plastic wardrobe cabinet. When I asked if she had prepared it herself, she pulled out an entire assortment of bottles that she used for different purposes. Milena was a midwife (*partera*). She had delivered so many babies that she had simply lost count. And so, we talked about birthing. I had

recently gone through childbirth myself and told her about my experience. She listened and shared. She told me that most of her own babies were delivered by another *partera* from across the river, but that she had given birth to two of them on her own. When I asked what happened when there were complications she said that in those cases women were taken out to Tumaco. But she also admitted that sometimes women died during or soon after childbirth, and that sometimes their babies didn't make it.

Although she was confident of her own curing abilities, she lamented the near total absence of health services on the river. In her view, it would not only be possible, but ideal to combine local healing knowledges with a decent medical infrastructure. She told me that there were a total of four health posts along the *Bajo Mira*. One of them had been recently built following the intense lobbying of the community council. More specifically, it had been negotiated by Felipe Landázuri, a former secretary of the community council's board. Felipe was a community health officer in his home village of *Candelilla de la Mar*, and as a member of the community council's board he had managed to have a well-equipped health post built there. But in June of 2008, he was taken from his home by paramilitary soldiers and murdered.³⁴ "After his death," Milena said, "the health clinic fell apart." The other three health posts had suffered severe damage during the floods of 2009. She couldn't tell me whether they had been properly repaired and were now running because she had never used their services before.

³⁴ (Diócesis de Tumaco, 2008).

We had been sitting on the floor, under a single light bulb that threw a dim light on her bedroom, and suddenly the whole house went dark. The generator that kept the bulb on had run out of gas. Unmoved, Milena immediately called out for Daisy, her only daughter, and sent her to fetch some candles from the neighbor's shop. "Tell him I'll pay him back later," she said, and then apologized to me for the darkness in her home. She dried me up and told me to put my pants back on. Then we walked out into the kitchen to wait for the candles. Although she was only sixteen at the time, Daisy was already a tall and shapely woman of exceptional beauty. She often "joined" in on the conversations that her mother and I had by sitting quietly next to us, but she rarely intervened. That night, as her mother was busy frying several pieces of *tatabra* (pecari) for dinner, I asked her about school.

Daisy told me that she had recently finished the fifth grade and hoped to keep going to school soon. Milena explained that the local school in *Guabal* was only an elementary school and that the closest middle and high school was in *Congal*. Although *Congal* was only 45 minutes away, no one could afford to pay for the gas needed to send their kids back and forth every day, so most people who had relatives or acquaintances in Tumaco sent them off to attend high school there. Plus, the school in *Congal* suffered from the chronic dearth of teachers and resources that most schools along the river faced. This scarcity was not new for the people of the *Bajo Mira*. But it was something that they had hoped to overcome. In fact, many had placed their hopes on "the process," thinking that the chronic education issue might be solved once they had a legal "territory" and a locally-based "authority". The

community council had in fact made an attempt to intervene. But given that they had no discretionary funds to spend,³⁵ they were always forced to negotiate with the municipality or with the international cooperation organizations that funded these kinds of projects. In the end, although they managed to get funding to build several new schools, they couldn't keep the schools properly staffed. The problem was deep-seated and structural. Locals did not have the needed certificates to teach in village schools. And those who went to Tumaco to get the credentials seldom returned to the river.

As a makeshift solution to this problem, Milena, like most other parents in the *Bajo Mira*, was thinking of sending Daisy to live with an in-law in Tumaco. But she had bigger plans. She and her husband had bought a lot in the city and were hoping to build a small house there with wood from the forest. Maybe she would move in there temporarily while her daughter finished high school. That was what most mothers did and she was ready to do the same. Like those other mothers, she was motivated by the dream of economic improvement that education promised. If Daisy finished high school, she might be able to get a job, move to the city, and go home to *Guabal* once in a while to visit. But Milena was also motivated by fear. After we finished eating and Daisy had left, she told me in confidence that one of the paramilitary soldiers that was stationed in *Guabal* had been stopping by to ask to

³⁵ Unlike their indigenous counterparts, *resguardos*, the community councils of black communities do not receive cash transfers from their respective municipalities and therefore have no discretionary funds.

speak to Daisy. Milena had ignored his requests and had forbidden Daisy to speak to any of them. But she knew that she could only keep him at bay for so long.

Everyone in *Guabal* knew that Victoria, a local woman in her mid twenties, had been recently raped by one of those same paramilitary soldiers. When her father found out, he sent her away to Tumaco where she gave birth to a premature boy before returning to the river. A couple of months before the rape, Victoria's mother had told me a story that revealed much about her hopes for her seven daughters, and which acquired added meaning in light of the event. She told me that when Victoria turned fourteen, she started itching to make money and asked her mother for permission to work in Tumaco. Her mother enthusiastically found her a job cleaning and cooking for an acquaintance. She had hoped that by getting a job, Victoria could avoid following in her oldest sister's footsteps. Rosa, who was 26, had married a local man when she was still a teenager and was now, according to her mother, the unhappy mother of five. But Victoria's father, who was an active participant in "the process," opposed to Victoria's employment. As soon as he found that Victoria was working as a domestic worker in Tumaco he went to fetch her to take her back to the river. Exasperated, he told his wife that he had dedicated his entire life defending the land on which he raised his children so that they could be free; so that they could avoid the *enslavement* of paid employment. When she told me this story, Victoria's mother repeated the word *enslavement* and dwelled on it. Then she pointed to her daughter Rosa's house on the other side of the river and looked at me, "But isn't that the same thing?"

Is it not possible for Milena and Victoria's parents to articulate their hopes for their children in a way that doesn't oppose the "modern" promise of education to the "traditional production practices" of an agricultural life? On the one hand, there is the offer of a "traditional" rural life, which according to Victoria's mother condemns women to domestic subjugation and perpetual poverty. And on the other hand, there is the possibility of pursuing a "modern" urban dream, which for Victoria's father was tantamount to the nightmare of proletarian existence, which he equated with slavery. If that is as far as our political imaginations can go, we might be condemned to a false choice between the commitment to defend different kinds of relationships with others, and the rightful desire to live well.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have strived to explore what ethno-territorial blackness means for the people of *Bajo Mira*, what it does politically and where it gets in the way. I have shown that sometimes it accommodates practices of mobility, porous notions of belonging, and paradoxical mixtures of "traditional" and "modern" livelihood practices. By focusing on the gaps between the concept and its practice, I have traced the ways in which ethno-territorial blackness has acquired new contextual and contingent meanings in the *Bajo Mira*.

These new meanings and appropriations have emerged in the midst of an unfortunate turn of events. In this new conjuncture, ethno-territorial blackness has not successfully halted the violence of the war from impinging on black communities

and their territories; it has not unambiguously strengthened their autonomy; nor has it facilitated the attainment of their individual and collective aspirations. And yet, the limitations cannot be attributed to the idea itself or to “the process” whereby its implementation has been carried out. Like all articulations, ethnic blackness was a product of a moment, a moment in which the idea was promising, expedient, and revolutionary; but perhaps that moment has passed.

Chapter 3

Competing landscapes of blackness

Introduction

The Blackness Law

On September 28, 1994, Aroldo and a small group of other residents of *Bocas de Guabal*, a small village on the Mira River in Colombia's littoral border with Ecuador, held a meeting to discuss the rapid rate at which their community's mangroves were being destroyed. Mangroves were being exploited for the construction and leather tanning industries with dire consequences for locals' livelihoods. For example, when the mangroves were cut, *concheras*, women who made a living collecting shellfish, lost their only source of income. But in addition to being an important source of money, mangroves were essential components in locals' well being. During a conversation that we had in 2009, Aroldo explained the mangroves' importance to me in detail. He described them as "daycare centers" where baby fish remained safe until they were large enough to swim in the river without being eaten by larger fish, and as "little houses" where crabs laid their eggs and made their homes. The disappearance of mangroves therefore meant a significant threat on locals' source of sustenance. Also, a few families who lived on the river's mouth had lost their houses when the Pacific Ocean's waves, no longer contained by the mangroves' powerful barrier, beat against the village's residential areas.

That afternoon the atmosphere was tense. Because some people benefited considerably from the commercialization of the mangrove wood and bark, they

opposed a ban on its exploitation. But the consequences of indiscriminate exploitation were too ominous to be ignored. The purpose of the meeting, therefore, was to reach a consensus in which commercial mangrove exploitation was not entirely prohibited, but rather carefully managed. Of course, this was easier said than done. On the one hand, residents of *Bocas de Guabal* were familiar with predatory capitalism. Everyone remembered how the *chanul* (*sacoglottis procera*), an exotic tree that is a coveted source of export quality timber, had entirely disappeared following the entrance of foreign timber companies. At the same time, they were tired of living so precariously. In a region of Colombia with little to no formal State presence—no health services, education, electrification, sewage, or drinking water—nor any stable sources of employment, the possibility of exploiting mangroves for a small profit was undoubtedly attractive. The situation that they tried to resolve that afternoon was not new. The problem of how to create and sustain strategies to relate to plants and animals in a not-entirely-capitalist manner, while living in some of the world's most promising areas for capital reproduction was a recurrent theme. Until then, however, the inhabitants of *Bocas de Guabal* had not had a concrete political tool with which to confront this conundrum.

In the midst of the exchange, the attendants heard the humming of a motorboat approaching. Fernando, a native of *Bocas de Guabal*, disembarked. He was accompanied by Juan Manuel, a man from Tumaco who aspired to a seat in the city council. Because Juan Manuel had funds from his political party, Fernando had asked if he could ride the boat with him as he traveled up and down the river

campaigning. Juan Manuel had the money, but as an upstanding young man born and raised on the Mira River, Fernando had the cultural capital. In the end, they reached an agreement that could be summarized quite simply as: “You do your thing and I’ll do mine”. Fernando’s “thing” was circulating the news regarding the recent passage of Law 70. For several years, he had been a militant with one of Colombia’s most well known black organizations—PCN—working for the protection of black people’s territories. For Aroldo, this was a memorable meeting during which he heard the word *territory* to refer to his village, to his farm, to the mangroves, and to the forest where he had hunted and cut wood his entire life, for the first time. Fernando’s message that day, as Aroldo recalled it fifteen years later, was straightforward and captivating: “*Muchachos*, this territory is in danger.” He explained the issue of large companies, how they kept advancing, and he told us that collective titling of all the territory was a strategy to mitigate the impacts of their advance and that then we would have to make some internal rules so that each of us respected the space as it was defined. Well, back then he didn’t give us much detail, he simply said, “This is good. We are a part of this dynamic that is stretching all the way from Chocó to Nariño. Further down the road you will get acquainted with the work that we’ve been doing in order to get President Gaviria to sign this law.”

In 2003, ten years after the passage of the law, the people of *Bocas de Guabal*, along with fifty-three other villages of the lower portion of the Mira River, received a collective title for over forty-six thousand hectares of land. Although the work of lobbying the government to pass the law had been completed when they first heard

the word *territory* in 1994, delimiting and protecting their own territory was not an easy task. First, they had to organize into a community council, a local government figure that had been especially created for black communities following Law 70. This involved the difficult work of spreading the word up and down the river, mobilizing with little to no resources, and pressuring the State to finally grant them the land title. Despite all these difficulties, every single person that I spoke to about the titling process recalled it as a period of remarkable political effervescence and hopeful enthusiasm. When I asked the protagonists why everyone had been so enthusiastic, they all agreed on the reason, but as usual, Aroldo put it most eloquently:

[Because] it was a current issue. It was not a made up thing; it was something that was in fact happening in Buenaventura, in Chocó, in Cauca, and Tumaco was not an exception. We were losing our land through loans, sales, and also through invasion [...]. So people of course felt very touched by the message of the need to get the territory back, or at least protect what was left of it [...]. This is why people were so committed.

Law 70 gained currency among the eleven thousand inhabitants of the lower Mira River because they saw it as a promising tool with which to protect their territories; because it provided them with a language with which to speak and be heard about the felling of the forests, the destruction of the mangroves, and local communities' own complex participation in these processes. In fact, during that meeting in 1994, the people of *Bocas de Guabal* referred to themselves and their neighbors as *campesinos* not as black communities. And yet, Law 70 is commonly referred to today as The Blackness Law (*La Ley de Negritudes*). I do not mean to suggest that Law 70's recognition of cultural difference is negligible, nor do I want to

minimize its impact on ethnic politics in Colombia. However, I think that a thorough analysis of its consequences as a land reform is long overdue. It is imperative that we evaluate whether collective land titling did in fact provide the people of the lower Mira River with an effective tool to confront the concrete problems they were facing. More broadly, it is necessary to analyze the consequences of Law 70 as both a multicultural and land reform, and to carefully evaluate the consequences of this articulation.

Landscaping Projects

Law 70 is Colombia's poster child of successful multicultural reform. In 1993, following Colombia's most recent constitutional reform, this law defined "black communities"³⁶ as collective beneficiaries of special rights. Broadly stated, the law's objectives are the protection of black communities' ethnic identity and rights, as well as the promotion of their economic and social development in order to guarantee equality. Being the first large-scale State reform of its kind, Law 70 became a milestone of official multiculturalism in Latin America, in particular as regards Afrodescendants' rights³⁷. But Law 70 was not simply a top-down juridical mandate.

³⁶ I put the term in scare quotes to note that this was a juridical category created by the law itself.

³⁷ A broad array of politically correct terms that refer to blackness circulates in Colombia. These terms include *negro* (or black, as both adjective and noun), Afro-Colombian, and Afrodescendant among others. There exists, of course, a seemingly endless set of other less official, more contextual, less politically correct and sometimes outright offensive terms that I am not referring to here but whose existence should be recognized. Unsurprisingly there are varying interpretations and political appropriations of these more official terms and therefore their usage can ignite heated debates. Each of them has a particular history that I cannot trace in detail here but it is nonetheless important to clarify my usage of them. In general, my preference is to use the term black or *negro*, as an adjective, to indicate the presence of particular subjectivities and politics. I do, however use other terms when they are the ones that my interlocutors are employing, including the use of *negro* as a noun. In this particular instance, I use the term Afrodescendant because, given that it is free of national markers, it

It is widely recognized that it does not mark the beginning of ethnic rights for Afro-Colombians, but rather it is the result of a prior social mobilization that ran deep and wide. Many authors have traced the history of this mobilization noting that the process of drafting the law created an unprecedented political effervescence in which many sectors of civil society were involved (cf. Agudelo, 2005; Asher, 2009; Oslender, 2008; Grueso, Rosero, & Escobar, 1998). Because of this, today many independent black organizations regard Law 70 as the second most important accomplishment for black communities (after the abolition of slavery) not simply because of the rights that it granted them, but mostly because of the ethnic awareness that it generated.

Naturally, not all evaluations of Law 70 have been favorable. In the nearly twenty years since its passage, many observers have produced incisive analyses of its impact on black communities. Scholars, for example, have criticized the ossification of black identity that it produced, the way in which it has contributed to the cooptation of the black social movement's agenda, the uneven distribution of its benefits, and its many conceptual shortcomings. On their part, activists have reflected on its actual reach and have proposed concrete ways to close the gap between the law and its effective implementation. But despite its mixed reviews, Law 70 still stands as the paradigmatic example of the successful mobilization of ethnic blackness, not only in Colombia but for international observers as well.

circulates broadly in the international sphere where Law 70 is recognized as a model of official multiculturalism.

But Law 70 is also a land reform project. In practice, the law's main impact has been on land tenure. Since its passage, more than five million hectares of lands have been titled to black communities. Its impressive breadth has led some observers to describe Law 70 as the largest land reform in recent Latin American history. And although in practice the exercise of black communities' territoriality is dubious,³⁸ its impact as a significant transformation in Colombia's land tenure structures cannot be ignored. The point is that although much has been written and said about Law 70, it is usually analyzed as a multicultural reform when in fact it is much more than that.

In this chapter I continue to analyze the concrete consequences that Law 70 has had on the black communities of the *Bajo Mira* in Southwestern Colombia. However, rather than focus on its impact as a multicultural reform designed to protect "ethnic rights", I analyze it as a *landscaping project*. Following Tsing, I understand *landscapes* as particular "configuration[s] of humans and nonhumans across a terrain" (Tsing, 2004, p. 174). *Landscaping*, then, involves both the material and representational practices through which any given landscape is created and maintained. Finally, I refer to *projects* in order to stress the fact that landscaping is processual and power-laden. At any given moment across any given terrain there are multiple landscaping projects, which seek to consolidate competing or dovetailing configurations of humans and nonhumans.

³⁸ This is mainly for two reasons that I address more fully in subsequent chapters. First, because hundreds of thousands of members of black communities have been forcefully displaced from their titled territories since the passage of the law. And second, because those who managed to remain on them have to contend with violent forces—drug traffic, armed groups, and capital extraction—that greatly obstruct their ability to fully appropriate said territories.

Focusing on landscaping projects allows me to do several things. First, it enables an analysis that looks at the joint formation of humans—as multicultural subjects—and nonhumans—as “nature” or “resources”. Second, it uncovers multiculturalism as much more than the official recognition of ethnic rights, showing instead that it is a broad political project that re-organizes relations between people and “nature” by producing particular categories of difference. Finally, as an analytical category *landscape* is much closer to the notion of territoriality that black activists constructed and mobilized around Law 70. This is relevant not only because territoriality is the emic category that best describes the political project of the black activists that participated in drafting the law, but also because territoriality emerged as a counter-hegemonic landscaping project, one that sought to challenge exploitative relations between people and nature. When Fernando spoke about *territory* rather than land, he was referring to a landscape, to an entire set of social and biological relations between plants, people, animals, and even “inanimate” objects and spirits. He clearly distinguished it from land as a “natural resource” or as a “factor of production”. As Aroldo put it, “land can be any old barren field but territory, territory is much more complete”.

Green Multiculturalism

This is one starting point of my analysis of Law 70, not as a narrow multicultural reform but as a landscaping project that seeks to simultaneously define subjects and nature. But there is one insight that must be added to this approach. While the Marxist critique of capitalism’s exploitation of nature is still necessary, scholars of

environmentalism have noted that capitalism has entered a “green” phase (Brockington & Duffy, 2010; Katz, 1998; Sullivan, 2006). These works document a transformation in the mechanisms through which value is produced and reproduced. Basically, they note that in addition to the well-known mechanisms that produce value through labor exploitation and extractive and industrial transformation of nature, it is now also possible to derive value from non-extractive activities such as conservation (Igoe, 2007; West, 2006).

In fact, the rise of green capitalism responds to what I see as three significant shifts in global environmental discourse and policy. The first refers to the widespread adoption of "sustainable development" following the Brundtland Report's recommendations in 1987. The second shift concerns the international preoccupation with biodiversity conservation, which spread as a result of the CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity), which was opened for signing at the Earth's Summit in 1992. The third and more recent shift signals a growing international concern over climate change and its complex entanglements with the global economic and fuel crises. Together, these changes point to a major paradigm shift in matters of resource management, conservation, and environmental responsibility and to the concomitant adaptations of extractive capitalism, which has selectively turned green.³⁹

My second point of departure is Hale's notion of neoliberal multiculturalism, which emphasizes the integral--if counter-intuitive--relationship between cultural rights and neoliberal political economic reforms in Latin America (Gros, 2000; C. R

³⁹ I wish to thank Shane Greene for helping me identify these shifts in global environmental politics.

Hale, 2005)⁴⁰. Hale shows that in practice collective land rights for Afrodescendants and indigenous people—a distinctive element of multicultural policies in Latin America—have dovetailed with neoliberal governance. He explains that this is possible because contrary to *mestizaje*'s homogenizing nation-building project, which suppressed cultural difference, neoliberalism shapes, limits, and produces cultural difference. Therefore, it is logically compatible with multiculturalism. (Hale 2005:12).

I follow Hale in noting that cultural recognition and neoliberal governance are deeply entangled, but I qualify two important things. First, I expand the realm of political society to include nature. And second, I note that neoliberalism does not only involve predatory forms of production, but green capitalism as well. Just like neoliberal multiculturalism replaced *mestizaje*'s attempt to eradicate cultural difference with strategies to manage and contain it, green capitalism has abandoned its necessary antagonism with environmentalism and complemented it with a selective investment in “green” ventures.⁴¹ To signal the articulation of these two counter-intuitive developments—a nationalist formation that tolerates and even encourages difference and a marketable environmentalism—I use the term *green multiculturalism*.

⁴⁰ In fact, this insight has an older history that can be traced back to Christian Gros' work on the politics of ethnicity in Colombia (cf. Gros, 2000).

⁴¹ This is not to say that predatory capitalism is a thing of the past. Clearly, extractive, industrial, and highly destructive production practices are alive and well. The point is simply that alongside these practices (which are often greenwashed), green capitalism has also thrived.

In order to explore green multiculturalism on the ground, I focus on the cultivation of oil palm⁴² in the *Bajo Mira*'s black collective territory. Looking at oil palm cultivation in the *Bajo Mira* is particularly useful because it illustrates how official multiculturalism—in the form of ethnic land rights—and green capitalism—in the form of biodiesel production—articulate in practice. Some critics may point out that because the majority of the world's oil palm is *not* cultivated for biodiesel production, the linkage between this crop and green capitalism is tenuous. Added to this observation is the fact that the practices involved in oil palm cultivation are far from being “green”. Specifically, the bulk of oil palm cultivation—in Colombia and elsewhere—is still done in large-scale monoculture plantations that have no pretensions of being or even appearing to be green.⁴³

While these observations are pertinent, the linkages between oil palm and green capitalism cannot be denied. Although in Colombia—and most specifically in the area around Tumaco—oil palm cultivation was not introduced (nor is it still mainly destined) for biodiesel production, recent State incentives for its cultivation are driven by the global discourse of clean energy. The numerous economic-political incentives to oil palm cultivation introduced by the Uribe administration, for

⁴² *Elaeis guineensis* is commonly referred to as African oil palm, or in Spanish *Palma Africana*. However, some of the black activists with whom I have collaborated refuse to call it African in order to avoid creating or reinforcing a negative association between African-ness and devastation. For this reason, they prefer the term oil palm, or *palma aceitera* in Spanish.

⁴³ It is important to note that a significant change in oil palm cultivation practices is currently under way as a result of the global standards outlined by the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), which was created in 2004. As Silva Castañeda notes, the RSPO's espousal of market-based incentives make this initiative's environmental soundness dubious at best (Silva Castañeda, 2011). However, despite these well-placed critiques, the RSPO's impact on the concrete practices of both large and small-scale palm growers in Colombia cannot be ignored. For a detailed account of the RSPO (cf. Silva Castañeda, 2011).

example, were all ideologically shored up by the vision of Colombia as a world leader in clean energy production. For example, in January of 2008 during the inauguration of the first biodiesel processing plant in Tumaco, president Uribe's speech described the event as a major step towards realizing his dream for the Colombian agricultural sector: "I have a dream that Colombia can be filled with alternative fuel processing plants that are based on agricultural raw materials, and this is the beginning of that dream."⁴⁴ In the end, although quantitatively speaking biofuel production is still a marginal portion of the industrial uses of oil palm, much of its expansion has been enabled by the discourse of clean energy.

Green multiculturalism is not simply a euphemism for cloaked capitalism and my purpose is not to narrate yet another story of capitalism's "unchallenged" triumph, or to make an inventory of everything that is destroyed by its advance. Like all landscaping projects, green multiculturalism competes with other projects, it is constantly challenged, and must continuously reassert itself; it is a grounded hegemonic process. Overall, I find it particularly revealing that what began as two separate and antagonistic landscaping processes—landless black farmers and oil palm plantations—have in some senses converged. In order to trace this convergence, I begin with a brief history of oil palm cultivation and its arrival to Colombia. Then, I present a detailed overview of the various modes of oil palm cultivation that currently exist on the Mira River and use ethnographic data to illustrate the main consequences

⁴⁴ The original citation, which was taken from the Presidency's Press Secretary's webpage read: "Yo tengo el sueño de que Colombia se pueda llenar de plantas productoras de combustibles alternativos a partir de materias primas agrícolas y este es el principio de ese sueño" (Presidencia de la República, s. f.).

that this crop's expansion has had for black farmers on the Mira River. Finally, I present some general conclusions regarding this articulation of cultural recognition and "green" uses of nature.

Oil palm journeys

*"The tropic's gift to the world"*⁴⁵

As postcolonial scholars have shown, the colonial enterprise was centrally concerned with the management of nature, which sought to reconfigure human and non-human relations just as much as relations of power between colonizers and colonized (Casid, 2004; Merchant, 1989; Pratt, 1992). Therefore, when we follow the journey that oil palm underwent from Western Africa to the Americas, we also trace the history of the transatlantic slave trade and the colonial project that has been unfolding in this continent since.

West African farmers began using oil palm⁴⁶ since prehistoric times as a source of wine and cooking oil. Although it was a very important resource for Guinea coast and Congo villagers, it was not deliberately planted. Instead, oil palms sprouted in forest clearings that were made for edible crops such as yams and taro. The palms eventually grew above the forest canopy and developed into groves. Even when dooryards were more purposefully tended to, oil palm one of the many plants that fall in the gap between "cultivated" and "wild" (Tsing, 2004).

⁴⁵ This subtitle, which in the original is *El Regalo del Trópico para el Mundo*, is taken from Fedepalma's publication "*La agroindustria de la palma de aceite en Colombia*" (2006)

⁴⁶ In general, I am tracing the history of a particular species of oil palm, *elaeis guineensis*, although the American species *elaeis oleifera* and hybrids are also currently cultivated in Colombia.

In fact, Sauer's historical geography of *elaeis guineensis* describes the relationship between it and prehistoric farming peoples as symbiotic (Sauer, 1993, p. 191). This is not to say that all species involved in this relationship benefited equally from it, nor to suggest that West African farmers had a harmonious relationship with the forest. Symbiosis, as I use it here, simply suggests that these two organisms lived in close physical association, and benefited—albeit differentially—from the interaction. Another way of showing this type of relationship would be by replacing our analyses of farmers and their cultivated crops, of gatherers and their wild fruits, with analyses of landscapes. This would allow us to see how oil palms and West African villagers flourished in tandem through a range of interactions that cannot be adequately described by the modern categories with which we describe “nature” today. That is, until the onset of European colonialism.

Although early European presence on the Guinean coast was not motivated by oil palm, but rather by slaves, the latter carried seeds of the former across the Atlantic, and Europeans often loaded palm fruits as provisions for the journey.⁴⁷ According to Sauer, by 1700, oil palms had been casually planted in Jamaica and Brazil, where Africans used it for cooking, and by the mid 1800s it had been introduced to other places in the West Indies. After the British banned the slave trade in 1807 slave traders began to load their ships with palm oil instead of captives. In this way the market for African palm oil—which became widely used in Europe and

⁴⁷ Patiño disagrees with some historians' assertion that oil palm was introduced into the Americas by slaves themselves because they were stripped before boarding the ships and were unable to smuggle anything. According to him, it is far more likely that slave traders carried the first kernels across the Atlantic. Despite this disagreement, there is a general agreement that its introduction can be attributed to the slave trade's transatlantic voyages.

North America to make margarine, soap, and candles—gradually replaced the market for African men, women and children.

In 1911, a Belgian, who in prior trips to the Congo had seen locals use the oil palm fruit, was the first to embark on a commercial planting venture in Sumatra. Before this, oil palm had been used only for ornamental purposes in the Dutch East Indies. However, it quickly expanded throughout the East Indies and Malaya, where after World War II it replaced many rubber plantations thanks to broad state support of the industry. In the Americas, commercial planting began in the 1930s, when after catastrophic disease problems on banana plantations, the United Fruit Company began experimenting with oil palm in order to diversify their crops. By the 1960s, there were more than 10,000 hectares of oil palm planted in Honduras and Costa Rica. In Colombia, commercial planting followed a very similar path only a decade later. The United Fruit Company initially cultivated it in 1945 in the northern state of Magdalena, also a banana plantation area.

In her ethnographic work with Meratus mountain dwellers, Tsing describes a forest that is neither pristine nor spoiled. Although to an untrained eye, there might only be “natural” forest, these forests are in fact human-made though not necessarily cultivated. She explains that relationships between plants and people take on a range of forms that lie in the gaps between cultivated and wild, and describes the forest as a “weedy, patchwork naturalness” with no clear demarcations (Tsing, 2004, p. 174). Turning away from the neat dichotomy cultivated/wild, she proposes the notion of “weediness,” which can help us better see and describe a wide variety of relations

between people and plants. The point is not simply to note that there are numerous ways to engage in and understand relationships between plants and people. This would amount to naïve cultural relativism when in fact Tsing's observation is an anticolonial proposition. It is anticolonial because it seeks to make visible and challenge the asymmetrical power relations between these various ways of categorizing and manipulating "nature."

Like the history of colonialism, the history of oil palm in the Americas is marked by a relentless effort to eradicate weediness, both materially and discursively. Because weediness is inherently unruly it challenges the modern demarcations that have kept nature and culture separate. Where it cannot be physically eradicated—by replacing symbiotic dooryards with monoculture plantations, for example—weediness is systematically invisibilized or portrayed as marginal or unlawful. It might be tempting to say that the history of oil palm in the Americas follows the path from symbiosis to domination, from diversity to uniformity, from wild to cultivated. But this description would be too facile. By doing this, I would simply reinforce the teleological History of capitalism and reinscribe the false separation between nature and culture. Instead, I want to suggest that the history of the African oil palm on Colombian soil has been a fierce struggle between various forms of weediness and the homogenizing discipline of the plantation, and although the relation of forces is quite uneven, the outcome of this tug of war cannot be predicted.

Clearly then, agriculture is a landscaping project that seeks to produce colonies and generate colonial subjects through the joint territorialization of land and

bodies (Casid, 2004, p. xiv). But, as Latour has shown, the separation of nature and culture has never been entirely successful (Latour, 1993). This is in part because even when rendered invisible, marginal or outlaw, weediness continues to sprout and spread; it cannot be eradicated. What is more, landscapes are also battlegrounds where counter colonial actions are unfurled. They are fertile soil on which possibilities for transformation can thrive. In what follows I tell a weedy story of the oil palm on the southern Pacific Coast of Colombia. One that is clearly marked by the capitalist imperative but not exhausted by it. One that reveals a colonial project that seeks to put people and plants in exploitative configurations. But also, one that unfolds unevenly across a terrain where a multiplicity of other configurations still grows and sometimes flourishes.

“The queen of oleaginous crops⁴⁸”

For those of us leading Western lives, wherever on the globe we may live, it is virtually impossible to avoid consuming palm oil. On any given day, the daily activities of the average middle class person will most probably involve numerous encounters with this abundant oil. Spread margarine on your toast for breakfast. Lather your arms with soap in the shower. Eat a muffin with your mid-morning coffee. Pour a spoonful of creamer in that coffee. Throw a load of laundry in your washer. Even if you think that your consumption preferences can bypass consuming palm oil, you are probably wrong, for after oleochemical processing, palm oil can be

⁴⁸ This is the phrase with which Fedepalma, Colombia’s federation of oil palm cultivators, refers to oil palm in order to highlight its tremendous potential to produce profit. The fact that they call it “Queen rather than “King” results from the fact that in Spanish *palma* is a feminine noun, not from a suggestion that it is second to anything.

found in alcohols, paints, and lubricants all around us. In fact, palm oil consumption in Europe at the beginning of the 19th century was spurred mostly by its use in the metal plating industry. In a sense, this oil greased the machines of the industrial revolution.

A century later, its success as a commercial crop was guaranteed by its exceptionally high yield. Once it began to be planted in identical rows of equidistant palms, oil palm became the undisputed queen of oily seeds. Today, one hectare of oil palm can yield up to ten times more oil than a hectare of sunflower, soy, or rapeseed and for this reason it is the leading vegetable oil in the world market (Fedepalma, 2006: 3). This is why by the end of the 20th Century, oil palm was already well established as a profitable agribusiness worldwide. In fact, by the 1990s Malaysia and Indonesia were covered by millions of hectares of oil palm. As if this dizzying repetition of oil palm across the world's tropics were not enough, this crop has an additional quality that has further accelerated its expansion in the last decade.

In addition to its remarkably high yield, it turns out that converting palm oil into fuel does not require that much energy. Once we take into account the amount of energy needed to transform crude palm oil into diesel, calculations show that this fuel produces six times more energy than is required to produce it (Ospina & Ochoa, 1998). This energy input/output balance is the highest of all feedstock crops for agrodiesel production (compared to maize, soy, rapeseed, and castor oils). So once again, the oil palm reigns supreme. Unsurprisingly, this characteristic has become very profitable in the midst of the energy crisis, and worldwide cultivation has

responded accordingly. In light of the ongoing depletion of fossil fuel reserves, the oils and fats sector has become the fastest-growing sector in the world, with palm oil leading the way (Ospina & Ochoa, 1998).

Oil palm landscapes

On the Mira River three modalities of oil palm cultivation co-exist today: the plantation, independent cultivation, and small-scale cooperatives. Overall, in the vicinity of Tumaco, the infamous plantation model continues to be dominant both in total land extension and capital investment. In 2010 there were ten plantations with extensions that range from a few hundred to five thousand hectares, and seven oil-processing plants, which are all owned and operated by the plantations. The collective territory of the *Bajo Mira* borders with three major plantations: *Palmas de Tumaco*, *Salamanca*, and *Palmeiras* and therefore, its inhabitants are incorporated into the plantation economy in various ways. Most prominently, they work as laborers on various plantations and processing plants.

A tour of *Palmas de Tumaco*, the largest plantation in the region, reveals the nightmare of monoculture agriculture in full splendor. During my first visit in 2007, riding in one of the company's four-by-fours, I crossed large extensions of uniform rows of equidistant palms of identical height. The numbered lots were tended by laboring groups of three: a *tallero*, a *mulero*, and a *pepero*. The *tallero*, or stem cutter, is considered the most skilled laborer and is therefore better paid. His job consists of cutting the stem at precisely the right distance from the bunch and at the ideal moment of ripeness. The *mulero*, usually a younger and more inexperienced

man, picks up the seed bunches and handles the beast of burden, a mule or water buffalo. The *mulero* is followed closely by the *pepero*, or seed collector—oftentimes a woman or an adolescent—who picks up the stray seeds that come off the bunches as they hit the ground. The employment models on plantations range from labor contracts to piecework and daily wages. But, in general, relations of labor on the plantation are similar to those in most capitalist industrial sectors. In other words, they seek to extract the greatest amount of labor at the lowest cost possible. This is done through a variety of well-known strategies that include accumulation by dispossession, induced indebtedness, labor market fragmentation, and vertical integration of the industry. In brief, Third World plantations like *Palmas de Tumaco* are veritable “factories in the field”—that is, centers of capital reproduction—characterized by their managerial regimes of labor discipline and military-style methods of agriculture (Escobar, 1994; Scott, 1999; Wolf, 1982).

But the exploitative nature of the plantation economy is also evident in areas other than labor conditions. If we decenter our humanist perspective, we can easily see that oil production on plantations seeks to simultaneously exploit people and nature for the purpose of capital accumulation. Palms trees, water, weeds, pests, mules, and people are carefully managed to maximize profit. Seeds are carefully selected, nurtured in a greenhouse, and replanted as seedlings in numbered lots where they will be fertilized and protected from weeds and pests. From this perspective, the terrain on which oil palm is cultivated is not simply a prediscursive background on which human action unfolds. Plants and animals are not inert objects but rather co-

protagonists in the violent encounters between nature and people precipitated by capitalism.

Moreover, the colonial relations of the plantation extend beyond the field and the processing plant. Oil palm plantations reproduce social relations reminiscent of 19th Century European colonialism. *Palmas del Sur*, for example, is a full-fledged structure with workers' living quarters, a health center, a school, a small shop, and a requisite bar for the unskilled workers. A ten-minute drive from the fields, there is a main house that lodges the administrative and technical personnel during their stays on the plantation—these staff members don't usually live in the area but rather fly in from large cities such as Bogotá and Cali. This house, with impressive views of oil palm extensions and exuberant tropical gardens, offers all the amenities that these predominantly white out-of-towners demand: a recreational area with a pool table and TV, a restaurant with an all black female staff, and a gym.

At an even larger scale, it is clear that oil palm plantations have established colonial relations with neighboring villages. Because of their intrusive nature, plantations tend to develop into enclaves, that is enclosed territories with little relations to their exterior. To counter the negative reputation of the enclave as an exploitative intruder, plantation managers have undertaken development initiatives with neighboring villages—building schools, employing locals, financing public works. The purpose—in addition to strategically improving their public image—is to become better integrated to the region, to seem less alien, and therefore position themselves as fellow “locals.”

However, the landscaping project of the industrial plantation does not travel everywhere. There are many places where its regimes of labor and nature exploitation simply do not penetrate, or when they do, do not significantly transform pre-existent configurations of people and nature. This is evident in the second modality of oil palm cultivation that survives on the Mira River. In the four decades since oil palm was introduced to the region, independent black farmers have developed a different kind of relationship to it. In his detailed description of oil palm cultivation in the area surrounding Tumaco, Restrepo sharply contrasts this modality from the agro-industrial model (Restrepo 2004). Unlike plantations, autonomous farming does not follow strict agronomical practices of crop maximization. Local farmers do not plant homogenous rows of palms, but rather intersperse it with foodstuffs and other subsistence and marketable crops. Although they sometimes resort to wage labor for help in harvesting the ripe seed bunches, generally speaking they rely on family and labor exchange practices to maintain the farm. And even though they sell their product to local processing plants, the reproduction of the domestic group, rather than the generation of profit, is what drives their efforts (Restrepo 2004; Escobar 2008).

In fact, one could even argue that the category of labor does not adequately describe the relationship between oil palms and independent black farmers on the lower Mira River.⁴⁹ This Marxist category foregrounds only the exploitative relations

⁴⁹ I am aware that there is a vast literature that has critiqued the Marxist category of labor (notably feminists concerned with theorizing the labor that is done within the domestic sphere). I wish to make explicit the fact that although I believe that this revisionist work is extremely valuable, I do not engage

of power in the human-nature encounter when in fact there exist myriad other ways of knowing nature through work. Moreover, the narrow definition of work as the transformation of nature for human advantage reinscribes the idea that work and nature are inherently antagonistic and that only those bodies and landscapes that escape work can be considered natural. Although autonomous farmers invest a significant amount of effort in tending to oil palms, theirs is a different kind of work; one that does not rely on extermination, exploitation, or objectification, and in which humans do not compete with other living beings for planetary domination. I do not mean to suggest that independent oil palm farming is entirely outside of the logic of capitalism, nor do I want to reinforce the myth of the noble savage who sustains harmonious relations with the environment. It's important to remember that oil palm seeds were introduced by plantations, that most independent farmers took the seeds and learned how plant them when they worked for those same plantations as wage laborers, and that in the end they have no choice but to sell their products to back to them (artisanal oil processing does not take place in the region). My point is simply that it is imperative to remember that there exist other rationalities and other landscape configurations that do not strictly follow the agro-industrial model. On the Mira River, independent oil palm farming, although minimal, is one such alternative that survives amidst the plantation.

with it directly here. Like all categories, "work" and "labor" are only meaningful insofar as what is being signified is made explicit. For the purpose of this chapter, the differences between the two hinges only on what I believe are two main kinds of relationships between humans and nature: symbiotic and alienated.

The third modality of oil palm cultivation dovetails with the plantation. In the last two decades, the total extension cultivated by small-scale cooperatives in the rural areas surrounding Tumaco has mushroomed. According to Cordeagropaz, the main umbrella organization that groups the coops on the Mira River, small-scale farms now produce approximately 40% of all oil palm in the region. The coop is an interesting figure. On the Mira River, the first successful coops were established in 1999, when the main plantations in the region entered into a partnership with the mayor's office and together they secured State and *Plan Colombia*⁵⁰ funding for the initiative. Plantation managers were interested in two main things: changing their image from economic enclave to regional development engines, and increasing the raw material available for oil production. But by 1999, collective land titling for black communities was underway all across the Pacific, and local plantations could not aspire to purchase or otherwise acquire more lands. Because Law 70 protects collective territories from any form of alienation (mortgage, sale, or transfer), plans to further expand oil palm cultivation would have to fold black communities in—their people and their lands—as *pequeños palmeros*, or small-scale oil palm growers.

Unlike independent oil palm cultivation, small-scale coops do represent a significant reorganization of human-nature relations on the Mira River. They are in essence branches of large-scale plantations that have been established on collective lands. The labor, administrative, and agronomical practices of small-scale farms

⁵⁰ *Plan Colombia* is a bilateral agreement between the U.S. government and Colombia, which began in 2000 and still exists today. In essence, *Plan Colombia* provides U.S. funding that supports the military in the State's twin internal wars: "the war against drugs" and "the war against terrorism."

mirror those of the plantation. By extending the reach of agro-industrial rationalities into collective territories, small-scale coops effectively discipline both black farmers and oil palms, creating new configurations of plants and people while technically respecting the land rights of black communities. In other words, small-scale coops enable the *de facto* transformation of black communities' landscapes while maintaining their *de jure* status as inalienable collective territories.

At the same time, small-scale coops are not exact replicas of plantations, and the differences between the two are significant. Because they must recruit both people and lands in a "lawful" manner, proponents of small-scale coops cannot resort to proletarianization by dispossession. In fact, *pequeños palmeros* occupy an ambiguous position that straddles the divide between landless proletariats and willing (and truly advantageously positioned) stake-holders. They are, in a sense, exemplary of what some Latin Americanist agrarian political ecologists have termed semi-proletariats (c.f. (Edelman, 1992; Kay, 1997)). That is, they often combine subsistence agriculture, petty commodity production, and wage labor as non-mutually exclusive livelihoods. Nonetheless, as I will show, the dominant discourse that is employed to enlist them as *pequeños palmeros* is pervaded by the ideology of the entrepreneurial subject, and the terms of their incorporation into oil palm cultivation tend to erode their possibilities of combining commodity production with these other

forms of agrarian practices. As a result, small-scale coops have turned independent black farmers and rural proletariats into alleged green capitalists.⁵¹

These are some of the landscaping projects that centrally involve the oil palm on the Mira River. Sometimes they overlap, sometimes they dovetail, and sometimes they collide. They operate on various scales and have access to very different kinds and quantities of symbolic and material capital. They do not fight on even terrain; they confront each other under conditions of vast historical inequality. And yet, they coexist, not harmoniously, but in a fierce struggle to define human-nature relations.

Green and black

Sitting in the air-conditioned port building I easily forgot that it was an unusually hot morning in Tumaco. We were in a large room with an ocean view and long tables arranged in the shape of a U. Manuel, the MIDAS⁵² officer who had called the meeting, sprawled confidently on a metal chair at the head of the U. The team of experts from *Palmas de Tumaco*, the largest plantation in the region, sat to Manuel's right. A senior lawyer, an engineer, an administrator, a topographer, and the plantation's activities and social coordinator waited patiently as the community council members trickled in and sat on the opposite side of the room. The meeting began with a round of introductions.

⁵¹ Of course this is not a uniform or uncontested process. As Bernstein points out in his insightful analysis of the political economy of small-scale farmers, some *pequeños palmicultores* are relatively successful at becoming small-scale capitalists, while others simply become petty commodity producers and/or wage laborers. The outcome, as Bernstein shows, depends on a number of things that include differential access to social, political, and agricultural capital, as well as the intersection of these class dynamics with other social cleavages such as race, ethnicity, and gender (Bernstein, 2010).

⁵² MIDAS, which stands for "More Investment for Alternative Sustainable Development" is one of USAID's programs in Latin America.

The items on the agenda were five reported cases of invasion of the community council's lands on the part of the plantation. José, who had worked at *Palmas de Tumaco* for twenty-two years, narrated his story, claiming that the plantation had invaded his land in violation of Law 70. The lawyer replied that this was a simple matter to settle; all that was necessary was to follow the INCODER's⁵³ maps with technical precision. Aroldo, the community council's legal representative and oldest member, intervened:

You see, we prefer good agreements over bad lawsuits. The reserve areas [of the collective territory] have been sacrificed, who is responsible for this? Since we are all amongst friends, let's talk about how to solve this. This problem can be fixed with boundaries. Our elders used streams and fruit trees as boundaries, but if you pull out the *calabazo* we can no longer know where the boundaries were and we have to use cement.

Emiliano, the second complainant, presented his case. He related that in the more remote areas of his lot, where he had been unable to farm due to time and money constraints, the plantation had dug ditches to mark property boundaries. What ensued was a tense back and forth with differing versions of the events. The plantation's lawyer claimed that Emiliano's father had been given twenty hectares in the 1950s but that he had proceeded to *invade* a much larger area for his six children. Emiliano agreed that he and his siblings had *expanded* his father's lot in order to "occupy the territory"—a common practice within collective titles—but that the adjoining lands where they had farmed did not belong to the plantation. To this, the lawyer responded with an indignant monologue: "See, that's the problem. You people

⁵³ INCODER, the Colombian Institute of Rural Development, is the state-agency in charge of executing agricultural policies and overseeing land tenure.

take that title as if it guarantees future expansion, but then you go and have a bunch of kids and the land just isn't enough." Then he proceeded to read aloud from the neighboring community council's application for collective titling. His point in doing this was to emphasize that prior to Law 70 all those lots were legally "empty" and therefore, Emiliano's ancestors had no legal claim to them. Then, to show his faithful observance of the law and his good will, he reminded everyone that he had been in charge of legally proving that those lots were not empty, and that they were in fact inhabited by black people. He explained that his noble deed had facilitated the transformation of those territories' land use permit from "natural reserve" to "agriculture," thereby paving the road for collective titling. He ended with an offended look on his face, saying that he was taken aback by the community council's affirmation that the plantation was taking lands from black communities, and to prove that this was not the case he held up a pile of documents saying: "We have the INCODER's resolution here. There is official documentation that says 'from here to there and from there to here.' The State said to us 'this is yours.'"

The discussion became heated at the lawyer's mention of "empty lots"—a reference to Colombia's infamous Law 2, which in 1959 declared large tracts of land on the Pacific as State property. There were two main areas of disagreement. The first was a debate regarding the legitimacy of the State's laws. While the plantation's team kept referring to the INCODER's maps and titles as the unequivocal source of truth, the community council representatives expressed a deep skepticism towards their validity. The second point of contention was regarding the alleged advantage of

the change in land use that the lawyer had referred to. While the lawyer maintained that this transformation—from natural reserve to agricultural use—had greatly benefited Tumaco’s black farmers, Aroldo differed. He held that maintaining their territory’s official land use as a natural reserve would have been far better because it would have deterred the entrance of exploitative industries and been far more compatible with their ancestral practices.

The meeting stretched over several hours during which some of the thorniest issues surrounding Law 70 were touched. The discussions about the validity of the law and the superiority of differing land use practices evidenced a clear tug of war, a struggle to define a cultural politics of nature. And still, despite what could have been a highly volatile meeting, cordiality and negotiation reigned. Overall, although there was a constant throwing and dodging of accusations back and forth, the meeting was construed as “friendly” by both parties. As the meeting drew to a close, Ingeniero De la Torre added his concluding remarks:

We really do want to maintain good relations with you [...] let us start from a point of sincerity and good faith. When I arrived in Tumaco twenty-four years ago my role was to divulge oil palm cultivation and I looked for organizations to do it with. We always wanted to have the best of relations with the people, but the kinds of organizations that exist today did not exist back then [...]. The problem is not that [black communities] have been violated, but that there were no organizations like yours that would take the reigns of their own destiny.

Milena, a community council member who had been quietly scribbling in her notebook for most of the meeting stood up and asked if she could read a poem that

she had composed in the midst of the exchange. Its title, tellingly, was "*Concertación*."⁵⁴

I recount this meeting because it condenses neoliberal multiculturalism's domesticating effects (Hale 2005) as well as its crafty articulation with green capitalism. First, on the Mira River, as black communities attained cultural rights, they became more legible—and therefore more supple—to the interests of the State and institutions of neoliberal development. It is not an accident that the facilitator and mediator of this meeting was a high-ranking MIDAS officer, or that the plantation representatives constantly invoked the INCODER's authority. At a very basic level, simply by having their territories' coordinates fixed on a State-sanctioned map, the black inhabitants of the Mira River have become more easily legible to the State and to international capital. This, of course, has had some beneficial consequences for them. Most notably, it positioned them as political actors that must be contended with, as participants that cannot be simply swept aside. This visibility has contributed to halting the more overt forms of dispossession that were common prior to the passage of Law 70. Plantation owners can no longer hire lawyers to draft concessions of empty lots or even pay local campesinos sub-market rents for land use. The changes in land tenure brought about by Law 70 created new multicultural subjects—black communities—and new spaces of agricultural production—collective territories—that must be jointly dealt with.

⁵⁴ I could have simply translated *Concertación* as "Agreement." However, its usage in Colombian Spanish (as well as its etymology) signals a process of consensus building, that is, of bringing differing views "in concert" with one another.

But this visibility has a dark side. Law 70 has also made it possible for those same agents of the State and international capital to identify, negotiate with, and co-opt the new political actors. In a sense, Law 70 crystallized the interlocutors necessary to facilitate capital reproduction in spaces that had until then remained relatively illegible to its agents. By rationalizing previously unintelligible landscapes, Law 70 did a lot of the hard work necessary to create neoliberal subjects. As Ingeniero de la Torre aptly put it, prior to Law 70 the crux of the conflict between black farmers and plantation owners was the absence of a legitimate interlocutor with which to negotiate. Or, put more bluntly, because of the existence of "black communities" as legal subjects of rights what used to be clearly evident as violence can now be presented as compromise. And while overt uses of force have not entirely disappeared, the maintenance and expansion of plantation landscapes is made possible through the work of persuasion

A second domesticating effect of Law 70 is the separation of legitimate and undeserving subjects of rights. In the case of neoliberal multiculturalism, Hale notes that the criteria of legitimacy are standards of cultural authenticity. He explains that under official multiculturalism, the State no longer functions as an adversary of cultural rights, but rather, becomes the arbiter of those rights by determining who does and does not measure up to satisfactory standards of cultural difference. Green multiculturalism also separates "authentic" and "inauthentic" subjects of cultural rights, but the criteria for legitimation are somewhat different from the ones Hale identifies. While neoliberal multiculturalism separates cultural rights and access to

resources, green multiculturalism puts natural resources in the hands of multicultural subjects while charging them with global environmental responsibility. In this way, environmental friendliness gets construed as a cultural trait that defines black subjects' authenticity and a determinant factor in the decision to grant them special rights.

During a particularly tense moment in the negotiation between *Palmas de Tumaco* and the community council, the plantation's lawyer openly lamented that black communities had received so many privileges that they had not taken full advantage of. He referred to the entrenched "underdevelopment" in black communities, blaming them—rather than State-endorsed structural racism for example—for their incapacity to rise out of poverty. This comment established "development" as the marker of success, as well as the easily legible signal of rational behavior. Always the congenial strategist, Aroldo intervened to counter the implication that black communities did not "measure up" and were therefore undeserving recipients of special rights:

What many people call development we call aggression. For us the best thing would be for these lands to have their animals and their plants. Not just now, but always. That dollar sign is what has destroyed and continues destroying. We have created reserve areas as buffers and for reforestation. When we cut down the *chanul* (*sacoglottis procera*) the *tatabra* (pecari) and the *perico*⁵⁵ (sloth) left. They all followed the banks of the Mira River to Ecuador. The animals that lived in Puerto Palma migrated to Esmeraldas. We were not wrong, our ancestors were right.

⁵⁵ Spanish-speakers may be struck by the translation of *perico*, given that this word most generally refers to parrots or parakeets. However, in this area of Colombia, *perico* is used to refer to various species of sloths.

His strategy with this intervention was twofold. First, he delegitimized development as an outdated measuring stick of rational behavior by presenting it as primitively aggressive. Then, he introduced and appropriated green multiculturalism's own criterion of legitimation: environmental friendliness. By opposing it to *mestizos'* and foreigners' savage capitalism, he established environmental friendliness as a morally superior criterion of evaluation; a test that black communities could easily pass.

Finally, it is important to note that these standards of authenticity have built-in political constraints, and therefore the choice to occupy the newly created spaces of cultural difference can come at significant political costs. Faced with a strict set of rules of the multicultural game, black communities must decide whether to play or not. Those who play become legitimate political actors, while those who opt out are construed as unruly, or beyond the pale. As this meeting shows, the central qualities that the deserving subject of rights must exhibit have little to do with cultural authenticity. The criteria are instead centered on black subjects' willingness to engage in conciliatory actions. The cleavage that separates "good" blacks from "bad" ones is their docility, and this docility is in turn opposed to "undesirable" racial traits. The result, as Hale notes, is a subtle remaking of the racial hierarchy through a differential racialization of multicultural subjects who are willing to engage in *concertación* and those who are simply too radical.

After Milena read the poem, Marcia, the plantation's social coordinator, gave a short speech expressing how impressed she was by the community council's hard work and their willingness to collaborate with the plantation. In the end, she said, it

was very gratifying to see that there existed an organization that shared *Palmas de Tumaco*'s whole-hearted pursuit of the region's well being. Her congratulatory tone was clearly a seal of approval; as far as the plantation was concerned, the community council had been recognized as a "good" black organization, as legitimate recipients of rights, or as Hale would say, as *negros permitidos*⁵⁶ ("authorized blacks") (Hale 2006).

Rationalities

In general, on the Mira River spaces designated for commercial or self-subsistence production are interspersed with stretches of swampy forest, or *bosques de guandal*. This is not to say that there exists a neat delineation of wild and cultivated, for forests are also sites of commercial production and self-subsistence activities—through lumber extraction and hunting for example. Conversely, family farms, or *fincas*, are rarely disciplined spaces of agricultural production. They are, to go back to Tsing's terminology, weedy spaces of human-nature interaction. In fact, to my untrained eye, *fincas* were often indistinguishable from the forest. But despite *fincas*' weediness, locals do differentiate between them and the forest, which has varying degrees of wildness that range from *monte alzado* to *monte biche* and *monte bravo*.⁵⁷ These categories, however, are not intrinsic designations of a given space and what was previously a *finca* can easily become *monte*, and vice-versa.

⁵⁶ This is an allusion to Hale's concept of the *indio permitido*, or authorized indian, which refers to the slot that ethnic others are invited to occupy under neoliberal multicultural regimes so long as they do not threaten the State's or capital's projects of governance.

⁵⁷ The terms *alzado*, *biche*, and *bravo* are used to describe various stages of wildness/domestication in increasing order or wildness.

In the village of *Bajo Jagua*, those shifting spaces that locals temporarily designate as *fincas* have been put to many different uses over the past sixty years. Usually some portion of every *finca* is destined for subsistence crops such as rice, sugarcane, taro, and fruit trees, as well as medicinal plants. While this practice has remained fairly stable, the commercial activities that are undertaken in the remaining portions of a given *finca* have varied considerably: from raising cattle to cultivating cacao, plantain, coconut and most recently, oil palm. In 2001, Santiago, a local who is now in his late forties, heard that people in the neighboring collective territory had started planting oil palm with Cordeagropaz, a Tumaco-based organization that was creating associations of small-scale oil palm-growers, or *pequeños palmicultores*.⁵⁸ Santiago approached Cordeagropaz officials and invited them to *Bajo Jagua* to evaluate the possibility of creating a local palm-growers' association. After a few meetings and expert evaluations of the swampy lands, Cordeagropaz gave its approval, and the hard work of making local farmers into *pequeños palmicultores* began.

First, Cordeagropaz had to embark on the task of bringing local *campesinos* on board. Proponents of oil palm cultivation had to sell their idea as an unprecedented opportunity for black farmers to improve their socioeconomic conditions. In the main office of Cordeagropaz a poster showing black children

⁵⁸ Cordeagropaz emerged in 1999 as Colombia's first *Alianza Estratégica Productiva*, a joint public-private business venture meant to foster economic development in rural areas. The initial thrust behind *alianzas estratégicas*, which was to create productive alternatives for peasants who eradicated illicit crops under Plan Colombia, was gradually molded under the fire of multicultural reform. What began as an effort to provide employment opportunities and social services to *campesinos* involved in coca cultivation was quickly articulated with black and indigenous people's demands for state investment in economic development.

playing in a well-equipped playground and a boatful of palm seeds in the foreground says it all: “Oil palm, progress for all” (“*Palma de aceite, progreso para todos.*”). But capitalism’s unfulfilled promise of prosperity is nothing new. What is different under green multiculturalism is that proponents of development must employ an ethnic sensibility. Thus, the creation of small oil-palm business ventures was presented as an urgent necessity for black communities, who were construed as pre-capitalist societies in decline. Roberto, Cordeagropaz’s business consultant described a situation in which the inevitable advance of capitalism had eroded black traditional labor:

The open economies that are so aggressive have broken down the culture of the *negritos* with their little canoes and their little coconut farms [...] When cash comes in, this structure of solidarity is broken, [...] the local modes of communal work—the *cuadrilla*, *junta de trabajo*, *cambio de mano*—are gradually lost.

This narrative of cultural decadence functioned as the justification for the deployment of a whole set of disciplining technologies aimed at making multicultural subjects into green capitalists.

These efforts are clearly observable in the yearlong course that Roberto designed to train the new palm-growers. The training workshops have three distinct objectives. The most obvious of these is a decided effort to create entrepreneurs. The leaflets extol the virtues of associative labor units and carefully instruct farmers on everything from how to convert families into efficient productive units, to how to manage credit, build leadership, maintain workers’ motivation, market their product, and keep accounting books. Each of the workshops is similarly organized. First,

participants fill out an open questionnaire designed to assess their knowledge of the day's topic. The answers to the questions are then openly discussed in a collective reflection exercise that seeks to expose the group's "strengths" and "weaknesses." Finally, an intervention is made to remedy the diagnosed deficiencies. These sections, which are fittingly called "*Conozcamos*" or "Let's Learn" contain glossaries with definitions, lists of facts, and worksheets where participants practice their newly acquired skills.

Although these workshops are presented as innocent efforts to teach practical skills, they are actually disciplining technologies. They are carefully designed to transform local farmers into entrepreneurs by changing those convictions and behaviors that are considered an obstacle to capitalist development. For example, the unit designed to teach farmers how to safely manage credit, craftily intertwines practical knowledge of bank loans with a discussion of trust. The first part of this workshop is dedicated to define trust as an essential social value and to encourage participants to be both trusting and trustworthy individuals. After that, it instructs pupils on interest rates, grace periods, IOUs, and the various State lending institutions in Colombia. This unit's objectives are twofold. It seeks not only to create responsible borrowers, but most importantly, to convince skeptical farmers to take on loans. As if this interweaving of practical skills and capitalist rationalities were not clear enough, the workshop leaflet ends with a statement that explicitly inverts local farmers' logic regarding the risk and high cost of bank loans: "*Recuerde, el crédito*

más costoso es el que no se tiene”, “Remember, the most expensive loan is the one that you don’t take.”

The second main objective of the training course is to make black community members into proper multicultural citizens. This is equivalent to defining the *negro permitido*, in other words, a black multicultural subject who is sufficiently authentic and does not radically challenge the status quo. Because adequate multicultural citizens must exhibit and master two things—socially accepted standards of citizenship and manageable cultural difference—these interventions are necessarily two-pronged. On the one hand, they address topics such as “civic-mindedness and the culture of legality”, “community organization and leadership”, and “the role of the family in productive activities.” They are intended to instill the norms and duties of citizenship by presenting them as self-evidently desirable, by compelling participants to internalize the desire to become “better citizens.”

The second part of producing multicultural citizens entails the management and normalization of cultural difference. This objective is most clearly observable in a workshop unit entitled “culture, territory, and economics.” The handout for this workshop reinforces the official definition of blackness, for example by reviewing a superficial version of the history of slavery and by briefly pausing to consider Afrocolombians’ contribution to the nation. It also repeats the stock phrases of multicultural political correctness for example by emphasizing the need to “protect Afrocolombians’ cultural identity and rights as an ethnic group.” (Cordeagropaz, 2008). At the same time, this reaffirmation of black cultural difference seeks to

create an explicit link between “Afrocolombian culture” and particular uses of nature that are in turn construed as “green”:

Traditional production practices are the agricultural, mining, forest, livestock, hunting, fishing, and gathering activities and techniques that black communities have habitually used to guarantee the conservation of life and sustainable development.⁵⁹

In this way, cultural recognition becomes inextricably related to “green” practices, placing black communities with territorial control in a nearly inescapable position as “wardens of nature.”

The third and final area of intervention involves farming practices. Roberto modeled these training workshops after a publication entitled “*El Diplomado de la Palma*” or “Certificate in Oil Palm,” which consists of six modules with detailed instructions on how to build nurseries, prevent disease, manually pollinate, harvest, and generally maintain oil palms. The emphasis in these workshops is on what Roberto referred to as “*buenas prácticas agrícolas*” or “good agricultural practices.” Like the rest of the training units, these do not simply aim to build practical agricultural skills, but rather they seek to transform local forms of human-nature relating; they are landscaping technologies. To illustrate the depth of this intervention, it is useful to contrast the work of autonomous palm growers with the meticulous labor that is expected of *pequeños palmicultores*. In doing this, I find it useful to distinguish once again between work—as a non-capitalist form of

⁵⁹ In fact, this citation, which is reproduced in the workshop’s leaflets is taken from Law 70. In this sense, it is not the Cordeagropaz itself that is producing black subjects as natural environmentalists, but rather, it is drawing from the dominant multicultural discourse in order to solidify this association between black cultural difference and environmentalism.

transforming nature—and labor—as a distinctly exploitative manipulation of natural resources.

A small palm-grower in the making must first master the art of seed selection. A germinated seed of precise plumule and radicle size must be planted in a pre-nursery that is carefully traced and equipped with drainage canals. During its three months in the pre-nursery each seedling must be fertilized nine times with ammonium sulfate. After this, the first seedling selection process is done. Only plants with well-defined leaves, twenty to twenty-five centimeters tall, and growing at forty-five degree angles are chosen to be replanted in the nursery. Once again, the instructions regarding the soil type, bag size, and method of replanting are meticulously prescribed. During their remaining nine months in the nursery, three different fertilizers—Triple 15, magnesium sulfate, and borax—are applied to each plant every other week. In addition, they must be watered daily and weeds must be manually removed. At the end of this yearlong process, there is a final selection of “normal” plants. Plants with leaves that are too upright or too limp are eliminated, as are those with leaflets that are too far apart or too close together, too abundant or discolored.

Even if the new palm-growers are given seedlings rather than seeds, they cannot escape the discipline of the plantation. They must first prepare the terrain where definitive planting will take place by eliminating all other vegetation and plowing the land. After this, the *palmicultor* must design the lot in a precise alignment. Each palm must be nine meters apart and each row must be 7.8 meters apart, making sure that palms in consecutive rows are not parallel to each other, but

rather form an equilateral triangle. The seedlings are then carefully transported and replanted making sure that the neck is not deep or too shallow. Once this is completed, a map of the lot is drawn in order to have an inventory of the plants and a graphic description of all natural and artificial waterways, as well as problem areas. Finally, kudzu is planted as a hedge plant to control soil erosion and maintain adequate humidity and nutrition.

After this, the maintenance of oil palm lots is much less labor-intensive. Aside from building and maintaining drainage canals there are few other upkeep tasks involved. Mainly, a radius of 2.5 meters surrounding each palm must be kept free of weeds, the palms must be pruned once a year, and the spaces between rows must also be kept clear by manually eradicating weeds, mechanically mowing, and applying herbicides with pumps. Of course, the danger of disease must also be managed. In order to prevent catastrophic epidemics or pest invasions, farmers are instructed on disease prevention, early detection, and eradication techniques. If all goes well, an inexperienced but diligent palm-grower can expect the palms to start yielding a harvest every ten to fifteen days three years after the definitive lot is planted. But the periodicity of this perennial harvest is only an estimate. *Palmicultores* must become experts at distinguishing ripe fruit bunches and skilled at using the telescopic tools to cut the stalk at just the right place. And even the most experienced palm cutter must then select and classify the bunches, which must be quickly transported to be processed in less than 24 hours, lest they become too acidic. More than extenuating

labor, the optimization of both the quality and the quantity of palm oil involves constant supervision and precise timing.

Clearly, not all farmers follow these instructions to the t. But even if we account for substantial divergences from these rigid expectations, it is clear that the decision to become a *pequeño palmicultor* requires subjecting oneself to a regime that simultaneously disciplines humans and nature. Compare the injunctions of the *Diplomado de la Palma* with Milena's experience with a one-hectare lot of oil palms. A few years ago Milena took some loose seeds from neighboring lots and planted them in her backyard lot, where the palms grew in close proximity to her house. She interspersed the oil palms with plantain, other foodstuffs, and timber. Her husband and two oldest sons pruned and harvested the palms on a flexible schedule and took the bunches out to the riverbank to be collected by the plantations' boats whenever the fruit was ripe. But Milena didn't keep her oil palms for very long. She realized that this irregular method of cultivation was not profitable in her own cost-benefit calculation. Put simply, it was too much hassle and too much money—in transportation and fertilizer costs—for very little gain. In the end, she and her husband decided to cut the oil palms down. When I visited her dooryard last year all that remained amidst plantain palms, various fruit trees, and a *zotea*,⁶⁰ were a few oil palms, which she had decided to keep because they attracted squirrels, which she explained could kill cacao trees if they were not kept away by luring them with oil palms. In short, Milena and her family gave the oil palm plantation model a try and

⁶⁰ *Zoteas* are raised herb gardens that are generally planted in old canoes and kept close to the house. They are generally kept by women to cultivate spices and medicinal plants.

decided to abandon it. In the end, they did not entirely eradicate the oil palms but crafted a different type of relationship to them.

During one of our meetings, Roberto stated outright that the purpose of these training modules was to transform local farmers' rationalities. He hoped that these workshops would result in the internalization of cultural practices that would convert black farmers into *empresarios de la palma*, oil palm entrepreneurs. If these interventions were successful, Cordeagropaz would have succeeded in creating *pequeños palmicultores*, that is, green multicultural subjects with all the necessary characteristics to make them legitimate recipients of rights and of the State's socioeconomic programs: cultural authenticity, entrepreneurialism, and environmental friendliness. What makes green multiculturalism different is that it does not simply separate legitimate and undeserving subjects of rights, but rather it crafts new subjects who are both *negros permitidos* and green capitalists.

In June of last year I spoke to several members of *Agromira*⁶¹ in what ended up being an *ad hoc* riverside meeting. Sitting under a cement roof where locals hold public events, they enthusiastically recounted how the association was formed and narrated their personal experiences as palm-growers. Santiago, the visionary, said:

Thanks to [oil palm] cultivation people kept their lands, because lands that don't produce are no good. When your land is producing you don't want to sell it, you value it. The important thing is for people to work the land.

When I asked why they found oil palm cultivation attractive, Alberto explained:

⁶¹ *Agromira* is the local oil palm-grower's association that is based in the Lower Mira River. In theory it brings together small-scale palm-growers from all the villages of the *Bajo Mira*'s community council, but in practice most associated palm-growers are residents of the village of *Bajo Jagua*. *Agromira* is an affiliate association of Cordeagropaz and so in some ways can be thought of as its local chapter.

We were all raised on cacao. There were years when cacao was no good and the farm didn't produce. At first we thought that oil palm cultivation was economically hard, but today ours is one of the most thriving villages of the river.

We spoke for over an hour, comparing various crops in terms of profitability and labor-intensiveness. Tibercio, the current representative of *Agromira*, concluded with a noteworthy reflection that evaluated the overall experience of becoming a village of *pequeños palmicultores*:

The main mistakes were committed out of a failure to understand the production processes thoroughly, because we didn't trust ourselves. We were waiting for such and such to come and solve our problems and we didn't trust our own ability.

Exterminating weediness

In March of 2010, I visited *Palmas de Tumaco* again. Once more, I rode in one of the company's four-by-fours and visited the nurseries, the water-treatment plant, a few cultivated lots, and the oil processing plant. But there were two important differences between the two visits. The first was that this time I was accompanying the *Bajo Mira's* community council members, who were setting foot on company soil for the first time in their lives. Although our stated purpose was to verify whether the plantation was overstepping the boundaries of their property and invading the community council's collective lands, the visit turned into an *impromptu* tour complete with a sumptuous seafood lunch. After lunch, as we sipped coffee and discussed the next step of the negotiation, José, the former employee, leaned over and told me in a hushed voice that in the twenty-two years that he worked for *Palmas de Tumaco*, he had never been inside the main house. The reason for this splendid

treatment, of course, was that we were accompanied by Manuel, the MIDAS officer that was mediating the land dispute.

Although this alone merits a thorough commentary, the second difference between the two visits was so overwhelming that it overshadowed everything else. On my first visit, I had been taken to a look-out point to appreciate the “green sea”⁶² of oil palm spreading grandiosely across the plantation’s five thousand hectares. Because on that occasion I was accompanied by a documentary film crew, our hosts offered to let us use the company helicopters to capture some aerial shots of the plantation. This time, the helicopters were put away because the company was drastically cutting costs. Although I had read and heard much about the fearsome disease that locals referred to as “*la PC*,” (*pudrición del cogollo* or heart rotting) I was not prepared for what I witnessed: a seemingly endless oil palm cemetery. During the three years between my two visits, a fungal epidemic had ravaged the plantation killing more than eighty percent of the palms. We stopped by plots at various stages of decline. Some were just beginning to show the first signs of the disease—burnt lower leaves and a yellowed arrow—while on other plots all of the palms’ leaves were completely dry and limp and we could make out the distinctly fetid smell of the palms’ rotting hearts.

⁶² This is the term that Restrepo uses to describe the large extensions of oil palm plantations in the region (Restrepo, 2004).

The plantation was hard hit by this mysterious epidemic.⁶³ Only 700 of an original 4500 hectares of oil palm had survived and the company was operating on a steady economic loss. But while a few other processing plants in the region had closed down, *Palmas de Tumaco* had decided to hold out. They were hopeful. The government had generously extended them the necessary funds to eradicate the diseased plants, and the ICA (*Instituto Colombiano Agropecuario*)⁶⁴ had quickly designed a hybrid seed that was more resistant to the disease. Aroldo, like many others, was highly skeptical about the hybrid's promised panacea and he was determined to make the most of the company's moment of weakness for the community council's advantage. Using his characteristically tactful tone he asked them if the plantation's owner had contemplated an alternative emergency plan, which he called "Plan B." Then, he subtly asked if he might be interested in selling the plantation's lands. To this, Ingeniero de la Torre responded with great conviction: "*Palmas de Tumaco* does not have a Plan B because we are convinced that this hybrid will be the solution."

They were not the only ones. When I asked Tibercio how *Agromira's* small-scale palm-growers were dealing with the disease, he responded with a detailed description of their renovation plan. He explained that the association was in the

⁶³ Although I have asked numerous people—ranging from local farmers to phytopathologists and from plantation owners to international aid officials—about the causes and nature of the epidemic, I have never gotten a consistent and straight answer. I have heard variously that the PC is a fungus, a bacteria, and a virus; that it is caused and/or worsened by Tumaco's rain cycles and people often told me—in hushed tones—that the disease "coincidentally" spread in Tumaco precisely after the region was aerially sprayed with Roundup (glyphosate) when the Uribe Government used Plan Colombia funds to eradicate coca. I dare say that much of the "mystery" surrounding the origin and spread of the PC has been actively produced to muddle the situation and divert attention from the culprits.

⁶⁴ The Colombian Institute of Agriculture and Livestock

midst of negotiating with the Ministry of Agriculture to secure funds for eradication. Eradication was the most critical step of the renovation operation since the PC is highly contagious and small-scale farmers do not have access to the heavy machinery that plantations use to fell and chop the dead palms to prevent further spread. Also, Tibercio explained, thanks to Cordeagropaz, Agromira had secured renewed loans of approximately seven million pesos⁶⁵ per hectare to replant a hybrid oil palm seed. These loans, like the previous ones would not be directly disbursed to the farmers, but rather would be given in kind or as reimbursements for incurred expenses and performed labor. As for the original loans, a State-administered emergency fund (FONSA) bought the debt from the private banks and restructured the pay-schedule for the debtors. Although there was a seven-year moratorium on this old debt it was not condoned, so the oil palm entrepreneurs ended up taking on a double debt over a period of fifteen years. But despite this double debt, according to Cordeagropaz's survey of affiliated palm-growers, 98% of those affected by the *PC* were willing to renovate their plots with hybrid seed.

In March of 2009, I sat with Raúl in the village school kitchen. Raúl was one of *Agromira's* 53 members and had cultivated six hectares of oil palm in 2002. Actually, although Raúl was the official member who had signed all the legal documents and taken on the responsibility of paying back the \$15,500 dollar loan, oil palm cultivation was a joint project that he shared with his five brothers. In 2001, he went through Cordeagropaz's intensive training course and three and half years after

⁶⁵ At the time of writing this was roughly equivalent to \$3600 US dollars.

planting, Raúl and his brothers started harvesting fruit. The harvest was initially small—about 800 kilos—but steadily increased to reach fifteen monthly tons. When the harvest was large, Raúl and his five brothers would pay four additional men and recruit their wives' labor in order to collect all the seed bunches and get them to *Palmas de Tumaco* in time to process high-quality oil. The price that the company paid varied—from \$130 to \$180 U.S. dollars—as did the size of the harvest, but when business was good they collected up to two thousand dollars in one month. With this money he and his family fixed up their house and bought a motorboat, a TV, and a gas-powered generator. With enough cash to purchase the necessary gas to drive the motorboat to Tumaco, Raúl and his family bought basic foodstuffs in town and replaced their kerosene lamps with light bulbs. Overall, he summed up his assessment of incurring into the small-scale oil palm business by saying “life improved a bit”.

But this bonanza only lasted a few years. In August of 2008 Raúl started noticing some burnt leaves on a few of his palms and Cordeagropaz's technicians recommended that he eradicate them. Although he immediately cut those sick plants down, the epidemic spread quickly. In order to eradicate all the remaining palms, he had to borrow an additional \$700 dollars, which were calculated into a second loan that had to be used for renovation. When we spoke in 2010, only six of his original 780 palms were left, but he had already replanted five hectares with the hybrid seed and was optimistic. While he waited for the new palms to yield and prayed for them not to get infected, he had negotiated a line of credit at a granary in Tumaco where he

got the rice, sugar, oil and salt that his family needed. As for fish and game, he would have to cross his fingers and hope for their continued abundance.

Epidemics on monoculture plantations are so common that this oil palm disease is almost unremarkable. In the Tumaco region alone, most monoculture crops—plantain, cacao, and coconut—have eventually gotten sick and died. From a biological perspective, it is not difficult to understand that large extensions of a single organism tend to magnify genetic weaknesses. In order to survive and thrive, organisms need to engage in relationships with other organisms. In its obsession with single-organism repetition, monoculture obstructs symbiosis. Obviously, this goes for human beings as well. In fact, most of the community council's argument against oil palm cultivation is founded precisely on this premise. The community council is not opposed to what Raul described as "improving one's life." In fact, in order to urge the State to remedy the region's socioeconomic conditions—by providing public services in their communities for instance—the community council constantly mobilizes a notion of "ethno-development" that is precisely about improving one's life. Their opposition to the spread of oil palm cultivation is not due to a perspective that sees tradition and development as inherently antagonistic, nor do they blindly defend a static notion of "afrocolombian culture." Rather, their concern with the spread of oil palm inside their collective territory reflects a preoccupation with preserving symbiotic relations between people, plants, and animals. Put differently, oil palm cultivation as it is currently practiced on the Mira River by large-scale

plantations and small-scale farmers is a landscaping project that conflicts with the community council's desired configuration of humans and nonhumans.

These two landscaping projects (along with others) spread simultaneously across the terrain of the Mira River's collective lands. The outcome of their encounter is somewhat predictable due to the unevenness of their forces but its consequences cannot be entirely foretold. Sometimes, oil palm cultivation dovetails with locals' pursuit of well being. Whether the State and oil palm capitalists genuinely share this concern is almost irrelevant as long as locals' objective of a better life is met. Both individuals and the community council are sometimes able to tap into the oil palm project and exploit its (symbolic and material) capital to their advantage. This is clearly evidenced by the Bajo Jagua's residents' commitment to oil palm cultivation. Although we could simply see their devotion to it—in spite of the devastating epidemic—as a result of false consciousness, this explanation is off the mark. Like other hegemonic projects, oil palm cultivation does in fact resonate with local farmers' interests otherwise it could only be implemented through the use of force. And although the use of force is not entirely absent from this ongoing battle, its more crude manifestations are no longer as frequent as they used to be. This is undoubtedly in part due to the existence of collective land rights. Law 70 was an important landmark that helped local black farmers reign in the virtually unchecked expansion of oil palm plantations. In this sense, land titling was unquestionably necessary to halt any further dispossession.

But oil palm cultivation did not end with land titling and its continued spread needs explanation. What I suggest is that even antagonistic landscaping projects have points of convergence, or at a minimum, points of mutual indifference. The pursuit of well-being that I outlined above and that Raúl described, is an example of one such point. The plantation is not opposed to the improvement of locals' quality of life, in fact they are willing to collaborate in reaching this goal so long as it does not ultimately obstruct their main goal, which continues to be the reproduction of capital. The two projects' goals provisionally coincide and therefore they can coexist and even collaborate. This resonates with Tsing's analysis of collaboration, which focuses on the productive potential of difference. Thinking counter-intuitively, Tsing suggests that what facilitates solidarity is not consensus, but rather disagreements "about what are supposed to be common causes and objects of concern"(Tsing, 2004, pp. 245–246). These differences are precisely what generate the necessary "friction" that helps an issue gain enough traction to move. Clearly, locals' desire to "improve their life", the community council's notion of "ethno-development", and the plantation's effort to become a "motor of regional development" are not identical goals, but their divergences in fact facilitate collaboration and enable concrete action around issues that are in some measure important to all parties involved. In fact, these points of overlap between seemingly antagonistic landscaping projects can result in unforeseen synergies. I use synergy to refer to the interaction of two or more agents that produces a combined effect that is larger than the sum of their individual effects. This does not require voluntary collaboration or awareness. In other words,

synergy can occur in spite of the agents' will and it can be unknowingly generated. If the PC had not violently crushed palm-growers' various dreams of "development" perhaps Cordeagropaz could have resulted in synergy. But this is perhaps a futile exercise.

But these points of convergence and synergy are highly unstable. Although some goals are provisionally shared we cannot ignore that at heart these landscaping projects have conflicting commitments to people and nature. And while some of these differences are manageable and productive, others are simply insurmountable. In other words, friction must be present in just the right quantity. Both too much and too little friction make it impossible for political projects to get off the ground. And while friction is a productive force of resistance, when a force becomes purely oppositional it results in collision. This is best exemplified by the tragic death of Felipe Landázuri, a former treasurer of the Lower Mira River's community council. On June 24, 2008, several armed men showed up at Felipe's home in one of the lower-most villages of the river. They dragged him out of his house, took him to the edge of the village and shot him point-blank. At the time Felipe was the community council's treasurer and had been very vocal in his opposition to the spread of oil palm cultivation. Although the circumstances of his violent death have not been formally investigated, those closest to his work as a local leader are certain that he was murdered precisely because of this. The narrative that circulates among past and present community council members is that several plantation owners paid paramilitary hit men to silence him. Felipe's death makes it brutally clear that

sometimes opposition is entirely antagonistic, and that for one landscaping project to prevail it must annihilate its adversary.

Conclusions

If green multiculturalism is a landscaping project, what kind of landscaping project is it and what are its consequences for the people, plants and animals that it seeks to configure in particular relations of power? First, green multiculturalism is a scale-making project. It actively seeks to claim the local, national, and global scales as the spatial dimensions on which its particular views can be projected and naturalized. For example, in order to garner the political and economic backing necessary to create Cordeagropaz and get it off the ground, its founders had to mobilize a discourse of development that simultaneously conjured various scales the regional and the national scale. The work to abandon the enclave economy in order to become a motor of regional development conjured the local scale while the usual macroeconomic discourse of increased employment, comparative advantage, and export-led growth provided the tools with which to project their vision onto the national scale. Finally, the global scale was engaged by making reference to the central role of palm oil biodiesel in the alleged resolution of the world energy crisis. Scales, however, are not innocent frames to view the world, or simple units of geographic measure. Scale-making is in and of itself a political endeavor because it locates actors and gives them relative “size”.

Second, green multiculturalism is a specific articulation of cultural recognition and nature politics. In the particular guise that it has acquired on the Mira River

perhaps its most perverse effect is the way in which it facilitates a conflation of environmentalism and green capitalism. In the first moment, black and indigenous subjects are recruited (both through consent and coercion) into green capitalist ventures and subsequently their very involvement in these undertakings serves to legitimate these endeavors as environmentally sound. Small-scale oil palm cultivation on the Mira River is a clear example of this dynamic. Black communities are extended the financial resources with which to exercise control over their collective lands on condition that they be used for oil palm cultivation, and their participation in this industry is then used to market biodiesel as a clean energy source. In this way the circle of cultural and environmental legitimacy is completed.

Finally, the main difference between green multiculturalism and its unadorned incarnations is that it does not seek to drive a wedge between cultural recognition and access to resources. Instead, green multiculturalism puts natural resources in the hands of multicultural subjects while charging them with the responsibilities of “sustainable” resource exploitation, forest preservation, “green” energy alternatives and whichever other environmental concern is high on the global agenda. The key is not so much in separating cultural rights from resource control as in carefully proscribing the terms under which resource control must be undertaken. In the case of multicultural subjects—such as black communities—who have legal control over resources that are regarded as a source of value for green capitalism—such as land—the conditions of cultural recognition get intricately tied to their promise to display appropriately “green” behavior. In other words, environmental friendliness gets

construed as a cultural trait that defines black subjects' authenticity and therefore determines whether they deserve special rights.

I wish to conclude by remarking on an unfortunate irony: what began as a self-conscious search for globally recognized eco-ethno alliances that would legitimate their "indigenous-like status" and put resource control in black communities' hands as a weapon against development-driven colonization of their territories, ended up placing these black farmers at the very heart of capitalism's advance. While it is true that small-scale palm cultivation does not evoke the specter of accumulation by dispossession, it has nonetheless recruited Colombia's blacks communities into capitalist ventures that contradict their own landscaping projects. The irony turns to tragedy when it becomes clear that in their efforts to secure control of natural resources, black multicultural subjects have become full-fledged stakeholders in green capitalism's industries. These palm growers are no longer proletariats who resist labor exploitation; nor are they landless *campesinos* who wage deadly battles against the landowning class. They are small-scale entrepreneurs, that is, "fellow" investors in the oil palm business who "willingly" enter the market only to participate under deeply unequal conditions.⁶⁶ Unlike their large-scale counterparts, *pequeños palmicultores* provide the land, exert the labor, and take on the full risk without the access to the symbolic and material capital that the former have. At the end of the day, if this model of industrial agriculture continues on Afro-

⁶⁶ This is in essence what Du Toit has termed "adverse incorporation," meaning that "poverty and disadvantage themselves can often flow not from exclusion, but from inclusion on disadvantageous terms" (Du Toit 2007, 2). For a detailed analysis of adverse incorporation in oil palm cultivation see McCarthy 2010 and Du Toit 2009.

Colombian collective lands, the land titles might end up being the most efficient means to appropriate black farmers' lands without ever invading or legally owning them.

Chapter 4

Displaced blackness

Introduction

“And that’s when everything changed”

Maria Elena is the second youngest of fifteen siblings. Her parents had two plots of land, one that they designated for foodstuff cultivation and the other for mining. On their *finca*, or farm, they grew plantains, bananas, cassava, *chontaduro* and fruit trees. On the *mina*, they scraped, stirred, and washed soil until they had a rich sediment of gold and platinum that they sold to local traders on the weekends. With the food from the farm and the money from the mine, Maria Elena’s parents fed their children and sent all of them to school. The FARC, Colombia’s largest guerrilla group, had been intermittently present in her hometown of Condoto as far back as she could remember and people were used to seeing them come and go. But in the early 1990s, as their presence became more consistent, Condoteños began to learn to live with them in different ways.

When Maria Elena was young, people referred to *guerrilleros* as *chusma* (riffraff or rabble) and she remembers that every time they came into town, grown-ups told their children to hide under their beds ‘because the bad guys had arrived.’ Back then, she recalls, ‘they drifted in and out. They would arrive, take a stroll around town, do what they had to do and then go back to their *monte*.’⁶⁷ But over the

⁶⁷ *Monte* is a very difficult Colombian term to translate into English. In general it can refer to the “wilderness” in opposition to a town or to a farm. It doesn’t refer specifically to a particular ecosystem, so the *monte* can be a lowland forest or a highland plateau. In the case of guerrilla groups,

years as they settled in the river's towns and villages, their relationship with the townsfolk began to change.

In a sense people started to live with them, and really, back then they didn't massacre people the way they are doing now. The guerrilla was kind of like an authority, something like that, because in some towns there was no police [...] If there were any conflicts between families or people of the same town, then they would act as mediators. Yeah, they were the ones who solved those conflicts [...] But they also made demands from people. They demanded a part of people's production, and since they were armed...nobody could say no.

Although there existed a coercive dimension of *guerrilleros'* relationship with locals—a situation that was undoubtedly facilitated by their weapons—over the years, their presence began to look less like an occupation and more like *convivencia* (coexistence).

When she finished high school, Maria Elena met a young man from the distant town of Barbaocoas (in the department of Nariño) who was working for a mining company that had him traveling back and forth. The two of them fell in love and soon after had a son. One of Maria Elena's sisters had a common-law husband who owned a large plot of land in a town about five hours away from Condoto. Because Luis, her brother-in-law, simply could not work the land on his own, Maria Elena, her husband, and her siblings spent a good deal of time on Luis's *finca* mining, farming, swimming and drinking beer (sometimes with the resident *guerrilleros*) in a small bar that he had set up on his property. With the *finca*'s profits Luis bought a small boat,

their *modus operandi* is synonymous with hiding out in a vague and undetermined *monte*, meaning spaces that are not normally inhabited by civilians.

which he used for personal transport and to make extra money taking people up and down the river.

But in 1997, a few months after Maria Elena's son turned three, "everything changed":

[Then the paramilitaries arrived, *and that's when everything changed* [...]
There were a lot of them, when they came into town. First they arrived in Condoto and started massacring people. They started doing selective murders, which was very uncommon in town. That never used to happen. There would be one or two dead people every morning. Everyone was bewildered, terrified with fear. After that, they settled in the rivers and brought their lists.

These lists were put together by local informants who were paid to finger alleged guerrilla sympathizers and collaborators. Sitting in her apartment in Bogotá more than ten years after the fact, Maria Elena took a long pause before she continued telling me how everything had changed:

They would come. They would come into houses and get people. Sometimes people would be eating and they'd say "finish your meal 'cause we're gonna kill you". A person who's eating and is told that they're gonna be killed, who would keep eating? So they would pull them out of the house and tell them to say goodbye and they wouldn't care if people were screaming, if the wife or the children were kneeling, begging, they didn't care about anything. They would simply take them out and say "dig your hole right there, dig your hole". And the person would dig their own hole, would stand next to it and they would shoot them right there and watch them fall in the hole, then they'd barely kick a little dirt in with their foot. Then they started to kill motorboat drivers. And my brother-in-law had a motorboat...

Although Colombia has acquired a worldwide reputation as a hotspot of drug traffic and political violence, Maria Elena's story is not simply a "fresh" example of what for decades has been Colombia's regrettable state of affairs. From the vantage

point of black communities⁶⁸—and I use this term deliberately— this kind of violence is not an old and everyday reality. In fact, I wish to begin my analysis in this chapter with an assertion about the historical timeline of Colombia’s internal conflict: as seen from the vantage point of black communities, the late 1990s were a critical turning point. I am neither the only nor the first observer to point out that during this period the Pacific region quickly went from being a “refuge of peace” to a “nightmare of war” (Restrepo, 2005; cf. Oslender, 2008; Wouters, 2002; Escobar, 2008). I do, however, take this observation further by claiming that this moment marked the beginning of an altogether new historical conjuncture. It is thus a key point of departure from which to understand how notions of blackness, multicultural policies for Afro-Colombians, and black Colombians themselves have been affected by the war since then.

Displaced blackness

One day in late march, when they were heading to her brother-in-law’s farm in Santa Barbara, Maria Elena and her family noticed that the small bar on his property had been razed and immediately knew they had to flee. They never turned the boat around to go back to Condoto. Instead, they kept going down the San Juan River and headed for Istmina, a larger town where they could hide out while they carved out an emergency plan. After only a week, they decided to go to Bogotá because two of Maria Elena’s brothers who had moved there to go to college had

⁶⁸ Recall that when I use the term “black communities” I am referring specifically to the legal and social formation that resulted from Law 70 and the collective titling process, not to black subjects at large.

stable jobs and apartments where the extended family could stay until things in Condoto cooled down. But Maria Elena never went back.

Maria Elena's story is a paradigmatic example of how thousands of members of black communities became internally displaced persons (IDP). But the process of becoming an IDP entails much more than the seemingly objective fact of leaving one's "territory" under violent conditions. Her displacement, which was accompanied by new experiences of racialization, marks the beginning of a complex process of political becoming. In essence, I will show that in the process of becoming an IDP, Maria Elena also became black in new ways, and that her experience is representative of that of many people who settled in urban centers with large non-white populations such as Bogotá. Over the ten years that I have listened to the testimonies of self-identified black IDPs I have repeatedly come across this general narrative, which suggests that forced displacement has politicized the racial dimensions of blackness in unprecedented ways.

But Maria Elena's story is not only useful as an illustration of a typical case. In addition to being an embedded ethnographic tale, her biography is also useful because of its uniqueness. Today, Maria Elena is the president of AFRODES, the National Association of Displaced Afro-Colombians, and one of the most visible political interlocutors on all matters of blackness in Colombia. Precisely because hers is an exceptional case of a person who mobilized her personal experiences towards a clear political end, it can tell us quite a bit about how activists' individual trajectories congeal into concrete political projects. Of course, she is not the sole agent in this

story and many conditions of possibility had to be met in order for AFRODES to become a nationally recognized political actor and for her to become the organization's president. But this is in fact one of the virtues of this analysis, which allows me to go back and forth between the historical conjuncture and the actors who are both shaping and being shaped by it.

In this chapter, therefore, my objective is twofold. On the one hand, I will trace Maria Elena's life story and political trajectory in detail to show how the experience of displacement can trigger the production of new subjectivities that are heavily marked by experiences of racialization. I will argue that when aggregated, these experiences have had a considerable impact on Colombia's formations of blackness. In addition, I will show how these initially disperse experiences have gradually become articulated into a rather coherent political project of blackness, which is heir to the model of ethnic blackness but also departs from it in significant ways. I call this emergent project "displaced blackness."

At the same time, Maria Elena's unique position as an activist provides an entryway into the political work of AFRODES. Through her, I can trace the emergence of the organization and its speedy ascent as one of Colombia's most reputable black organizations. AFRODES is a key site in this analysis because its history runs parallel and is integral to the appearance of this displaced articulation of blackness. In a sense, AFRODES' very existence stands as proof that in Colombia the violent conjuncture of the late 1990s has spurred the emergence of new articulations of blackness. I will show that displaced blackness is founded on the

proliferation of new black subjectivities that were forged in the context of experiences of forced displacement such as Maria Elena's. Together, these two registers of analysis—the biographical and the organizational—allow me to provide a critical perspective on displaced blackness, which not only traces its conditions of possibility but explores the ways in which it is taken up, mobilized, and articulated with sedimented notions of blackness such as the discourses of ethnicity and territoriality.

Battlegrounds

In order to substantiate the claim with which I opened this chapter, I will now present a fuller historical background of the new conjuncture. I do not intend to provide a history of Colombia's internal war—the longest armed conflict in Latin America, which began in the 1950s. I will not attempt to make sense of a senseless terrain in which armed groups emerge, converge, dissolve, resurrect, and are routinely exterminated. Much has been written about violence in Colombia (Bejarano Avila & Diaz Uribe, 1985; Bolivar Ramirez, 2003; Guzmán Campos, 1963; 2005; Sánchez G. & Aguilera Peña, 2001), and this is not intended as a direct contribution to that literature. However, my research has been inevitably situated at the center of many violent occurrences and must at a minimum attempt to understand their immediate consequences for the people with whom I have worked.

Although paramilitary groups have existed in Colombia for decades and some trace their origins to the period known as *La Violencia* in the 1950s, they did not emerge as a united and cohesive force until the mid 1990s. Specifically, the leaders of the paramilitary group known as ACCU (*Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y*

Urabá), which had been operating in the northernmost portion of the Pacific along the border with Panama since the 1980s promoted the creation and alliance of paramilitary groups throughout the country. These extreme right groups were created as vigilante groups whose main objective was to eradicate leftist guerrillas, and they funded their activities through drug traffic. After securing their stronghold, this coalition—the AUC or *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*—began to expand southwards towards the northern portion of Chocó, which had been under guerrilla control for decades.

In the southern Pacific the shift was spurred by the drug war in the neighboring department of Putumayo. In 1999 President Pastrana and President Clinton signed a collaborative agreement known as *Plan Colombia*. Although *Plan Colombia* was designed as a comprehensive aid package that included institutional, social, and economic development, a large portion of the total funds were destined towards the war against drugs. Over the next ten years, with Presidents Bush and Pastrana in office the military component of *Plan Colombia* was steadily increased. With this robust financial and military backup from the U.S. government, the Colombian army escalated their attack against drug trade and their associated illegal armed groups. Because the department of Putumayo had established itself as one of the areas with the highest density of coca leaf cultivation in Colombia, the armed forces made a particularly fierce entrance there and pushing out civilians and armed groups alike. Many of those who left Putumayo fled to neighboring Nariño where they re-established their coca cultivation and and illicit armed activities. In fact,

Nariño and the southern Pacific Coast was a fertile ground not only for coca cultivation but for military expansion more broadly because of the easy access that it offered to major ports such as Buenaventura and Tumaco. Thus, the war took root in the southernmost portion of the Pacific just a few years after the AUC began expanding deep into Chocó.

Overall, the emergence of organized paramilitarism in conjunction with the State-sanctioned military escalation spurred by *Plan Colombia* significantly changed the dynamics of Colombia's civil war and escalated the competition for territorial dominance. As both military and armed groups sought to establish command over key trading posts for drug and arms traffic and over land on which to establish profitable activities to fund the war, the Pacific was abruptly folded into the logics of the war.

This radical shift did not occur overnight but was the result of a complex nation-wide process that had been brewing for some time. I, like other observers, am well aware of these complexities. At the same time, the changes for black communities were so profound and so swift that they appeared to happen overnight. In fact, some scholars pinpoint the beginning of this transformation with great precision to the night of December 20th 1996 when paramilitary troops opened fire on the town of Riosucio, Chocó.⁶⁹ In a sense then, Riosucio stands as the moment after

⁶⁹ It is important to clarify that the situation in Riosucio was not replicated all along the region. In each place the actors, the interests, the histories, and the responses were unique. These contextual details make a difference and I do not intend to make broad generalizations that obviate these particularities. That said, I take the events in Riosucio as an important marker of the radical rupture that occurred on the Pacific during this period.

which “everything changed” for black communities and for this reason I take a brief moment to recapitulate the event.

Rupture

In the 1990s, the area around Riosucio, which had been used by the FARC as a resting and settlement area for over twenty years, became a new coveted point for development projects and strategic military control. For this reason, paramilitary fronts that had a stronghold in Antioquia and Córdoba advanced into the northwestern portion of Chocó to initiate a battle for territorial control against the FARC. After the infamous paramilitary attack of December 1996, the inhabitants of Riosucio’s rivers lived through a bloodshed that lasted several months. First, the AUC’s men opened fire on *guerrilleros* and civilians alike. A few weeks later, the FARC counterattacked. In response, the Colombian army surrounded the area, implemented entry and exit controls, and initiated a search operation. Finally, the General in charge of the army’s 17th Brigade gave the order to initiate “Operation Genesis”, which consisted of four days of relentless aerial, land, and water attacks—by both members of the army and “civilians” in fatigues allegedly protecting locals from the FARC. By February of 1997, the balance in Riosucio consisted of dozens of murdered *campesinos*, burnt houses, dead animals, trampled farmlands and the ineffable memory of a group of armed men playing soccer with Marino Lopez Mena’s—a local *campesino*—head.

In the months following Operation Genesis 18,000 of the 27,000 inhabitants of Riosucio fled. This mass exodus was the largest forced displacement in

Colombian history. Some left in organized caravans that managed to break through the army's cordon. Others left in smaller groups of incomplete families, neighbors, and life-long friends who kept each other company through the journey to Quibdó, Pavarandó, or Turbo. Many of those who stayed were singled out as guerrilla collaborators and given twenty-four hours to leave under penalty of death. Although later that year several national and international organizations oversaw escorted mass returns to the region, Riosucio has not been the same since. As its name suggests, Operation Genesis was successful in razing the old Riosucio to the ground, making room for a new one to emerge.⁷⁰

The onslaught on Riosucio and the Pacific at large closely followed the triumphant moment of ethno-territorial blackness marked by the passage of Law 70 and the political effervescence that collective land titling had stirred. By the end of the 1990s, the celebratory mood that had reigned on the Pacific turned sour. Members of newly recognized black communities were being forcefully displaced by the thousands; black activists were being systematically silenced through intimidation or selective murder; collective territories were being emptied of their rightful owners and used as military training grounds, coca plantations, war trenches, or contraband trade centers. In short, the forests and rivers that had provided mining and farming grounds for thousands of families like Maria Elena's had become battlegrounds.

Uprooted

⁷⁰ The data on "Operation Genesis" were taken from the reports drafted by the human rights watchdog group *Comisión Intereclesial Justicia y Paz*, see <http://justiciaypazcolombia.com/>.

Current data on forced displacement of black communities is scarce and imprecise. On the one hand, the State has not systematically gathered disaggregated data on black IDPs. On the other hand, non-governmental organizations that attempt to monitor this data simply do not have the resources necessary to undertake such a large enterprise. To date, there exist three sources of statistical data on black IDPs, which have been collected by the State, a group of black civil society organizations, and an independent watchgroup. A detailed analysis of these statistics is beyond the scope of this chapter, but I do wish to roughly describe the divergent methodologies and results of these three sources in order to show how uneven (and therefore unreliable) these numbers are.

The State's figures are taken from the official declarations that IDPs give at their place of arrival. They include individuals who presented their stories at State-sanctioned posts *and* whose cases were approved as legitimate. These individuals were subsequently entered as "active" in the national *Sistema de Información para la Población Desplazada* (SIPOD). These numbers understate internal displacement on three accounts: 1. Not all IDPs present their cases to the State 2. Of those who do make official declarations not all are approved, and 3. The SIPOD only includes displaced persons from 1998 to the present.

CNOA and AFRODES, two national black organizations based in Bogotá have designed an alternative data collection method. Based on the 2005 Census data for ethnic minorities, they constructed a map of municipalities with significant Afro-Colombian presence. Then, they multiplied the SIPOD's aggregated numbers of

IDPs by the percentage of Afro-Colombians reported in the census. Finally, they added these municipal-level data for the 100 municipalities with the highest level of “Afro-Colombian Significance.” Although these numbers suffer from the same general shortcomings as the SIPOD’s, they correct for two of its ethnic-specific errors: 1. that not everyone who presents a declaration reports their ethnic identity, and 2. for the fact that the SIPOD did not collect ethnic indicators until very recently.

The third set of existent data on black IDPs comes from a national survey conducted in 2008. This survey was spurred by the *Comisión de Seguimiento a la Política Pública para Población Desplazada*, a group of independent observers that provides expert data and advice to the Constitutional Court in its effort to monitor State programs for IDPs. The *Comisión* does not receive State funding and although it is committed to supporting IDPs’ struggles, it does not represent any given organization or population group. The *Comisión’s* survey collected demographic and socioeconomic data on Afro-Colombian IDP’s, and although it only reflects the situation of a small national sample of IDPs, it provides a great deal of detail on matters such as nutrition, income, and access to health, education, and housing.

With these caveats in mind, we can then ask: What is the current situation of black IDPs? How many black Colombians have been displaced? What percentage of Colombia’s five million IDPs is black? Again, the vast statistical differences evident in the table below suggest that it is quite difficult to venture a reasonably accurate estimate. Nonetheless, in quantitative terms, the fact remains that a very large number of Afro-Colombians have been forcefully displaced. In fact, with the

exception of the SIPOD's figures, the data coincide in that black Colombians are grossly over-represented among IDPs. Simply put, afrodescendants have been disproportionately affected by the shifting geographies of violence in Colombia; the country with the world's second largest number of IDPs.

	SIPOD	AFRODES/CNOA	Comisión
Total number of black IDPs	334.722	764.373	N/A
% of total IDPs	9%	32%	17%
% of Afro-Colombian population ⁷¹	8%	18%	N/A

Table 1: Afro-Colombian Displacement

If the balance of forced displacement is difficult to gauge in quantitative terms, the same is not true of its qualitative consequences. In fact, several scholars have analyzed some of these outcomes in considerable detail. Restrepo, for example, sees paramilitary violence in Tumaco as a disarticulating force that profoundly weakened the ethno-territorial political project that had emerged and solidified in this part of the Pacific (Restrepo, 2005). For Ulrich Oslender, the initial onslaught of the 1990s left the landscapes of the Pacific haunted by new “geographies of terror”. That is, spaces of formerly peaceful forms of sociality were reinscribed as sites of bloody memories of the past or as dangerous places to inhabit and traverse in the present . And in William Villa’s sorrowful appraisal of the aftermath of this wave of

⁷¹ The calculations of the percentage of the total Afro-Colombian population who are IDPs are my own. In both cases, they were calculated using the National Census data published by the DANE in 2005. According to these data, the total number of Afro-Colombians was 4,273,722, which was 10.5% of the total population.

violence, the Pacific's places of "golden histories" have been reduced to "shards, ruins, and debris" (Oslender, 2008).

At the same time, analysts have acknowledged that in addition to being overly grim, these hopeless appraisals of the new conjuncture are not entirely accurate. Restrepo, for instance, clarifies that this new moment has not only wrought destruction. To counter this pessimistic outlook, he carefully outlines a number of important political openings that the new conjuncture has ushered in. In fact, to a certain extent, Restrepo sees these changes as an opportunity for a much-needed paradigm shift that could overcome some of the limitations of the ethno-territorial project. That is, an unexpected opportunity to correct its various points of near-sightedness.

Hoffman, another long-time ethnographer of the Pacific, coincides. For her, the weakening of the ethno-territorial articulation has given way to emergent forms of black identity formation. When referring to the settlement of black IDPs in Colombia's urban centers, for example, Hoffman describes cities as the site where "the eclectic stew of a new black ethnicity" is being produced; as a place where "in the absence of a territorial justification, other cultural and political instruments are used as the philosophical basis for 'living together'" (Hoffman, 2002: 364). Wouters, on the other hand, suggests that as a result of being put "under fire" ethnic rights may have in fact re-emerged stronger than ever. For her, the crisis brought about by forced displacement "boosts the ethnic discourse once more, and this ethnic discourse

in turn contributes towards the creation of strategies meant to confront displacement and reconstruct new forms of peaceful cohabitation” (Wouters, 2002: 371).

Despite their various approaches and somewhat divergent assessments, all of these works in one way or another attempt to make sense of the new conjuncture. Given the undeniable irruption of violence on the Pacific and its accompanying mass displacements, it is urgent to ask what has happened to the articulation of ethnic identity and territoriality. Put bluntly, what has happened to a black social movement founded on ethnicity and its relationship to territory, in the aftermath of a severe blow to that territoriality. If the ethno-territorial project was about emplacing blackness, can we now speak of a “displaced” blackness in Colombia? And more importantly, does this “displaced” blackness necessarily imply a disarticulation of a somewhat solid political identity (ethnic blackness)? Or can it also be taken as an opportunity to rearticulate this identity in more expansive terms?

My answers to these questions require undoing our common sense associations of physical permanence with emplacement. Rather than assume that forced displacement has simply disarticulated Afro-Colombians’ ethnic identity and undermined their ability to make and defend their place in the world, my analysis explores the extent to which this experience has fostered re-routings that lead to new forms of emplacement and of being black. Overall, I argue that the politics of displaced blackness in Colombia constitute a technique of both location and expansion. Like the ethno-territorial project of the 1990s, the political projects of displaced Afro-Colombians constitute an active and self-aware defense of place. But

theirs is not simply an attempt to recover a lost home or erect rigid boundaries of belonging. Instead, in their efforts to *resolve* their critical situation, displaced Afro-Colombians have carved out new and possibly more expansive places from which to inhabit and move through the world.

Emplacement

But before I go on to show displaced blackness as a place-making project, it is important to clarify what I mean by emplacement. My point of departure is Massey's extroverted definition of place, which does not see places as bounded areas, but as particular axes in complex networks of social relations (Massey, 1994). Therefore, emplacements are not localist projects that erect impermeable boundaries to separate insiders from outsiders. They are projects of location and expansion that also constitute historical subjects as resolutely modern (Hoffman, 2002).

Let me illustrate this definition with the case of ethnic blackness. Although one could see ethnic blackness as an introverted form of nationalism, or what Gilroy termed 'ethnic insiderism' (Gilroy, 1993), I see it as a process of emplacement that involves three simultaneous moves: location, extension, and modern subjectification. By location, I am referring to the fact that for its advocates, the objective of ethnic blackness was to place black Colombians in better (economic and political) positions vis-à-vis others, such as "white"⁷² Colombians, indigenous people, and the Colombian State.

⁷² Racial categories, as we well know, do not travel well. Therefore, it is extremely difficult to simply transpose the term "white" to the Colombian spectrum of racial categories. This is why I put the term in scare quotes. My use of the term here is meant to signal the non-marked, dominant racial category

In its first moment ethnic-territoriality was a concerted effort to stave off intruders, secure land, and protect local livelihoods. Within the context of the Constituent Assembly, it became an opportunity to also carve out a symbolic place, a place of ethnic difference similar to the one that indigenous people had carved out for themselves within the national structures of alterity. Escobar describes this process in great historical and ethnographic detail in his book *Territories of Difference* (Escobar, 2008). Escobar's work traces the production of the Pacific as a *territorio-región de comunidades étnicas* showing that it was the outcome of intense disputes and makeshift alliances between biologists, planners, capitalists, activists, and local inhabitants with competing discourses regarding the relationship between nature and culture. Of course, all of these actors themselves were historically situated and had to contend with various layers of landscape-production, which ranged from geological formations and biotic processes to livelihood practices and resource exploitation for international markets. In short, the ethnicization of blackness and the emergence of the Pacific as a place were co-constitutive processes.

But ethnic blackness was also a technique of “spatial-temporal extension” (Munn 1986). That is, it was a way to establish linkages to other locations and relations with other people within and beyond the nation. Interestingly then, at that particular historical moment, staying put was the best way for black Colombians to be cosmopolitan. To invert Nancy Munn's observation regarding migrant bodies, the defense of a “black culture” that sits in place effectively functioned as a technique of

in Colombia, which though not exactly equivalent to “white” would nonetheless be contrasted to “black.

spatial-temporal extension. But again, this process of extension itself was part and parcel of the work of place-making in that it sought to situate black Colombians in particular relations of power with others and elsewhere.

And finally, as scholars of globalization have showed, place-making projects are also temporal in nature. In other words, they constitute historical subjects in particular ways (cf. Trouillot, 2002). In the current historical conjuncture, where transnational flows have greatly intensified in quantity and velocity, being emplaced necessarily involves claiming a particular location on a *global* map of crisscrossing relations and flows. I am by no means arguing that transnational mobility is a new phenomenon, nor am I asserting that this is the first time in history that subjects are positioned in social relations of power at a global scale. What I am suggesting is that what is perhaps different about emplacement at this particular historical moment is that self-conscious struggles to make and defend a place for oneself must be played out on a game board of global dimensions (just as much they require us to keep solid footing on a given location). Place-making is therefore inevitably a technique of both location and expansion. It is a statement about how one inhabits, moves through, and is connected to others all across the world.

With this expansive, extroverted, yet grounded definition of place (and emplacement), we can now re-evaluate the ways in which ethnic-territoriality has been successful at emplacing black communities in Colombia. I do much of this empirical work in Chapter 2, however, at this juncture it is relevant to roughly describe some of the broader consequences of emplaced blackness. First, it is

important to highlight that not all of the interpretations and uses that it has been put to follow an expansive definition of place. In fact, in its administrative dimensions, ethnic-territoriality has in fact created rigid cartographies of blackness that, as Colombian anthropologist Bocarejo warns, run the risk of incarcerating ethnic difference (Bocarejo, 2008). With this caveat in mind, we can state that ethnic territoriality inserted black Colombians into global circuits of indigeneity; indirectly interpellated them as “ecological natives” (Ulloa, 2001); rendered them legible as authentic ethnic others within Colombia; and positioned them as legitimate beneficiaries of special rights to cultural difference and collective territory. In practice, none of these consequences have been unambiguously advantageous for black Colombians, and not a single one is exempt from serious risk. Among other things, this dissertation is intended precisely as an analysis of this place-making project that is neither blindly celebratory nor inevitably ominous. For the purpose at hand, however, I simply wish to state that the black ethno-territorial project that congealed in the early 1990s has been unquestionably interpreted as a place-making project in both material and symbolic terms.

Making one’s place in the world

When seen in relation to the emplacement enacted by the ethno-territorial project, the current historical conjuncture can appear as nothing more than the tragic destruction of that place; as a profound disturbance of the seemingly natural and harmonious isomorphism that was established between culture (blackness) and place (the rural and riverine Pacific region). However, as Malkki has shown in her work on refugees,

this perspective suffers from a “sedentarist bias” that sees uprootedness as an unnatural state of affairs (L. Malkki, 1995; L. H. Malkki, 1995). This is the view that has been adopted by many NGO and State officials (as well as some academics) who see displacement only as a destructive force that erodes collective identities, and *desplazados* as liminal subjects in desperate search of their true and original place of belonging.

The notion of diaspora is a useful corrective to this sedentarist bias because rather than seeing displacement as a radical rupture between the homeland and the place of settlement, or between the past and the present, displacement itself is seen as the foundation of identity; as a group’s very source of commonality and historical continuity (cf. Gilroy, 1993). Theorists of diaspora maintain that dislocations not only constitute losses and absences, but also findings, encounters, and inventions (Clifford, 1994). Displacement then, can also be a creative force from which new identities are forged and with which *desplazados* carve out multiple and unbounded places of belonging.

However, one problem with this approach is that because it overemphasizes a group’s physical departure from “home” as *the* seminal experience of becoming, it can end up reinscribing the homeland as a nostalgic place of origin (and implicit return); of longing and belonging. By separating the (mythical) homeland and past from all other spatial-temporal locations, this narrow concept of diaspora is incapable of considering that “home” itself can also be a diasporic site. The result is a diasporic perspective that sees *desplazados* as always and necessarily homeless, and is

incapable of thinking of the Pacific itself—the mythical homeland—as a site where black communities can also be out of place.

In her ethnographic analysis of the family members of overseas Chinese migrants who stayed behind in their home village of Fuzhou, Chu offers a very insightful corrective to this narrow view of diaspora by unsettling the uncritical association of emplacement with physical permanence (Chu, 2006; 2010). For Chu, Fuzhounese migration is not only about their “yearnings for linkages to other spatial locations, but also [about] their desires for embodying the privileged ‘spirit’ of the times, which in this case required maintaining a temporal flow onward and forward alongside the mercurial pulse of a normative Chinese modernity” (Chu, 2006: 398). Thus, “longing and belonging turned out to be less about physical travel and place of origin than about inhabiting the world in a particular dynamic and cosmopolitan way” (Ibid). As such, her conclusions on processes of emplacement are quite counterintuitive. On the one hand, the Fuzhounese quest for emigration turns out to be a place-making project in which Fuzhou and its inhabitants are reinscribed in the “moral hierarchy of relative mobility and connectivity” as modern and cosmopolitan (rather than as peasant and parochial). On the other hand, Chu finds that for her “Fuzhounese subjects, the ultimate form of displacement was experienced as the result of *immobility*, rather than physical departure from a ‘home’” (emphasis added Chu 2006:397).

This move to dislodge physical mobility from displacement, and physical permanence from emplacement, allows us to see the politics of displaced blackness in

a very different light. Following Chu, I question common sense assumptions about the relationship between travel and cosmopolitanism, and between dwelling and belonging, in order to avoid both the sedentarist bias and the narrow diasporic perspective described above. Instead, I am arguing that the politics of displaced blackness are neither uprooted (and therefore aberrant) versions of the ethno-territorial project nor nostalgic efforts to recover a lost home. The politics of displaced blackness are as much of a place-making project as the ethno-territorial project has been. But at the same time, I show that the place that is being constructed after displacement is not the same (physical or symbolic) one that the ethno-territorial project had carved out. The politics of displaced blackness are therefore not an attempt to recover a lost homeland—the rural, riverine, Pacific region—and defend an essential cultural identity—ethnic blackness. They constitute a propositional stance that seeks to defend place while exploding its boundaries. In Chu’s terms, they are less a politics of return, than a politics of destination (Chu, 2006: 420).

Dislocated experiences of racialization

In her relentless pursuit for economic survival, Maria Elena quickly figured out that if they registered as IDPs she and her family could be eligible to receive State emergency aid. The first step in doing so was to render an official declaration of the events. Then, if the factual evidence added up and the circumstances under which they had left were deemed adequate, she and her family would be granted the official

status of *desplazados*⁷³. At that time, the State's *Red de Solidaridad Social* gave IDPs a small cash transfer to meagerly cover food and housing expenses during three months. And so in her efforts to collect this money, Maria Elena became a regular at the local *defensoría* office where she befriended the State officials who handled her case and her fellow *desplazados* who were also learning how to navigate the system.

In 1999, two years after her arrival, one of the women with whom she had shared long conversations while waiting in line at the *defensoría* invited Maria Elena to participate in an organized occupation of the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) office in Bogotá. Maria Elena was driven to the occupation site out of necessity—she wanted to see if her friend could add her name to the list of occupiers in case they were eventually successful in negotiating benefits from the State—but soon became actively involved in the event. Although she didn't enter the building, she and other women collected food donations at local markets to feed the occupiers who remained inside. After two months of intense negotiations, the occupiers secured a lump sum grant of approximately \$1800 USD for themselves and a small number of allies whose names they had added to the list of beneficiaries. Then, the occupation dissolved.

The most durable consequence of Maria Elena's participation was not the small business venture that she and her husband set up with the cash that they received, but the relationships that she cultivated in the process. During that

⁷³ It is important to recall that the official term used by government offices in Colombia is *personas en situación de desplazamiento*. The term *desplazado*, however, is the one that circulates most broadly in common parlance although it is sometimes perceived as pejorative. My own usage is simply meant to economize on words.

occupation Maria Elena met three of the founders of AFRODES. After converging in a makeshift refugee camp in downtown Bogotá, these three *chocoanos* friends had decided to create a grassroots organization that catered to the specific needs of black IDPs. Maria Elena did not know any of them from her prior life in Chocó, nor had she ever referred to herself as *Afro-Colombiana*, but their invitation to become involved with AFRODES was appealing. After the occupation dissolved, she did in fact stop by their office one day and after witnessing the precarious circumstances in which they were working to help fellow *Afro-Colombianos* she decided to help out. Initially, her job consisted of making meals for the *compañeros* with the food donations that they received. But over time, after being an outspoken participant in many of their meetings and events, Jairo, who was the president at the time, encouraged her to formally join the board.

Maria Elena's ascent within AFRODES was as precipitous as the organization's growth. In a matter of months she learned how to successfully draft project proposals for funding and became the *de facto* "gender lady" in the organization. For many years she was elected Secretary General and since 2009 she has been the organization's national president. But the speed with which she became the leading voice for *Afro-Colombianos desplazados* is impressive not only because of her outstanding ability to acquire expertise in topics with which she was entirely unfamiliar, but because the steepness of her learning curve goes hand in hand with a vertiginous process of subject formation. In just a few months Maria Elena went

from being just another *desplazada* to mobilizing a sophisticated discourse about blackness, racism, and its relationship to territory.

The interesting question, for which I want to offer a tentative response here, is why? Why was Maria Elena immediately drawn to her fellow *chocoanos* at the UNHCR occupation? Why did she find the idea of organizing as *Afro-Colombianos desplazados* compelling, even necessary? I suggest that her experience of dislocation enabled her to see herself as a racialized subject in ways that had simply not been possible before. In other words, the particularities of her experience with racial discrimination in Bogotá precipitated a process whereby she simultaneously became *desplazada* and black, in new, more clearly racialized ways.

I do not mean to suggest that racism did not exist in Condoto, or that she had somehow managed to avoid experiencing it. However, the particular type of racial discrimination that accompanied the experience of being out of place was in fact new to her. Nor am I arguing that before being displaced she did not self-identify as black. In fact, Maria Elena assured me that in Condoto “we were all convinced that we were black.” But this “fact” of blackness served more to reinforce a mutual recognition of sameness among *chocoanos* than to highlight their difference (and implicit inferiority) from “white” Colombians. Thus, she explained that “[in Condoto] there was no need to talk about that because we were all black and saw each other as black.”

Being the sophisticated analyst that she is, Maria Elena describes these two experiences of being black as directly related to the difference between structural and

interpersonal racism. It was not until she arrived in Bogotá where her everyday experiences involved constant interactions with “white” Colombians that her blackness began to acquire different meanings:

[W]hen you're there you don't even see that, you don't even talk about identity because over there we are all black, we all eat plantain, we all eat *tapado* (fish stew). We all fish, we all... and that's part of our identity. But once you arrive somewhere else, that's when you start to realize these differences and that's when you start to realize that you are different from everyone else.

Her dislocation to a place where her skin color was coded as being out of place—an experience that is clearly reminiscent of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*—precipitated a different process of becoming black. In Bogotá, perhaps for the first time in her life, Maria Elena was not simply “convinced of her own blackness,” but was subjected to others' ascription of blackness as a sign of difference that she inevitably carried on her body.

In one of our many conversations about racism, I asked her how those experiences made her feel, and she said

I felt a lot of sadness, a lot of pain to know that when I arrived here I saw myself as different, and to know that because I was different I was marginalized, in ways that I wasn't when I lived there. And I would say, God, why? Why does one have to live through this? Just because of this skin color? And I started seeing it when I would look for a job or for an apartment. Even when one gets on a bus. That was the moment that I started seeing that they made us feel different; *different but inferior*.

In a sense then, Maria Elena's uprooting marked two coinciding breaking points in her life. When “everything changed” in her hometown of Condoto and she was forced to leave her home she embarked on a long journey and as a result of that journey everything that she had known about being black also changed.

Projects of displaced blackness

In this section I will argue that though unique in its own ways, Maria Elena's experience of political becoming is in fact representative of a broader phenomenon that has had a considerable impact on Colombia's formations of blackness. In essence, I will show that forced displacement has politicized the racial dimensions of blackness in a way that ethnic blackness had not done so. This is observable on two levels. First, the aggregated experiences of black Colombians who have suddenly found themselves racially interpellated have sparked the emergence of a collective identity that is forged first and foremost in racial terms and against non-black Colombians. Whereas members of black communities had understood their blackness primarily in cultural terms such as tradition, ancestry, and territoriality, the category *Afro-Colombianos desplazados* is a racial identity as much as an ethnic one. Second, the conscious politicization of the category *Afro-Colombianos desplazados* (or black IDPs), which has been spearheaded primarily by AFRODES, has also rearticulated the discourse of ethnic rights in ways that deal with racism more directly. To be precise, over the years AFRODES has crafted a discourse of blackness that interweaves the right to cultural difference with an anti-racist agenda.

Afro-desplazados

The very emergence and rapid growth of AFRODES is proof of the fact that the idea of organizing as *Afro-Colombianos* and *desplazados* made sense to many people. It made sense because it spoke to the new experiences of racialization that many IDPs were undergoing in Bogotá (and other primarily "white" urban centers in

Colombia). In fact, I dare say that it was their coming face to face with overt forms of anti-black racism more than their attempt to preserve a particular set of cultural practices that attracted black IDPs to one another. It would be too easy (not to mention essentializing) to retrospectively narrate the coalescence of black IDPs into a burgeoning collective racial identity as “naturally” emerging from their blackness, as if this blackness was everywhere a given. The many thousands of *Afro-Colombianos desplazados* who met in temporary refugee camps, at State aid agencies, or in substandard neighborhoods were not already nor necessarily black. In relation to one another they were men, women, *campesinos*, miners, professionals, Chocoanos, Tumaqueños, Guapireños, Atrateños. They were a very diverse set of people who due to their ethnic, intra-regional, and class differences might not have otherwise met. But in relation to “white” Colombians, they were *negros* (black) first and *desplazados* (IDPs) second. When they converged in regions considered “white” in Colombia’s deeply racialized geographies, their numerous differences and diverse experiences of displacement were suddenly overshadowed by their commonalities as racial others and “bodies out of place” (Cresswell, 1999; McDowell, 1999). I do not mean to suggest that these differences disappeared or were magically transcended as a result of their displacement, but rather that their racialization became a more salient feature of their subjectivity.

In many cases, these new experiences of racialization turned into a heightened awareness of racism. As Maria Elena’s reflections on the numerous times that she was denied access to a job, an apartment, or even a seat on a bus reveal, the

assignment of racial difference that she experienced in Bogotá was not power innocent. Implicit within it was a widely-held conviction that blacks were not only “different but inferior.” I simply cannot count the number of times that I have heard different versions of this same story. Stories that reveal a painful experience of racialization that is immediately interpreted as a transparent expression of racism. For many black IDPs these experiences constitute the social glue that holds their identities as *Afro-Colombianos* together. They are the foundation of a process of mutual recognition that far outweighs the claim to cultural difference. Because they know that the reason why a cab will not stop for them after dark has very little to do with their ancestral cultural practices and everything to do with the social coding of their skin.

Over time and as a result of the concerted efforts of a few black IDPs, these seemingly isolated experiences of inter-personal racism have been worked into a complex analysis of structural racism. This process is most clearly evident in the work of AFRODES, which over the years has gone from a near exclusive attention to displacement to a broad struggle against racism that includes but is not limited to the defense of territory. The reason *why* AFRODES has become such a prominent actor in Colombia’s political landscape is in large part explained by the shifting processes of subject formation that I outlined above. That is, because by virtue of their experiences with racism, *afro-desplazados* are currently one of the largest constituencies of self-aware black subjects in Colombia; and their awareness is not merely cultural but solidly racialized. In this section, however, I want to carefully

outline *how* AFRODES's work has "naturally" moved from the defense of territory to anti-racism. By carefully analyzing the organization's shifts in discourses and strategies over the years, I will show that forced displacement has in some sense facilitated the rearticulation of ethnic blackness in ways that enable the open denunciation of structural racism.⁷⁴

From Emergency Aid to the Fight for Differentiated Treatment

When I first became acquainted with AFRODES in 2003 their work had three main foci. First, they facilitated black IDPs' access to various kinds of programs and projects aimed at improving their quality of life. This included everything from State-funded emergency aid plans to non-governmental and international aid-funded *proyectos productivos*, which were an array of programs that sought to provide income-generating opportunities for IDPs. This was the oldest of their work foci and AFRODES' role as a facilitator had evolved from simply giving out information to applying for funding and managing said programs. The first of these projects, which they carried out in 1999 was a socio-demographic study that assessed the living conditions of black IDPs in southern Bogotá and the adjoining municipality of Soacha. By 2004, they had put those data to work on a State-funded socioeconomic

⁷⁴ At surface, my argument runs counter to some analysts' declaration that the pursuit of ethnic rights and anti-racism are incompatible (cf. Hooker, 2005). But my intent here is not to prove them wrong. I do not contend that ethnic blackness *necessarily* enables anti-racism. In fact, I share many of these analysts' concerns regarding the risks of organizing blackness along a culturalist logic. My contention that the pursuit of ethnic rights in Colombia has in some ways facilitated anti-racist politics hinges on the new historical conjuncture that I outlined at the beginning of this chapter. It is the contingent outcome of an unforeseeable turn of events. In other words, the key element in this story is the collective experience of displacement that produced new black subjectivities, and which in turn facilitated the articulation of ethnic blackness with anti-racism.

stabilization project that managed income-generating activities for 73 families of *afro-desplazados*. They had also entered into a partnership with a religious organization, *El Minuto de Dios*, to build and manage a daycare center for children of displaced families in Soacha. Finally, they had an open-door policy for drop-in advising, and routinely held training workshops on economics and accounting, and on IDPs' rights as guaranteed by Law 387 of 1997 (known as the Law of *Desplazados*) and Law 70 of 1993 (known as The Blackness Law).

The emphasis on Law 70 and the cultural logic that undergirded much of this work corresponded with their second main focus, which they defined as “the maintenance and promotion of the cultural values that characterize our ethnic group” (www.afrodes.org). Put crudely, this aspect of their work constituted their black ethnic focus. For example, when choosing income-generating activities, they explained their preference for certain trades not in terms of the population's expertise, but in terms of Afro-Colombians' cultural practices. Following this culturalist logic, in 2004 AFRODES sponsored the establishment of a women's handcraft collective, which made and commercialized “ethnic” jewelry. And their flagship cultural project was the creation of a folkloric dance group, which was housed in a cultural center that AFRODES built with USAID funding in Soacha in 2003.⁷⁵

While this aspect of their work was directed towards their own community of black IDPs—which consisted mainly of affiliates in a handful of neighborhoods in southern Bogotá and Soacha—they also carried out this cultural emphasis at various

⁷⁵ I expand on this aspect of AFRODES' work in Chapter 5.

other scales. Basically, they worked hard to establish relationships with other black organizations both within and outside Colombia, and to consolidate themselves as legitimate interlocutors in the broader black social movement. The most telling examples of this are their leading role in the creation of the (now defunct) *Conferencia Nacional Afro-Colombiana* in 2002,⁷⁶ and their participation in two major international events: the first *Encuentro de Afrodescendientes de las Américas*, which was held in Honduras in 2002; and the UN's III Conference Against Racism, which was held in Durban in 2001.⁷⁷

The third and final focus of AFRODES' work at that time consisted of “defending and protecting the human rights of the displaced Afro-Colombian population” (www.afrodes.org). Although this work clearly overlapped with the first focus—emergency and humanitarian aid provision—it was more ambitious in scale. Here, their purpose was not simply to solve the urgent problems of their local constituency of *afro-desplazados*, but rather to actively participate in the emergent public policy initiatives aimed at IDPs at large. They carried out this work on two fronts. First, they inserted themselves into as many political spaces concerning IDPs as possible. For example, they sought a seat in the City Roundtable for IDPs (*Mesa de interlocución y gestión de población desplazada en Soacha y Cundinamarca*) and eventually also secured a seat in one of the four committees (*mesas*) of the National System for Comprehensive Aid for IDPs (*Sistema Nacional de Atención Integral a la*

⁷⁶ The *Conferencia Nacional Afro-Colombiana* (CNOA) was initially conceived as a collective space where various black organizations could come together to collaborate. Although this idea did not take, the CNOA turned into an independent organization of its own.

⁷⁷ I will expound on the nature of their participation in Durban in another section of this chapter.

Población Desplazada, SNAIPD). At the same time, they began creating their own network of black IDPs by organizing periodic National Meetings of Displaced Afro-Colombians (*Encuentros Nacionales de Afrocolombianos Desplazados*), creating neighborhood committees of black IDPs in Bogotá, and establishing various chapters of AFRODES that were based on alliances with local organizations of IDPs and existent community councils on both the Pacific and Caribbean Coasts.⁷⁸

Over the years, AFRODES' work has undergone considerable changes in focus and scope. I cannot fully do justice to the organization's trajectory here, but I will focus on two main transformations that I have observed and that I think are indicative of a burgeoning project of displaced blackness. The first of these changes is a shift from an aggregate to a *co-constitutive analysis* of black displacement. If we analyze the political spaces that were available to them in their early years, it will become immediately apparent that AFRODES had to present itself as *either* a black organization *or* an IDP organization depending on the forum in which they participated. These two options loosely corresponded with the first two foci of their work. On the one hand, their emergency aid work followed existent blanket programs for IDPs. And on the other hand, their participation in networks of black organizations had a cultural/ethnic focus that tended to elide all mentions of forced displacement. This, of course, is a crude depiction of what was clearly a much more complex political landscape, but it does capture the fact that AFRODES was caught

⁷⁸ Over time, they incorporated the denunciation of individual and collective human rights violations to this aspect of their work. More specifically, they documented human rights violations of black leaders inside and outside of Colombia and constructed complex human rights protection plans for black activists.

between two seemingly unrelated registers of political work: blackness and displacement.

The first major transformation in AFRODES's work is therefore reflected in a greater and greater emphasis on their third line of work, the one that was specifically designed to protect displaced Afro-Colombians. In contrast to the first two foci, this line of work was intersectional from the outset in that it did not compromise their political commitment to IDPs or to Afro-Colombians at large. And while they could have followed an aggregate logic of doing work with *desplazados* on the one hand and with fellow *Afro-Colombianos* on the other, they instead honed a sophisticated co-constitutive analysis that tied their current condition as *desplazados* to their historical racialization as *Afro-Colombianos*. This was a powerful intervention that amounted not only a refusal to conform to the mutually exclusive categories available to them, but also to a propositional stance about racism that has redefined Colombia's formations of blackness.

If we look back at AFRODES' early human rights work, it will be apparent that even then they had already begun to create ethnic-specific political spaces for black IDPs. The meetings, neighborhood committees, and regional offices of *Afro-Colombianos desplazados* were all initiatives whose main purpose was precisely that. In a manner that is reminiscent of black and third world feminism, they first denounced the inadequacy of the political spaces available to them, and later worked to carve out their own. The height of this intervention occurred in 2009, when

AFRODES played a leading role in the passage of a Constitutional Court order, *auto 005*, which became known as the *Afro-Colombian auto*.⁷⁹

Auto 005 resulted from the work of a perseverant group of black organizations—PCN and AFRODES among them—who insisted on the need to design differential aid programs for Afro-Colombian IDPs. In 2004, the Constitutional Court had passed a sentence (T-025) that urged the State to design aid programs for *all* IDPs (that is, irrespective of their ethnicity). But in 2007, in response to the persistent pressure of these organizations, the Court convened a public hearing in which several activists presented a convincing argument about the urgent need to develop differential public policies for displaced Afro-Colombians. Very briefly, this court order mandates specific government offices to: 1. design protection plans for communities whose collective territories are under attack or at risk; 2. undertake an in-depth and systematic analysis of the juridical, socioeconomic, and *de facto* state of affairs in collective territories and other areas of ancestral Afro-Colombian occupancy; 3. protect Afro-Colombian territories from usurpation; and 4. elaborate strategies to provide emergency assistance to communities confined by the war. It is, without a doubt, an ethnic-specific solution to black displacement.

A total of twenty-two organizations sent representatives to the 2007 public hearing. Not all of them were black organizations, many were human rights groups, only a handful was national in scope, and even fewer worked centrally on issues of violence and displacement. For this reason, the most thorough and incisive reports

⁷⁹ And more recently, their current involvement in a counter-proposal to the State's recently passed *Ley de Víctimas*.

came from AFRODES and PCN, which were the only national-level organizations that had developed an ethnic-specific analysis of forced displacement. As the most prominent ethno-territorial organization and key actor during the drafting of Law 70, it is not surprising that PCN continued to stress the importance of black communities' territoriality. Only this time PCN didn't just argue that territorial autonomy was central to the protection of their *culture*, but insisted on its importance for the very preservation of their communities' *lives*. In other words, they articulated the discourse of ethnic rights to that of human rights.

AFRODES, on the other hand, mobilized a different argument that subtly inter-weaved anti-racism into a discussion about ethnic difference and forced displacement. Briefly put, AFRODES argued that Afro-Colombians' current socioeconomic conditions, which are the result of historical and persistent forms of structural racism, make them more vulnerable to violent displacement and confinement, and by extension, more susceptible to cultural loss. This contention allowed them to explicitly tether ethnic and racial demands by stating that in order for the State to adequately respond to Afro-Colombian displacement, it had to work towards the eradication of structural racism. This argument, which was most clearly developed in the context of *auto 005* was the result of a long and concerted effort to carve out an intersectional political space for black IDPs.

Having followed AFRODES' trajectory since its early years, I can think of several preceding moments in which slightly different incarnations of this argument

was mobilized. For example, Geiler Romaña,⁸⁰ AFRODES' second president—now exiled in Washington D.C.—routinely declared, both publically and in private, that forced displacement among Afro-Colombian communities is tantamount to genocide. His logic was straightforward. According to Romaña, territorial *arraigo* (rootedness) is the foundational characteristic that makes Afro-Colombians culturally different, thus it is what confers them ethnicity.⁸¹ In his own words, “our culture revolves around those territories.” Which is to say, “without territory there is no culture,” and consequently, without territory the ethnic group itself disappears. Thus, for Romaña displacement (and other forms of deterritorialization) results in genocide.

Although many black Colombians were losing and continue to lose their lives in Colombia's war, Romaña was not referring to the deliberate murder of black Colombians, nor was he making a claim that Afro-Colombians were targets of violence because they were black. Instead, he was referring to the annihilation of the cultural trait that makes them black. Without territory, Afro-Colombians would be no more (Cárdenas, Mejía, & Romaña, s. f.; Mejía, 2012).⁸² The following citation from an article that I wrote with Geiler Romaña and Juan Mejía in 2009, and which was taken from recorded conversations that Mejía and I held with Romaña over the years, illustrates this point:

In the case of Afro-Colombians the loss of territory does not only imply the loss of a livelihood. Historically, in the Pacific región territory has been an

⁸⁰ Because I am referencing a publication that will reveal his identity, I use his real name here.

⁸¹ This, of course, is not Geiler's idea, but rather a product of the ethno-territorial articulation of blackness that I outlined in Chapter 2 and that Restrepo refers to as the ethnicization of blackness, which is now a naturalized and broadly circulating idea in Colombia. That is, that black Colombians are legitimate ethnic Others.

integral part of Afro-Colombian culture. Though marginalized and excluded from the benefits of national development, in the context of State negligence black communities have found the necessary space to cultivate autonomous forms of production and social and political organization. In this way, national abandonment and marginalization have enabled the emergence of an autonomous development model whose objective, contrary to the dominant Euro-Andean model, is not the accumulation of wealth. We are convinced that this Afro-Colombian cosmology has today become an obstacle for the expansion of the neo-colonial model of development that the current Colombian State is pursuing. In this model, championed by the State and Euro-Andean elites, *ethnic groups simply have no possibility of existing* because in order to be included as citizens who participate in the nation-building project they are required to give up precisely all that which makes them different.

Also, in 2008, AFRODES participated in an UNHCR-funded project to design ethnic-specific public policy recommendations for the State.⁸³ The main product of this initiative was a publication in which the authors described the nature and magnitude of Afro-Colombian forced displacement and went on to propose a practical set of public policy solutions (AFRODES, ORCONE, CNOA, 2008). This document is a considerable intervention in AFRODES' construction of an intersectional political space on many levels. But the document's main accomplishment, I believe, is their unequivocal stress on the structural causes of forced displacement. After lamenting the lack of ethnic-specific public policies for black IDPs, the document outlines the "structural character of exclusion and

⁸³ The participants of this project—CNOA, PCN, ORCONE, AFRODES, and Asomujer y Trabajo— included all but one of Colombia's main national black organizations and was by no means an exclusive product of AFRODES's initiative. However, AFRODES appropriated the document that was produced as their public policy proposal for black IDPs because they were the most active participants in their design. In fact, in subsequent inter-organizational spaces with fellow Afro-Colombians they attempted to introduce this document as a common ground but it was often not whole-heartedly embraced even by the organizations that participated in its design. For this reason, I take this document to be mainly representative of AFRODES's views.

discrimination” in order to conclude that the underlying cause of forced displacement is the historical relationship between (under)development, exclusion, and violence:

Forced displacement and confinement are intimately related to these structural factors [discrimination and exclusion]. If we try to understand their causes by simply looking at the current conjuncture of the armed conflict over the last decade distorts the analysis because it presents them as an “unfortunate” consequence of military confrontation; and, consequently, the objectives of public policies are oriented towards the alleviation of the effects without transforming the causes of these two phenomena.

Constrastingly, the recognition of *the structural character of these two realities (exclusion and displacement) and of the relation between them*, requires that we develop an ethnically-differentiated perspective that seeks to transform the structural causes that are implicit in both of them. In other words, a public policy initiative with an ethnically-differentiated focus for Afro-Colombians that aspires to successfully halt and prevent forced displacement must first transform the structural conditions of exclusion in which Afro-Colombian people continue to live, and which have only been deepened as a consequence of the armed conflict (emphasis added AFRODES, ORCONE, CNOA, 2008, p. 16).

These two examples constitute prior iterations of what I have described as AFRODES’s co-constitutive analysis of black displacement. They evidence a process in which forced displacement triggered the articulation of ethnic blackness with sharp analyses of racism. Similar to the way in which black feminists developed a theory of intersectionality to speak about racial and gender oppression simultaneously, AFRODES’ sophisticated analysis effectively tethered racial and ethnic demands to one another. It is interesting that although some of the more seasoned activists that participated in the ethnicization of blackness had long argued for the need to incorporate anti-racism to the black social movement, their observations regarding the relationship between ethnicity and race had not gathered

traction until now, when in the midst of a discussion about forced displacement it became possible to openly speak about racism.

Re-routing and Scale-making

The second major transformation in AFRODES's political strategy has to do with the routes and scales of their interventions. Although they participated in international forums from the outset, over the years these participations changed both in number and in nature. Due to their constant need to apply to foreign aid organizations for funding, AFRODES developed an internationalist language early on. But in 2003, they entered into a partnership with an international NGO, Global Rights, which resulted in a complete overhaul of their organizational profile. In a matter of a few years, AFRODES went from being a grassroots organization with an all-volunteer executive board made up exclusively of black IDPs, to being a second-degree organization with more than 90 affiliated organizations nation-wide, robust (if unpredictable) funding, and three full-time paid consultants. One of the main consequences of this restructuring was that members of the national board abandoned their grassroots work in *barrios* in order to dedicate themselves almost exclusively to high-profile political activities. These included lobbying State agencies to pursue the adoption of *atención diferencial*, denouncing the relentless violations of Afro-Colombians' human rights both at home and abroad, and strengthening the organization's political voice within and outside of Colombia.

This was a scale-making project in two senses. On the one hand, it was a straightforward effort to grow. But more than being a simple matter of multiplication,

growth was interpreted as a transformation in the type of interlocutors that the organization regularly interacted with. Gone were the days when members of the board counseled IDPs on how to find housing, how to file for *desplazado* status, or how to get their children enrolled in public schools. Instead, the board members' regular interlocutors were now comprised of national-level politicians, governmental and NGO aid officers, and fellow black activists. This shift is perhaps best captured by the words of their Global Rights partner, who after years of counseling AFRODES as a protégé organization congratulated them as a “grown up” human rights organization during an internal meeting in 2010.

But this change constituted a scale-making project in another sense. It was a deliberate effort to cast AFRODES into the national and international limelight as a major black organization, and this was accomplished not by a simple swelling in size or numbers, but through a re-routing of their political activities. Namely, AFRODES expended a considerable amount of energy to developing relationships with international allies that would in turn intervene directly with the Colombian State on their behalf. Thus, they expanded their range of interlocutors to include international actors such as watchdog groups, human rights courts, and U.S. congress members, and rather than continue negotiating directly with the Colombian State, they re-routed their political actions through these newly established international networks.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ This re-routing was not exclusive to AFRODES and has also been characteristic of PCN in recent years. In fact, for a few years AFRODES and PCN established a partnership to coordinate their international political efforts. Together they presented human rights reports at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, lobbied key congress members to intervene on behalf of specific issues (such as the implementation of *auto 005* and the obstruction of the Free Trade Agreement), and built a robust network of allies that stood ready to write letters and make phone calls to denounce human

The most noteworthy example of this re-routing process is AFRODES's central participation in the most recent report that Colombia was due to present at the Committee on the Eradication of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in August of 2009. The CERD is an independent organ that supervises State members' compliance with the UN's International Convention on the Eradication of Racial Discrimination (1965). Although each member country is expected to send official biannual reports, the CERD also holds periodic sessions in Geneva where non-governmental organizations are given the opportunity to present alternative shadow reports. If we examine Colombia's last two sessions (2009 and 1999) and AFRODES' participation in them one can clearly see a shift in their analysis of racism and a significant growth in scale.

The only shadow report presented at the 1999 session had two main components: a brief description of the nature of racism in Colombia, and a very extensive compilation of specific instances of political violence against indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. The first of these components, which is tellingly titled "Discrimination through culture" (*Discriminación a través de la cultura*) refers to the stubborn circulation of racial stereotypes in Colombia. The examples given to illustrate this point are scant and superficial: we hear of the pejorative use of the word *indio*, of the exoticization of black women fruit vendors in Cartagena, and of the total absence of positive representations of blacks in mainstream media. But there is no in-

rights violations abroad. Although this partnership was short-lived due to longstanding political differences between the two organizations, AFRODES-USA, which is mostly led by exiled members in Washington D.C. continues to carry out much of this work (as does the International Working Group of PCN, which is also based in D.C.)

depth analysis of racism in Colombia and the authors' main objective is simply to provide the readers with an exhaustive list of human rights violations in ethnic communities.

Compare this to the report presented by AFRODES at the 2009 session, which denounces displacement (and other forms of violence) as manifestations of the persistent, structural racism that plagues Colombia:

Afro-Colombians' forced displacement must be understood as the result of structural factors that go beyond the immediate causes that are related to the dynamics of the Colombian armed conflict during recent years. Said factors are mainly related to processes of exclusion and discrimination against this human group, which have been historically configured and which have persisted and deepened as a result of this forced displacement and the persistence of a development project that runs contrary to the principle of respect for cultural diversity.

Unlike the preceding report, which described racism as an inconsistent set of idiosyncratic stereotypes, this one describes it as a systematic phenomenon that is heir to the history of racial slavery and State neglect. Unlike the preceding report in which racism and culture are described as loosely inter-related phenomena, this one evidences a complex intersectional analysis of ethnic difference and racism.

The main argument presented by AFRODES at the CERD's 2009 session—that ethnic difference and racial discrimination are co-constitutive—is the same one that I have been outlining thus far, but the difference in the forum at which it was mobilized is noteworthy here. First, this is not a national space for *desplazados* or even an international forum for IDPs, it is one of the principal global forums on racism. And second, AFRODES participated in this forum not as a sub-specialized grassroots organization, but as a national-level independent expert on racial

discrimination.⁸⁵ As such, their shadow report and their presence at the CERD's 2009 session constitute a vivid example of the politics of scale-making.

My point is that their decisive intervention at such a high-profile event de-provincialized black displacement and rendered it a matter not of “local” or even “national” politics but rather as an instance of global racism, and therefore worthy of immediate international attention. This re-casting of black displacement as a global phenomenon and of AFRODES as a world-class black organization is indicative of what Tsing calls the “conjuring” of the global scale (Tsing, 2004: 58). For this scale, like its “smaller” counterparts, “is not just a neutral frame for viewing the world,” but rather, it is a spatial dimension that must be brought into being, and that renders a particular view of the world. But the particular views associated with different scales (the local, the national, and the global, for example) are not power innocent. For example, “ghettos” are produced as isolated, local problems by obscuring the ways in which they are connected to elsewhere (Gregory, 1999). In other words, they are the result of deliberate processes of parochialization. Global phenomena, in contrast, are produced precisely through the inverse process, that is, hyperbolic statements about how a particular phenomenon is allegedly connected to everyone, everywhere. Overall, in their efforts to re-route their political strategy and produce black displacement as an issue of global interest, AFRODES re-drew their scale of

⁸⁵ In fact, AFRODES's report is one of only two independent shadow reports presented by Colombian civil society organizations. The other one report was the result of a joint effort of three organizations: the Observatorio de Discriminación Racial, the Comisión Colombiana de Juristas, and the Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia (ONIC). In addition to these, two international observers presented reports: the organization Afrocolombia XXI, and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre.

intervention from the national to the global. That is, they maintained a place-based stance while refusing parochialization, and as a result of this dual strategy they projected Afro-Colombians' defense of territory onto a global scale. While the former had been linked to ethnic difference, the latter was articulated in the language of anti-racism.

Conclusion

Desplazados locate themselves on the map

My main objective throughout this chapter has been to show that the political projects of displaced blackness are not only desperate attempts to recuperate the “harmonious” isomorphism between place and culture that was established in the 1990s with the ethnicization of blackness. Beyond that, I have also tried to show that the experience of forced displacement opened up various possibilities to rethink blackness in ways that had previously been impossible. Namely, it enabled the articulation of ethnic identity with anti-racist political projects. But despite my emphasis on its expansive reach, I also want to argue that the mobilization of this politics of displaced blackness is as much a place-making project as ethnic territoriality has been. Put differently, it is a politics—as evidenced by the work of AFRODES—that projects itself outwards while keeping its feet on the ground.

In this section I return to the case of *auto 005* in order to outline these two faces of displaced blackness in some detail. On the one hand, the politics of displaced blackness have been relatively successful at suturing the established relationship between place and culture that was disturbed by the war. And on the

other, they have prompted more expansive articulations of blackness than the ones that ethnic territoriality had enabled. All this to argue that *afro-desplazados* have carved out a new place for themselves in the world, one that is ironically founded on being out of place. In a manner analogous to what Chu found among her Fuzhounese informants, for whom being on the move was the only way to be emplaced; being dislocated has become the standpoint from which *afro-desplazados* construct grounded and expansive ethno-racial identities. It is from this condition of dislocation that they make and defend new symbolic and material places for themselves.

Truthfully, in the three years since the passage of *auto 005*, the situation of displaced Afro-Colombians has not improved much. And yet, I have repeatedly heard top-level activists identify it as the latest achievement in the struggle for Afro-Colombian rights. For example, the former president of AFRODES, Geiler Romaña, routinely places it as the third major milestone in the history of Afro-Colombians' rights, after the abolition of slavery and Law 70. In a country with a clear tendency to over-legislate and an excessive number of ineffectual laws it begs to ask why *auto 005* has captured the interest of black activists. I want to suggest that the main reason is because it was an effective, if unexpected, way to continue the fight for ethnic territoriality precisely at a moment when its pursuit seemed doomed. Just when the spread of violence on the Pacific had undermined ethno-territorial blackness—both in its effective exercise and as a viable political discourse—*auto 005* facilitated the reintroduction of Afro-Colombian issues into national-level government agendas. Of

course, this was not a perfect suture, and the stress on displacement and human rights rather than on ethnic difference had important consequences, some of which I address in detail in Chapter 5. But overall, *auto 005* was a fresh point of convergence for supporters of multicultural rights, rallying black organizations, garnering international support, and capturing the State's attention.

But *auto 005* is as much a rupture as a continuation. Despite its ability to suture many of the tears wrought by the war, it also broke with the previous incarnation of black multiculturalism in important ways. On the one hand, it interrupted Colombia's common sense geographies of blackness. Law 70 and its attendant land-titling project had naturalized the link between blackness and rural, riverine, areas on the Pacific despite the fact that most black Colombians live in urban centers outside of the Pacific river basin. By evidencing the growing numbers of black people who live in Colombia's major cities (Cali, Cartagena, Bogotá, and Medellín in that order), *auto 005* redrafted Colombia's blackness maps and expanded the possible ways of being black beyond the rural, riverine subject on the Pacific basin. And on the other hand, by articulating the defense of the right to cultural difference to an explicit anti-racist politics, it expanded the terms of the multicultural conversation. And this rearticulation, as I showed above, has also been a scale-making project that has projected Afro-Colombian struggles onto the global scale of diasporic politics.

My central argument here is that these two simultaneous moves—re-grounding the defense of territory while expanding the terms of its central demands—

constitute a place-making project. And by this, I mean that being displaced is a vantage point—sometimes a fairly advantageous one because of its hyper-visibility—from which to inhabit the world. In a sense then, forced displacement has been a long and painful route through which *afro-desplazados* have carved out a place not only for themselves but for Afro-Colombians at large on the global landscape of ethnic and racial politics. As a displaced woman from the town of Calima in southwestern Colombia put it when she was asked to reflect on the consequences of mass displacement:

[...] there have been beneficial and harmful consequences, because Calima was a town whose name was never uttered; it was as if it didn't exist on the map and after the mass displacement that took place there it became nationally and internationally known, and that's an advantage (in Jaramillo Buenaventura, 2009, p. 72).

Epilogue

In June of last year Luz Marina and her son moved to a small town in the middle of Illinois. Her departure has provoked everything from sadness, to anger and anxiety. Her fellow board members at AFRODES have been literally unable to fill the void that she left and have resigned themselves to operating on reduced numbers. The groups of displaced women that she mobilized in Bogotá's peripheral neighborhoods have disbanded and they often tell me that they feel betrayed by her sudden departure. The official story that AFRODES circulates to explain her unexpected exit serves as a crude reminder of the fact that it is still very difficult to do political work and stay alive in Colombia: like the two previous presidents of AFRODES, Luz Marina left because her life was in danger. Although she began receiving death threats early in

her political career, these steadily escalated over the years. And in 2009, her paranoia peaked when a man who had been stalking her mistook the office secretary for her and attempted to abduct her in a busy downtown street. This event gave her the needed *resolve* to find the quickest way out of Colombia.

But unlike her exiled predecessors who live in Washington D.C. and have become key participants in AFRODES's international lobbying work, Luz Marina fills her afternoons not with petitions, meetings, and emails, but with housework in a suburban home in the Midwest. For a single, black woman with a dependent son, the quickest way out was not political exile, but marriage. My point is not to cast judgment regarding her motivations or her means to leave Colombia. My point is to draw attention to the fact that the political consequences of forced mobility are highly uncertain. If her move to Bogotá resulted in a productive dislocation that generated a political process of becoming, the same cannot necessarily be said about her move to the U.S. Given the structural circumstances of her exile, it is altogether possible that this last move may result in her being effectively out of place. As Hall reminds us, diasporic journeys do not necessarily have happy endings; they are processes "without guarantees". This open-endedness, which can be either a blessing or a curse, is part and parcel of the process whereby particular formations *resolve* themselves again and again.

Chapter 5

Victimized blackness

Introduction: Epistemic Murk

“If terror thrives on the production of epistemic murk and metamorphosis, it nevertheless requires the hermeneutic violence that creates feeble fictions in the guise of realism, objectivity, and the like, flattening contradiction and systematizing chaos” (Tausig 1987:132)

“I came to Bogotá because would be easier to hide from my enemies here.”

As a cop in the mid 1980s, Isaías was sent to patrol banana plantations in the Urabá region in Northwestern Colombia. His job consisted of evicting groups of people who illegally settled inside private plantations and “neutralizing” union activists who stirred rebellion in the area. Being located in a high-traffic trade area, he made additional income by cooperating in contraband circles that imported arms and exported the usual illicit merchandise from Colombia. After a few years, one of his commanding officers began demanding a portion of his profits and when Isaías refused to comply, the commander accused him of murder. At that time, Isaías decided to abandon the police force and went back to his hometown in Urrao to start a new life.

Because he had a high school degree, he quickly secured a job as a teacher in a village distant from the municipal center where there was a chronic scarcity of teachers. For four years he taught first to fifth grade kids in the mornings and tended to his farm and cattle in the afternoons. He would only go into town occasionally to shop for a few household items and collect his pay. Thus, he soon befriended some of the *guerrilleros* who would periodically stop by his place to stock up on food items before they kept going on their way. But this closeness soon proved troublesome.

Because of his usual travel patterns—from his farm to the municipal center and back—his professional background as a cop, and his constant communication with *guerrilleros*, it was not long before he was accused of being an army informant. After an initial run-in with *la guerrilla* where he was tied to a tree in the town center until they determined that he was innocent and was conditionally released, Isaías fled from Urrao immediately. He walked through the wilderness for two days and eventually made his way to Medellín, but after a year of feeling constantly hounded there he decided to move to Bogotá where he was convinced that “*it would be easier to hide from his enemies.*”

“Everything changed from the moment Uribe began to eradicate drug trade”

When he was in his late teens, Wilson “found a woman” and began to work to sustain his new household. His father-in-law gave him and his common-law wife a small plot of land and her uncles taught him how to grow coca. At first, he sold the unprocessed leaves in bulk and made good money, but after a few years his plot was aerially fumigated and he lost his yield. Although after this loss he swore never to cultivate coca again, he was soon compelled to re-plant. By this time, paramilitary groups were routinely present in his hometown of Cajapí, near Tumaco. They taught him how to process the leaves to make coca paste, sold him the necessary chemicals, and in turn bought his product on a regular basis. With this, his marginal profit was higher and he began to cultivate his father-in-law’s farm with coca as well. But then, “*everything changed from the moment Uribe began to eradicate drug trade, in 2004*”. The whole area was fumigated again and he was left empty-handed.

When she heard of his situation, Wilson's oldest sister, who had worked as a domestic servant in Bogotá for nearly twenty years, offered to pay for his bus fare from Tumaco. But instead of being lured by the promise of a home and a steady job, Wilson was attracted to her offer to move to Bogotá in order to become a *desplazado*. Aided by his sister, who was deeply knowledgeable of the humanitarian aid system, he obtained official IDP status and in a matter of weeks he began receiving emergency aid and a lump sum transfer to set up a small business in Bogotá.

"I never say no to traveling, I've always liked to travel".

Although she was born in Munguicó, Chocó Florinda only lived there until she was thirteen years old when she was taken away by one of her uncles to work as a domestic servant in Medellín. At that point she embarked on what she herself described as a thirty-year-long *odyssey* that had her traveling all over the country. After two decades of cleaning homes and supporting three children she got tired of the low pay and indignant conditions of domestic work. So when Beatriz, a distant relative of hers, offered to lend her the money to get to Bogotá she didn't hesitate: *"I never say no to traveling, I've always liked to travel"*.

Upon her arrival in Bogotá, Florinda stayed with Beatriz for a few months while she found her way around. She tried to make a living selling trash bags at traffic lights in the wealthy parts of the city but had a difficult time staying afloat:

Ever since I first arrived Beatriz started telling me that I should testify, but she wouldn't tell me how to do it and I was afraid that I wouldn't sound convincing. People had told me that you had to tell the same story four times in four different places to four different people and I was afraid I'd get caught, so I wouldn't go. But then one day I *resolved* to do it.

There were four of us. I was given one hundred thousand pesos⁸⁶ in coupons to shop for groceries. I said that I came from Chocó and that I had arrived on March 24th. I testified two years after I arrived. And I told them that it was because of the war.

The life stories of these three people—a domestic worker from Chocó, a police officer from Antioquia, and a farmer from Nariño—have very little in common. But although the trajectories that they have followed before arriving in Bogotá are profoundly dissimilar, all of them have now become *afro-desplazados*. In addition to physically converging in Cazucá, a conglomerate of shantytown neighborhoods in the marginal areas of Bogotá, their subject positions as black IDPs have also converged. This category, simultaneously victimized and racialized, helps flatten the contradictions and systematize the chaos of Colombia's war. It is in Taussig's words "a feeble fiction" that seeks to eliminate the murk produced by the terror of the war by neatly parceling out victims from victimizers, migrants from IDPs, and illegality from legality. As the life stories above show, the life experiences of Colombia's IDPs are complex and contradictory, difficult to grasp and pin down. Victimizers can easily turn into victims, and victims are seldom transparently or simply targets of violence. Terror is murky by definition; it produces murkiness and thrives on it. But the transparency of categories like "victims" and "IDPs," though spurious, is productive. In other words, although victimization requires an imposition of categories atop a reality that is anything but transparent, it has real consequences for everyone involved.

⁸⁶ At the time, this was roughly equivalent to fifty U.S. dollars.

In this chapter I argue that the claim to ethnic rights that became institutionalized as the centerpiece of official multiculturalism in Colombia has become increasingly articulated with an emergent politics of victimization that is currently situated at the center of Colombia's most polarized and burning political discussions. The chapter is organized in three sections. In the first, I describe the politics of victimization as an emergent field that condenses many of Colombia's historical power struggles but presents them in new terms. Although the politics of victimization in Colombia span a broad terrain of political action, I focus on the production of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) as "victims" and as "a vulnerable population group" both within Colombia and in the international field of humanitarian aid.

In the second section, I use ethnographic data to illustrate how this emergent formation has in practice become interweaved with the exercise of multicultural citizenship in a process that amounts to the victimization of blackness. I show that some people are produced and strategically produce themselves as "*Afro-desplazados*," both as a result of their everyday experiences of marginalization and racism, and of the multiple interventions from above that repeatedly interpellate them as simultaneously black and vulnerable. In the third section, I analyze some of the main consequences of this emergent articulation of blackness. Specifically, I look at the impact that this racialized victimization has had on 1. the production of particular subjects and 2. the possibilities of broadening the current discussions around black Colombians' victimization.

Politics of victimization

What I refer to as Colombia's politics of victimization is a discourse that is made manifest in a whole set of practices, institutions, and representations that define who is a victim and therefore a legitimate recipient of special rights such as state reparations, protection, and humanitarian aid. But this formation is not contained within the State apparatus. It is larger both geographically and institutionally because it spans the realm of international human rights and involves various types of civil society organizations both within and outside of Colombia. Given the recent intensification of Colombia's armed conflict, this formation currently permeates many different areas of national life and has become a central trope of Colombian politics.⁸⁷ In this sense, it is a pervasive element that is in one way or another inserted in nearly every political discussion of expedient relevance in Colombia today. But although it is indeed a product of the national conjuncture, its emergence has been enabled by a complex set of circumstances and a diverse set of actors that exceed the nation-state.

Because of its complexity and ubiquity, in this section I will not attempt to outline every single aspect of this discourse. Instead, I will focus on the formation of one particular kind of victim: the Internally Displaced Person (IDP). Focusing on this

⁸⁷ I simply cannot overstate how pervasive the topic of "victims" and "*desplazados*" is in Colombia. Their presence is ubiquitous in academia, in the media, in political disputes, and in common parlance. This is an important clarification because when taken out of context, my argument may be taken to imply that all kinds of people are simply out to scam the system by claiming that they are victims of x, y or z. Thus, it can be extrapolated to other contexts such as the U.S. to state that black people are not really victims of racism; gay people are not really victims of homophobia; immigrants are not really victims of xenophobia, etc. The emphasis on victimization, I hope this is clear, is not mine. Rather it is a broadly circulating discourse that saturates the political landscape in Colombia.

victimized figure is useful for two reasons. First, because IDPs are possibly the largest and most visible group of victims of Colombia's armed conflict. And second, because of the centrality that this category has acquired in rearticulating the struggle for Afro-Colombian rights that began as a claim to ethnic difference in the early 1990s (which I discuss in detail in Chapter 4). Still, a clarification is warranted here. The IDP is only one amongst several victimized figures that hold currency today, but I extrapolate from the in-depth analysis of its emergence, stabilization and circulation to understand the politics of victimization more broadly.

In general, the politics of victimization are an attempt to rationalize the epistemic murk created by the extreme violence of war. The seemingly transparent definition of IDPs as “individuals who have been forced to abandon their homes, or habitual economic activities because their lives, security, or freedom has been threatened by violence” (Deng 1993 in Aparicio) is a construct that is employed to make sense of a nearly senseless scenario. As such, the essential separation of who is a victim (and implicitly, who is a victimizer) is superimposed on a much more complex landscape of violent encounters in which such clear-cut distinctions are not always possible. This is evidenced by the diversity of “displacement stories” that I opened with in this chapter. In the end, what these displacement stories have in common is the fact that they have been actively constructed—both by their protagonists and by others—as such.

This is not to deny that real people have been harmed or killed in violent acts, nor to claim that victims' testimonies are false. An inordinate number of people have

indeed suffered as a result of Colombia's armed conflict. However, their suffering is mostly unrelated to whether they hold an official "victim" status or not. My point here is that the presence or absence of that label does not function as a useful distinction between people who have suffered and people who have not; or between people who have caused suffering and people who have not. This is why the distinction between "real" and "spurious" victims is also unproductive. Thus, I hope that it is clear that my claim that people produce themselves as victims is not meant to point a finger at "liars" or to cast a moral judgment at people's survival strategies. The overlap between poverty, victimization, and vulnerability in Colombia is so pronounced that everyone who can manage to claim IDP status—by whatever means necessary—probably deserves special State protection to begin with. But wouldn't it be better if they could aspire to dignified lives without turning to humanitarian aid? In the end, people deserve black lives that are not victim lives.

The categories of *victim* in general, and *IDP* in particular, are fairly recent constructs that are used to describe a very unruly set of circumstances. More to the point, the designation of particular events as "violence" and therefore as legitimate causes of "forced displacement" is complicated by at least two factors. On the one hand, no hard lines exist between the different reasons that motivate people to move. Take Wilson's case above. Is his an economic migration? Is he a victim of paramilitary violence? Or should his legitimate status as an IDP be called into question because he was an accomplice to illicit activity? Clearly, the lines that

separate the various causes of migration; force from choice; and object from subject of violence are quite blurry.

On the other hand, there is the issue of historical continuity. Although I have been arguing that the 1990s constitute a rupture in the dynamics of Colombia's war, this is mostly in relation to the specific geographies of the armed conflict. In other words, although the Pacific had in fact remained on the margins of the war up until then, the forced movement of people from other regions due to armed combat, intimidation, and other threats to their lives can be traced at least as far back as the period known as "*La Violencia*", which historians date to 1948. Of course, the broader history of human mobility in Colombia stretches far beyond that and includes causes that would today be classified as both violent and non-violent. Thus, it also becomes relevant to point out that the very people who became members of "black communities" in the 1990s and "victims of violence" soon after, had been involved in long-standing practices of mobility both within the Pacific and to other regions in Colombia (Hoffmann, 2007; Almario, 2002) But prior to the 1990s, these itinerant groups of people had never been referred to as IDPs, nor had they been folded into the broader category of victims.

The IDP is therefore a product of an epistemic shift. In fact, the category emerges precisely to delimit clear boundaries in spaces of epistemic murk. It is meant to separate victims of forced displacement from other itinerant peoples (such as economic migrants), and it is meant to signal the emergence of a "new" problem in what is clearly a historical continuum of human mobility.

Emergence of the IDP in international discourse

For the purpose at hand, I find Juan Ricardo Aparicio's analysis of the emergence of the IDP to be a useful point of departure to understand the subsequent production of racialized victims in Colombia (and which constitute my main concern in this chapter). Following a Foucauldian approach, Aparicio historicizes the figure of the IDP in order to highlight both its continuities with prior discursive formations (such as that of the *refugee*) and its emergence as a new disciplinary regime that produces particular truth effects. He traces its conditions of possibility to the Enlightenment and the Rights of Man, which were enshrined in numerous treaties and declarations that designated the State as the guardian and guarantor of these rights.

Following Hannah Arendt (1951) and Lippert (1999), he then identifies the period after World War I and the "impressive movement of people between states" that was spurred by the war as the critical point of inflexion at which refugees became thinkable as people who were experiencing a distinctive type of victimization. At this time, a whole "series of programs, technologies and apparatuses emerged, [...] to respond to this new problem" (Almario, 2002). Additionally, he notes that the postwar period brought about a significant reorganization of the Enlightenment ideas that produced the nation-state-sovereignty-citizenship configuration. Namely, at this time States were deemed necessary but insufficient guarantors of human rights, a deficiency which justified the creation of a robust international apparatus of human rights institutions such as the League of Nations.

Lastly, he identifies the convergence of international discourses of development and humanitarianism as final the turning point that enabled the emergence of the IDP as we know it. He shows that in the midst of the Cold War, there was a “growing consensus that supported the intervention of Western countries in the internal affairs of the developing world” (Aparicio, 2010: 23), which laid the groundwork for a new kind of humanitarianism that combined aid to victims and at risk populations with the promotion of development projects. Two logics guided this convergence, which he terms interventionist humanitarianism. First, that emergency aid was an insufficient strategy to improve the conditions of victims in the long run. And second, that States often acted against their citizens’ best interests. This last argument went hand in hand with a reconfiguration of Westphalian notions of sovereignty that depicted (mostly) Third World states as “failed” states and represented violence in the Global South as if it was disarticulated from global inequalities and ongoing processes of colonialism.

Stabilization of the Colombian victim

Although Aparicio meticulously traces the appearance of the IDP on the international landscape of humanitarian interventionism, he does not map its manifestations within Colombia. In this section, I wish to present the reader with a broad-stroke picture of the complex framework of institutions, laws, and programs that have gradually defined the Colombian IDP (and victim) with growing precision. Unsurprisingly, this framework is entangled with the international process that Aparicio describes in his work, not in a manner that necessarily suggests a top-down imposition, but rather

exhibits a discourse of victimization that interweaves the national conjuncture (of heightened violence) with the differential redefinitions of First and Third World state sovereignty and citizenship.⁸⁸

In 1994⁸⁹, the *Red de Solidaridad Social* (hereon RSS) was launched as an initiative of the President's office to attend to the urgent needs of the poorest and most vulnerable population sectors in Colombia and to oversee their inclusion into state-run governmental programs meant to alleviate poverty (BID, 2011). But its creation coincided with the critical turning point of the war that was brought about by the institutionalization of a nation-wide paramilitary force, the AUC (see Chapter 4 for a more detailed description of this shift). At this time, the number of people that were caught in crossfire skyrocketed and generated alarming waves of mass rural-urban exoduses. In Bogotá, specifically, the city government managed the situation in an *ad hoc* manner that made use of the established framework that was intended to deal with emergency situations such as natural disasters (and which in addition to the RSS included various kinds of organizations such as the Red Cross, and religious groups). In this way, the large numbers of people that were fleeing the escalated

⁸⁸ In fact, Aparicio suggests that the IDP emerges at the center of a conceptual linkage between responsibility and sovereignty that held states accountable for exercising "good government" practices. As such, the main responsibility of international human rights institutions was to reconstitute States' capacities to alleviate their own (internal) crises. Interestingly, this discourse was deeply imbued with colonial ideas that saw the states of the Global South as primitive, disorderly, and undemocratic.

⁸⁹ Actually, the RSS was not officially created as a national public entity until 1997 (through Law 368) but it had been operating since 1994. Also, the idea of a government office dedicated to vulnerable population groups and the eradication of poverty had two antecedents in prior administrations: President Betancur's *Secretaría de Integración Popular* and President Barco's *Plan Nacional de Rehabilitación* (BID, 2011).

violence of their rural homes were incorporated, by default, into the institutional framework that served “vulnerable population groups.”

But by 1997, this situation, which had remained unnamed until then, was gaining greater and greater visibility worldwide. As Aparicio notes, following two international conferences that were held in Oslo and Guatemala in the late 1980s to discuss the plight of refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Southern Africa and Central America respectively, the UN’s Human Rights Council urged the Secretary General to take a closer look to ensure that these populations’ rights were being adequately protected. In response, in 1991 the UN undertook the first worldwide evaluation of the situation and produced a comprehensive analytical report on displaced persons (Aparicio, 2012: 25). In this way, the UN began to outline the contours of a new global subject, the IDP. What I find particularly noteworthy here is that the IDP emerged simultaneously as a global and Colombian phenomenon because its very production involved a reciprocal relationship between human rights organizations and “internal conflicts” in the “Third World. Put differently, the UN needed evidence from around the world (Colombia included) to support the claim that a new humanitarian crisis was underway, and the Colombian government in turn needed the UN’s category to label the problem at home with new terms and in this way garner international funds to address it.

The two most obvious manifestations of this co-constitutive process were the passage of Law 387 in 1997, which became known as the Law of *Desplazados*,⁹⁰ and the establishment of the first office of the UNHCR in Colombia in 1998.⁹¹ The law, on the one hand, defined the IDP as an object of special State protection and mandated the creation of 1. a centralized information system that collected data on IDPs nation-wide (SIPOD), 2. an internal system of government agencies that oversaw the implementation of aid programs for IDPs (SNAIPD). The establishment of the UNHCR office in Bogotá, on the other hand, marked the moment at which Colombia's "IDP problem" became internationally recognized and thus signaled the Colombian State as a legitimate recipient of international humanitarian aid. Together, they constitute the first evidence of the materialization of the IDP in Colombia.

Although by this point a legislative framework that dealt directly with IDPs had been established, there was a significant time gap in implementation, and meanwhile, IDPs were still in need of urgent solutions. So in 2000, the RSS was designated by Presidential decree as the default government agency responsible for IDPs. Thus, over the next five years, the problem of "vulnerable populations" and "IDPs" were managed together with the same resources and institutional frameworks that were originally established to alleviate poverty. But by 2005, all of the makeshift

⁹⁰ This term, which is originally an adjective in Spanish has been turned into a noun in common parlance to refer to IDPs. Although it circulates widely, many organizations openly oppose its usage arguing that it essentializes IDPs' condition as an inherent characteristic of their being. Nobody, they argue, *is a desplazado*, rather, being in a situation of displacement is a temporary circumstance that many face.

⁹¹ Interestingly, although the UN has never established an agency charged specifically with overseeing internal displacement, in some cases, such as in Colombia, it has granted the UNHCR—whose mission is to deal with refugees—the necessary authority to intervene on behalf of IDPs. This responds to an attempt by the UN to respect States' sovereignty by not meddling in their internal affairs.

information systems and programs that had sprouted over time and were scattered across the State apparatus were consolidated under a single government agency, *Acción Social*. The creation of *Acción Social* is noteworthy for two reasons. First, because it is a gigantic government agency that sits directly under the Office of the Vice-President, and as such enjoys a great deal of discretionary decision-making power. And second, because it brought two seemingly unrelated government agencies together: the RSS, and the agency in charge of receiving and disbursing international aid moneys, the ACCI. As such, it is a crystal clear example of what Aparicio identifies as a new kind of humanitarianism, which merged the discourses of human rights and development into a single interventionist apparatus.

This is by no means an exhaustive description of all the laws, institutions and programs that have mushroomed in the last fifteen years to deal with the emergent problem of IDPs. But it is a sufficient sketch that illustrates the three overall processes that I wish to highlight here. First, in accordance with Aparicio's observations, the politics of victimization stand at the point of convergence between development and human rights discourses. At a given moment following the provision of emergency humanitarian aid, development entered the stage as the logical next step in alleviating human rights crises. Second, more than a transition that began with aid programs for *vulnerable population groups* and was transformed into assistance and development projects for *victims*, the interplay between these two categories has amounted to a *de facto* conflation. Although in theory, these two categories are distinct—all victims are vulnerable but not all vulnerable people are

victims—in practice the two are often equated or at the very least enunciated in the same breadth. Most concretely, this conflation is evident in the fact that in Colombia there is a significant overlap in the institutions that serve the two and which imagine them as similar objects of special protection.⁹²

The third observation regarding the formation of a politics of victimization constitutes my central argument in this chapter. Namely, the exercise of citizenship as enshrined in the international regime of human rights has become entangled with that of official multiculturalism. The former produces “victimized or “at risk” subjects as objects of special protection while the later entitles certain collective subjects to special citizenship rights if they successfully make claims to cultural difference. When they converge in producing black subjects, they amount to a process that I describe as the victimization of blackness.

But this victimized blackness is also heir to longstanding notions of racialization in Colombia. In fact, even in its most culturalist guise blackness has never been a racially unmarked category. In the context of forced displacement, the new experiences of racialization that *desplazados* experience in urban settings such as Bogotá have shifted the emphasis of black otherness from cultural difference to embodied, racial alterity. In a sense then, one of the collateral consequences of the

⁹² This conflation tends to flatten the distinctions not only between the two categories but internal to each of them. Such that the risk factors that indicate that a person is “vulnerable” can include poverty, drug traffic, or armed violence obviating the profound differences in the political contexts and needed resolutions to each of these cases.

victimization of blackness has been a partial racialization of vulnerability, such that a person may assume that someone in Bogotá is an IDP by virtue of their skin color.⁹³

Like the other two processes that I outlined above, the victimization of blackness is also evident in the laws, programs, and institutions that make up the politics of victimization in Colombia. Two concrete examples are sufficient to illustrate not only the discursive inter-weaving of blackness and vulnerability, but also its growing prevalence in recent years. In 2004, after the UNDP produced a key report that denounced the deplorable conditions of IDPs in Colombia (PNUD, 2003), the Constitutional Court issued a sentence that declared that the Colombian government's treatment of IDPs was unconstitutional (T-025)—because it was in violation of Law 387 and by extension of all the international laws and treaties on which it was predicated. Initially, this sentence was intended as an intervention meant to affect all IDPs. But over the next few years it was taken up by particular population groups that highlighted their specific vulnerabilities and demanded differential treatment from the State (*enfoque diferencial*). At first, organizations that provided emergency aid for IDPs drew attention to the fact that the majority of IDPs were women and children and that this demographic subgroup had specific needs that

⁹³ The point that I wish to make here is that the conflation between IDPs and black people is sometimes so pronounced that the body itself is can be used as a proxy for determining whether someone is a *desplazado* or not. This amounts to a racialization of vulnerability, that is, a corporeal reading of vulnerability that applies to both black and indigenous people whenever they are deemed to be “out of place.” But this only occurs in places where black and indigenous people are minorities or do not have long histories of substantial presence. Thus, while a black person at a traffic light in Bogotá will most likely be assumed to be a *desplazado*, the same will not occur with a black person in Quibdó. In Quibdó other diacritics—such as the urban/rural distinction—will function as signals of IDP-ness. For this reason, the racialization of vulnerability is not a phenomenon that we can generalize for black (or other racialized subjects) throughout Colombia and this is why I clarify that it is only a partial process.

treatment programs had to adequately respond to.⁹⁴ From here, it was not long before numerous groups of IDPs followed suit, demanding differential attention based not only on gender and age, but also on ethnicity,⁹⁵ disability, and sexual orientation; and thus, a whole slew of subsidiary court orders followed.

The first clear moment of the specific articulation of vulnerability and blackness was in 2009, with the passage of one such subsidiary court order, *auto 005*—which became known as the Afro-Colombian *auto*—that I discuss in detail in Chapter 4. I do not wish to replicate my analysis of *auto 005* here, but simply to note that its very passage signals the incipient victimization of blackness that has become further entrenched since then. Over the next two years, *auto 005* was taken up as the most effective way to defend Afro-Colombians’ rights because it enabled both the continued protection of ethnic territoriality and the denunciation of structural racism. But what began as a conjunctural coincidence is gradually becoming common sense. Just last year, the Colombian government passed the first comprehensive piece of legislation that outlines “aid, assistance and reparation for all victims of the *internal armed conflict*” (emphasis added, Ministerio del Interior, 2011).⁹⁶ But in addition to defining clear mechanisms to prevent and treat IDPs and other victims of violence,

⁹⁴ Some of the loudest voices in this process were women’s organizations such as Sisma Mujer, La Casa de la Mujer, La Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, and CLADEM.

⁹⁵ It is important to recall that the dominant idiom for mobilizing differentiated rights for Afro-Colombians continues to be based on a claim to cultural difference. Thus, although I point out the multiple ways in which blackness is (increasingly) a racial category, demands for differentiated treatment are primarily founded on Afro-Colombians’ ethnicity. The reader should therefore be aware that I am not make a conceptual elision between ethnicization and racialization whenever I tack back and forth between the two. In many ways, ethnicity is used as a euphemism for race in Colombia, and as I show in Chapter 4 the defense of ethnic blackness can function as a denunciation of racism.

⁹⁶ Interestingly, the full title of Law 1448 of 2011 is “*Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras*” (Victims’ and Land Restitution Law), which further illustrates the fact that IDPs and other people who have lost their lands are the most prominent kind of victim in the Colombian imaginary.

this law calls for the issuance of a presidential decree that must outline ethnic-specific programs to treat *Afro-Colombian* victims and administer collective reparations. I take this provision as proof of the fact that the logic of differentiated treatment that articulates blackness and vulnerability has been thoroughly naturalized and incorporated as an inextricable element of imagining victims.

However, I now wish to move from the rarefied field of discourse analysis into the messy terrain of flesh and blood people. Specifically, I am interested in the ways in which the victimization of blackness not only constrains, but also enables particular people to do things that may not have been previously possible. For this reason, in the next section, I shift my gaze from the seemingly endless sea of laws, programs, and institutions that produce both the general and the ethnically differentiated IDP and towards the people that navigate and are interpellated by them.

Victimization of blackness

“Resign yourself to your color the way I got used to my stump; we’re both victims.”
Home of the Brave (1949) cited in Fanon (1952)

Although the displacement stories with which I opened narrate very different life trajectories, their protagonists share a number of commonalities. First, as I showed in the previous section, they have all been constituted as IDPs. Second, they all live in Cazucá and are often interpellated as members of a single “community” that is simultaneously spatialized, racialized, and victimized; a community of *afro-desplazados*. Third, they are all in one way or another affiliated with ABCUN,

AFRODES' regional Bogotá organization⁹⁷. However, Isaías, Florinda, and Wilson cannot really be called activists. They are members of AFRODES's grassroots, "regular" black IDPs who attend meetings, do performances, sign petitions, and participate in the organization's activities as its rank and file. In fact, their motivation for participating is oftentimes simply survival. And still, in many ways their lives and their political activism are inextricable. Although they do not lobby anyone with a specific political agenda or mobilize according to a clear vision of social change, they are an integral part of the organization. As such, their participation in ABCUN's activities has broader implications for the way in which blackness is lived and mobilized in Bogotá.

"La Calle de los Negros"

To get from *la Calle 19* (literally 19th Street) in downtown Bogotá to the other *Calle 19* in Cazucá, one has to traverse the entire southern portion of the city. *El Sur*, as it is commonly referred to, is everything that spreads more than eighty streets south and seventy streets west of *La 19*. It is a massive and densely populated urban, working class area. Although clearly poorer than its northern half, its myriad neighborhoods, or *barrios*, are interspersed with commercial and recreational areas, and the city government has a well-established presence throughout. This solid sense of being in the city steadily fades as one gets farther and farther from *La 19*, from the city center

⁹⁷ In Chapter 1 I explain the differences between ABCUN and AFRODES in detail, but for the purpose at hand it is important to highlight that the members of the two boards have very different political trajectories. Although AFRODES's members are also black IDPs themselves, over the years they have gained visibility as national black activists. Contrastingly, members of ABCUN's board are common residents of Cazucá and although they are often invited to participate in national-level events, their political activities consist mostly of being black cultural representatives/brokers and seeking out humanitarian aid for themselves and for others.

towards the peripheries. The *Transmilenio* line (Bogotá's dedicated bus lane system) ends approximately eighty streets south of *La 19* where the north-south axis that so characteristically defines the city's geographic layout begins to hit the curving mountain range. But although the city's topography does not lend itself to extending the *Transmilenio* line, the system provides free access to feeder buses that leave from the terminal and climb the mountains in web-like routes. The rugged Andean terrain in this area has not proven formidable enough to stop human settlement. At the feeder bus's last stop, where the road's paving ends abruptly, the view of the city on a clear day is breathtaking. From this southwestern corner, it is still possible to make out where *La 19* lies, just south of the old financial district, *El Centro Internacional*, which is easily distinguishable as a cluster of high-rise 1970s buildings. And at nighttime, the 36 neon colors that light up the nation's tallest building unequivocally remind its observers that they are very far from the city center.

But the other *Calle 19* is still one short bus ride away. To get there, I usually took an inter-municipal *colectivo*, got off at AFRODES' cultural center in *El Oasis* and made my way a few blocks down to La Negra's fish stand. *El Oasis* is a *barrio* that straddles the border between Bogotá and Soacha, the capital's poor municipal neighbor to the South. Although I started going there in 2003, I've never really known where *El Oasis* ends and where *La Isla* begins; or *Los Robles*, or *Caracolí* or any of the other adjacent *barrios*. I did population censuses in 2004 and again in 2009 walking up and down the mountainsides for days, and although we traced the borders of eight neighborhoods in the area and drew maps of each of them, this

exercise only reinforced my sense that their limits are faint and imprecise. Street numbers too are a useless geographic reference. Added to their general inconsistency is the fact that Bogotá's and Soacha's municipal grids collide here creating so much confusion that neither locals nor outsiders use them with any real purpose. In theory numbered addresses exist—although city maps go entirely blank somewhere between *Caracolí* and *El Oasis*—and residents can sometimes come up with nomenclatures when asked to produce them, but in practice they use landmarks for directions.

I too honed a list of landmarks to find my way around the sea of dust, brick, and tin that people refer to as *Cazucá*⁹⁸, or more affectionately as *El Barrio*. In addition to AFRODES's cultural center (which was my first destination there) I initially identified the Catholic church, the *Casa de los Derechos*, the *Ludoteca*, the *Casa de la Igualdad*, and the UNHCR's office whose gigantic blue and white logo was visible about a mile away. Over time, I used other markers and started to refer to them not only for spatial orientation but also as central features of the *barrio*'s life. There were La Negra's and Beatriz's fish stands, Petra's two-story house, the *telecom*, the bakery, the *garita* where people played cards, and the *discoteca* across the street. All of these lined the (other) *Calle 19*: the periphery's self-designated center.

But there were other kinds of landmarks in *El Barrio*. There was *el palo del ahorcado* (“the hangman's tree”) atop the tallest still unpopulated hill where over the

⁹⁸ Although I use the term *Cazucá* throughout this chapter although strictly speaking it does not refer to a precise geographic-political unit. Although *Altos de Cazucá* is a registered neighborhood (*barrio*) in Bogotá, *Cazucá*, like many of the names of places that circulate in peripheral areas is a vague term that people use loosely. In my case, I use it to refer to a hazily-defined conglomerate of *barrios* that straddles the Bogotá-Soacha municipal border.

years people had seen the bodies of various “suicide” victims hanging. And the *cancha*, the precariously paved soccer court where three black teenagers were murdered point blank in 2005. And the warnings to thieves and troublemakers written on the walls by urban paramilitary groups; all of which stood as reminders that no matter how hard local residents worked at building their own *Calle 19*, they still remained very much on the urban periphery, that feared space of crime, vice and extreme poverty.

Put together, the *barrio*'s markers and its geographic distance from the city center make it clear that it is a marginal area, so much on the edges of the urban periphery that it sometimes falls out of the city's maps entirely. As such, there is nothing unique about Cazucá; it is just another area of *invasiones* where members of the most recent wave of rural-urban migrants have settled against all odds. Bogotá has many such marginal areas lining the entire circumference of the city proper. But Cazucá stands out amidst the otherwise undistinguishable strand of poverty-stricken *barrios* that surrounds the city for two reasons. First, Cazucá and the city sector to which it officially belongs (*localidad*), *Ciudad Bolívar*, loom large in Bogotanos's imaginary as the area that condenses the highest levels of poverty and violence in the capital (Armando, 2012). As such it has attracted an inordinate amount of attention as an area that is in need of intervention. Beginning in the 1980s, *Ciudad Bolívar* became the target of all kinds of *proyectos sociales* that sought to alleviate poverty and reduce crime by offering local residents entrepreneurship opportunities (cf.

Martinez, 2004). Thus, university students, church groups, and other civil society organizations constantly took their well-meaning projects to this area.

But in the 1990s, in accordance with the emergence of the IDP that I outlined in the previous section, the public perception of *Ciudad Bolívar* as an area or “regular” urban crime and poverty began to change. In particular, the newer areas within this city sector such as Cazucá—those that stood high up on the mountainsides—started to be thought of as *receptores de desplazados* (IDP arrival areas). Although there was already an abundance of state and NGO interventions in the area, in the 1990s their numbers skyrocketed and their objectives began to change. Interventions in *Ciudad Bolívar* shifted from a broad interest in the alleviation of poverty and crime to a plethora of aid and service providers for IDPs. In addition to graffiti art courses for delinquent youth and sewing workshops for single mothers, residents of Cazucá were now routinely invited to participate in talks on *desplazados*’ rights and psycho-social retreats for victims of violence. In brief, the residents of this area began to be collectively conceived of as *victims*.

The victimization not only of the area’s residents, but of the area itself is evident in Cazucá’s landscape. Over the last fifteen years there has been an explosion of IDP attention centers in the area. Some of these were State and NGO field offices that pre-existed the displacement era and were either gradually transformed or adapted in a moment of crisis. But many more are new places that were explicitly created to intervene on (behalf of) *desplazados*. Take the *Casa de los Derechos*, which was recently established (in 2005) as a local arm of Soacha’s Office of the

Ombudsman (*Personería*) in order to gather testimonies from recently arrived IDPs who do not have the necessary resources to find their way to the main office in the downtown area of Soacha. Or the local UAO (Attention and Orientation Unit in Spanish) which offers emergency aid, issues official IDs, and provides legal consultancy and guidance on how to obtain special health, education, and housing benefits for IDPs, as well as access to employment and other income-generating opportunities. And of course, there is the unmistakable presence of the UNHCR, a small white house atop the tallest hill in an already mountainous landscape, where workshops, meetings, talks, and *convocatorias* all directed at IDPs are hosted.

My point here is that this area is over-represented and exceedingly intervened as a space of *desplazados*, despite the fact that the area's settlement precedes the current onset of forced displacement. In fact, although *Ciudad Bolívar* was only recognized as part of Bogotá's Capital District (D.C.) in 1983, the area began to be settled in the 1940s and 50s with people fleeing from all corners of Colombia from *La Violencia*. And over the next few decades it became one of the preferred destinations for migrants seeking better fortunes in the nation's capital. It was only in the mid 1990s that the local residents of Cazucá began to be collectively imagined as IDPs. This is not to suggest that the area is no longer imagined as a poverty-stricken and dangerous space where thieves, criminals and prostitutes abound, but rather that this imaginary has been complemented and gradually overshadowed by the increasing view of local residents as victims of the war. In other words, the politics of victimization is now the regnant grid of intelligibility by which residents of Cazucá

have become hyper-visible as urban dwellers and as potential beneficiaries of special citizenship rights.

If at a prior historical moment being a recognized member of the city's lower socioeconomic strata⁹⁹ was the most effective way to gain access to State welfare programs and international donations, by the 2000s residents of Cazucá were well aware of the fact that they had to successfully produce themselves as *desplazados* in order to receive such benefits. This became sorely apparent in 2009 when more than 2000 *desplazados* occupied a landmark of Bogotano modernity, the *Parque Tercer Milenio* (Park of the Third Millennium) for over four months. During this time, *El Barrio* was nearly deserted and *La 19* was eerily quiet. Dozens of people that I had known for years decided to camp out at the park in hopes that the occupation's leaders would negotiate a robust welfare program for the nation's IDPs. As with the life stories that I opened this chapter with, the occupiers at *Tercer Milenio* included old migrants and early arrivals, people who had been forcefully uprooted and those who had willingly left, objects and perpetrators of violence, sanctioned and unsanctioned IDPs. But all of them were actively producing themselves as IDPs and therefore as victims of war because this was the most expedient way to effectively exercise citizenship.

⁹⁹ Bogotá, like many other major Colombian cities is divided along socioeconomic strata that are superimposed on a spatial grid. Thus, all legalized areas of the city receive a stratum number from 0 (indicating the lowest) to 6 (indicating the highest). This was conceived as a progressive economic strategy that enables the city government to tax the rich and subsidize the poor. In addition, individuals who reside in areas of stratum levels 0 and 1 are eligible for additional State aid (SISBEN) if they meet added criteria such as income and education levels. Together, these two systems are meant to identify vulnerable population groups both collectively and individually.

The second particularity that sets Cazucá apart from other “slums” and even from other IDP receptor areas is that it is imagined as a place of blackness. In fact, *La 19*, that other urban center on the city’s periphery is also referred to as *La Calle de los Negros* (Black people’s street). This term is used mostly by non-black residents, who are in fact the majority. In a sense then, the very act of calling it *La Calle de los Negros* indicates the utterer’s self-identification as non-black, and identifies this as a racialized space. Of course, in the Colombian case given the prior ethnicization of blackness that has run deep and wide, one cannot automatically equate blackness with racialization. Nonetheless, I wish to argue that the identification of this space as a place of blackness is in fact tantamount to the racialization of its black residents. When this designation is used it is not Afro-Colombians’ cultural difference that is being primarily or exclusively invoked. Clearly, stereotypes about “*negros*’ culture” do circulate. These are neither new nor surprising and include statements about blacks’ proclivity towards excess, leisure, partying, and crime (Armando, 2012). And Cazucá’s black residents also craft their own discourses of cultural distinctiveness, which are largely based on a salvage and celebratory logic that seeks to rescue their ancestral practices.¹⁰⁰ Thus, I am not suggesting that notions of cultural difference—positive and negative, both by those who self identify as black and as non-black—are entirely absent here. My point is that these allegations of cultural difference also function as racialized markers. That is, they are particular readings of bodies.

¹⁰⁰ Clearly these discourses are deeply imbued with the language of multiculturalism and its attendant ethnicization of blackness.

The most clear indicator of this is the circulation of the term *negro*¹⁰¹ and the meanings that it is given. Overall, the term is used to describe all dark-skinned people irrespective of their geographic origin or cultural particularities. When it is used to describe others—that is, by those who do not self identify as black—it is without a doubt based on visual cues: skin color, facial features, hair texture. Thus, it clusters Tumaqueños, Chocoanos, Costeños, Antioqueños and even Bogotanos together according to phenotype. For readers unfamiliar with Colombia, it is important to highlight that race and region are highly isomorphic in Colombia. In other words, ideas about a person’s “race” are closely related to their geographic origin. In addition, regional identities are extremely marked and differentiated from one another such that a person’s regional origin is seldom mistaken or overlooked. For this reason, clustering people who are evidently from different regions into a single category is noteworthy and a telltale sign that racial and spatial logics are both at play here.

Self-identified *negros* also use the category to signal racial meanings. For example, behind closed doors my interlocutors who primarily self-identified as *negros* referred to their neighbors as *blanquitos*, which is another evidently racialized category that would be loosely translatable as “white.”¹⁰² And although they also use

¹⁰¹ Sometimes the term that is used is “Afro.” Although a thorough genealogy of this term is beyond the scope of this chapter, it bears to note that its circulation among non-activists is most likely a consequence of the “Durban effect” in Colombia. That is, it is an offshoot of the adoption of the term “Afro-descendant” which was first coined at Durban and which has become the most politically correct term to signal blackness.

¹⁰² Like with many other uses of the diminutive form of a noun, the term *blanquito*—as opposed to simply *blanco*—denotes the utterer’s profound discomfort with the term and an attempt to minimize

other terms that mark more nuanced cultural and geographical differences between *negros*—for example, the differences between *negros* from different regions in the Pacific are constantly evoked—in practice they take up the category to describe themselves and others who “*look like*” them. In general, when used by those who are interpellated and self-identify as *negros* this identification of self and other is both an acknowledgement of racial sameness and an indication of cultural affinity.

The frequency with which racial terms circulate is so high that it is impossible to give a textured sense of their daily use, so perhaps a single example can illustrate the point. One day in late February while having lunch at her house in Cazucá, Rosa confessed that before coming to Bogotá she too held “the same [mistaken] idea that some *blancos* have about *negros*: that all *negros* are from Chocó, but over here I met some from Tumaco.” And a few minutes later she said “my people, so long as they are black, are everything to me” (*mi gente desde que sea negra para mí lo es todo*). Rosa is from El Bagre, Antioquia, a mining region in a department that is largely imagined as white and does not belong to the Pacific Region. Thus, it is not surprising that before coming to Bogotá Rosa believed two things about *negros*: 1. That they were all from Chocó, and 2. That (therefore) she was not one of them. But in Cazucá, her views changed substantially. First, due to her interactions with people from various parts of Colombia she acknowledged that blackness and geography were not isomorphic (ie. that many *negros* were not from Chocó, some were from Tumaco

his displeasure. In this case it is also evidently infused with contempt towards the object (ie. “white” people) that the term signifies.

for example). And consequently, she began including herself as *negra* irrespective of the fact that she is from Antioquia.

This shift in Rosa's ideas about blackness is a result of a dual process of self-making and racial interpellation. On the one hand, although she is well aware of the differences between a Chocoano, a Tumaqueño, and an Antioqueña (like herself), she now refers to all of them as *negros*, a descriptor that in this case is glossing over cultural and geographic difference in order to highlight their phenotypic similarities. Thus, in this case *negro* functions as a racial category. This is in part a result of her experiences with racism, instances in which *blancos* single out *negros* indistinctly of where they come from and what their lives were like before arriving in Bogotá.

During this same conversation Rosa was very clear about this:

People here are very rude, but one has to adapt. I'd rather just take it than go back to where I know I'll get killed. People here are very racist. Here they offend us calling us "you black..."¹⁰³ But I just don't pay attention because I am black (*negra*) and I am proud of it. My kids used to get picked on at school, but if you pay too much attention you just go crazy.

But as the quote above suggests, *negro* is also a racial self-adscription. Rosa has *resolved* to identify herself as *negra*, thus placing herself in the same identity category as her Tumaqueño and Chocoano friends, and this identity is as much a cause for pride as for derision.

¹⁰³ Rosa is implicitly referring to the most common racial insult that circulates in Colombia and in Latin America more broadly, which is "*Negro hijueputa*." The phrase could be translated as "you black son of a bitch," but it is incredibly flexible in its usage and can be combined with practically any other insult. Because the emphasis in this phrase is on the adjective *negro* rather than whatever follows it, it is a racial slur indistinctly of how it is used.

Negro and *blanco* are therefore racial terms with great currency in Cazucá.¹⁰⁴ But *negros* don't simply take up a category that is imposed on them and that does violence to their cultural particularities. In fact, their forms of sociality help reproduce and solidify it as a social reality. More to the point, in Cazucá many daily forms of sociality are clearly divided by a color line. On any given day, the great majority (if not all) of the people playing cards at the *garita* on *La 19*, buying fish at La Negra's stand, or drinking beer at the *discoteca* are dark-skinned Chocoanos. The groups of women who gather in each other's homes to play bingo on a regular basis are rarely inter-racial. And although in theory the local Afro-Colombian dance troupes welcome young people of all colors, in practice only a couple of light-skinned kids have joined. This is not a space of unbridgeable racial segregation, and outside of *La 19*, which congregates *negros* almost exclusively, people of all colors converge in various public spaces. But on a regular basis, the more intimate forms of sociality such as dating, visiting each other's homes, and extending/asking for solidarity do remain largely segregated.

In other words, the designation of *La 19* as *La Calle de los Negros* is not spurious. It is based on historical and emergent processes of racialization in Colombia. It folds in ideas about geographic and cultural differences that date as far back as the colonial period, as well as reconfigurations of these differences that are being sparked by the most recent processes of internal migration—such as the current wave of forced displacement from the Pacific. However, it is important to underline

¹⁰⁴ *Mestizo* also has some circulation, but it is much less common. In general, it is used as a euphemism for *blanco* in formal spaces of inter-racial exchange.

that *La Calle de los Negros* is only a three-block strip in the seemingly endless sea of dust, bricks, and tin that is Cazucá. And that Cazucá is only a handful of *barrios* in the third most highly populated sector in Bogotá (DANE 2005). Put bluntly, within the scope of the city at large the other *Calle 19* is only a speck on the massive urban landscape, and the total number of *negros* that live in Cazucá, though virtually impossible to ascertain, is a very small minority.¹⁰⁵ And still, that three-block strip that is alternately called *La 19* and *La Calle de los Negros* looms large in local imaginaries as a place of concentrated blackness.¹⁰⁶

But unlike other concentrated spaces of blackness in Bogotá, the blackness that Cazucá evokes is always already victimized. Blackness in Cazucá is therefore not on the same order as the well-known strip of Pacific Region restaurants right off the *Calle 19* in downtown Bogotá, where middle class “white” Bogotanos desperate for an exotic seafood meal regularly dine. Nor is it mentioned in the same breath as the popular *bailaderos Afro* (Afro dance clubs) that are scattered in small clusters in middle class areas of the city like Avenida Caracas, Galerías, or La Primero de Mayo. Cazucá is not even on the same order as the black neighborhoods in Kennedy, Bosa, or Suba, which tend to be working class *barrios* and their inhabitants—though often exoticized, criminalized, and routinely assumed to be non-Bogotanos—tend to be

¹⁰⁵ Although I haven’t been able to find disaggregated data for Ciudad Bolívar, according to the 2005 population census both Bogotá and Soacha’s Afro-Colombian population is only 1.5% of the total (DANE 2005). Even if the concentration of Afro-Colombians in Cazucá were exponentially higher than in the city at large, their numbers are still small.

¹⁰⁶ For example, for several years now ABCUN and other local organizations have organized a celebration of San Pachito, Chocó’s largest popular festival and one of the nation’s icons of “black culture” *par excellence*, in Cazucá.

identified as economic migrants rather than IDPs (Serna, 2011). Cazucá is unique precisely because it is simultaneously imagined as a place of blackness and of IDPs.

Given its relatively small size and extreme marginality, Cazucá and its black IDPs could have easily fallen entirely out of purview. But they did not. And not only did Cazucá not remain unremarkable, but the particular confluence of blackness and displacement with which it has become synonymous has gathered a great degree of attention both locally and in national politics. For example, the mayor of Soacha has identified black IDPs as a significant portion of his constituency and has reached out to them by sponsoring events such as the annual celebration of the Afro-Colombianness Day. In addition, during the congressional elections of 2010, residents of Cazucá were aggressively targeted as potential voters for both Afro-Colombian representatives and town councilors.¹⁰⁷

Why has Cazucá become hyper-visible and why has it become the object of so many different kinds of humanitarian interventions—by NGOs, religious groups, international aid organizations and government agencies? I am suggesting this is due to the fact that discourses of multiculturalism (which visibilized blackness) and of victimization (which produced IDPs) converged there. Together, they created the conditions of possibility for the emergence of racialized victims such as the black IDP. Put differently, this magnification effect is indicative of the emergence of a

¹⁰⁷ Although town councilors are not ethnic-specific governmental positions, in Colombia there exist two seats for Afro-Colombian representatives in the House (*Cámara de Representantes*). Voters must therefore decide whether to vote for an ethnic-specific candidate (indigenous or Afro-Colombian) or for their representative's district's candidate. Thus, the race for these two seats (which are known as the *Circunscripción Especial de Comunidades Afro-Colombianas*) constitutes an important dispute over official black representatives in the electoral system.

broader discursive formation in which multiculturalism and the politics of victimization have converged. This emergent convergence is what I have been calling the victimization of blackness.

Cazucá has a symbolic importance as a paradigmatic place where a new subject of intervention can be found: the black victim, which is at once ethnicized and racialized. Unfortunately, this has meant that despite the overabundant supply of humanitarian interventions the concrete and immediate changes for the people of Cazucá have been few and superficial. Local residents continue to live in abject poverty, most *barrios* remain without public services, and crime is as rampant as ever. But this does not mean that the victimization of blackness is therefore without consequence. As a powerful discursive formation in-the-making, the victimization of blackness produces particular kinds of subjects who are both enabled and constrained by it. Thus, in the next section I explore the concrete ways in which local residents get produced and produce themselves as black IDPs.

Making (oneself as) a black IDP

First and foremost, being an IDP, and even more so, a black IDP or *Afro-desplazado*, is an expedient survival strategy for many. Although Florinda's story above is unusually candid in admitting that she deliberately (and some may even say falsely) portrayed herself as a *desplazada*, many people actively produce themselves as victims in order to gain access to various kinds of aid. This may include everything from subtle adjustments to their displacement stories to outright misrepresentations calculated to fit exactly what donors and service providers want to hear. In fact,

strictly speaking, a great number (perhaps the majority?) of the people that I have known over the years in Cazucá are not “legitimate” *desplazados*. I am not interested in doubting the veracity of their life stories. In fact, I strongly believe that the distinction between *desplazados* and other kinds of migrants—even when we take the prescribed boundaries between the two for granted—is often difficult to make. Rather, I am interested in the processes whereby individuals craft themselves as *desplazados* or as *Afro-desplazados*, and in evaluating their consequences for subject formation and the politics of blackness.

One Sunday morning in 2009, like so many others, I stopped by Maria Elena’s apartment just south of the downtown area so we could ride the bus up to Cazucá together. Maria Elena had scheduled a meeting for “Afro” women for that day through her usual means: asking a few local *voceras* (spokeswomen) to spread the word. When we arrived, nearly an hour late, the women were not there but soon started trickling in from the Church next door where they had been offered a free lunch. As AFRODES’s board member in charge of women’s and children’s issues, Maria Elena was responsible for disseminating information on the newly passed Constitutional Court orders that mandated differentiated attention for these two IDP population subgroups. She started out by getting a show of hands to determine how many people had received the cash transfer for underage IDPs that was mandated by the *auto de niños* (children’s court order)¹⁰⁸. There was substantial confusion because there were many inconsistencies between her list and the people she was addressing.

¹⁰⁸ This is the common name that was used to refer to *auto 251*, which was one of the first differential attention orders that were passed as complements of Sentence T-025 in 2008.

Some of the local beneficiaries had not yet claimed their grants while nobody knew many of the names that she was reading off her list. Some people suggested that they might be residents of another *barrio* or members of another organization altogether, but Maria Elena thought this explanation was suspicious because she knew the people who had made the lists.

Next on her agenda was to inform attendees, composed primarily of black women with young children, of an upcoming deadline to request a land subsidy. Maria Elena framed it as an opportunity to “maintain *our* ancestral traditions and historical rural-urban relations” and encouraged them to claim their plot of land to grow crops, keep an herb garden, and raise chickens. For this purpose, they assigned five residents who were recognized by others as local leaders to be in charge of scouting out possible plots of land that were for sale. The rest of the meeting was dedicated to putting members up to date on current opportunities to gain access to other sources of humanitarian aid. Specifically, she counseled people on how to apply for the national housing subsidy for IDPs and to remain alert for an upcoming call for a supplementary subsidy that would be extended exclusively to Afro-Colombian women.

Every single person at that meeting, except for myself, self-described as a *desplazado*. Independently of whether they were *bona fide* card-carrying IDPs¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ The process to become an official IDP requires individuals to give a declaration at a State-sanctioned post. Then, the declaration is verified and a notification of acceptance or rejection is given. The criteria for determining whether the testimonies rendered are legitimate or not are inconsistent and opaque. Sometimes the determining factor is mostly a bureaucratic issue, whereas sometimes the veracity of the story is called into question. In any case, if the declaration is deemed legitimate, the

their very attendance at that meeting indicated their intent to be regarded as such. Furthermore, the mix-up with the list of potential beneficiaries suggests that there is an overabundance of people who are eager to be IDPs, and that in matters of separating IDPs from non-IDPs confusion is the norm. At the same time, although there were a handful of non-black attendees, the meeting was explicitly directed towards black folk and interpellated them as such. This was clearly evident when Maria Elena made reference to a community of belonging with particular relations to land, a statement that is clearly in line with multiculturalism's ethnicization of blackness. It may well be the case that some of the meeting's attendees were forced to leave their homes in the rural Pacific. It is also likely that many of them self-identify as black or "Afro." And yet, I would not hesitate to state that the primary objective of their attendance that day was to seek out an immediate material gain. Even if they didn't follow up on Maria Elena's advice, at the very least, they walked away with a (second) free lunch.

My point is that being a *desplazado* is oftentimes the only way for people in Cazucá to make a living. And given the recent push for differential attention for Afro-Colombian IDPs, being an *Afro-desplazado* further entitles some people to apply for additional humanitarian aid. This is because the State and international aid organizations have earmarked monies for Afro-Colombian victims and because humanitarian NGO's have followed suit by developing parallel ethnic-specific programs. In the absence of sustainable, decent, and effective ways to make a living

individual (and his or her designated family members) are included into the national IDP database (*Registro Único de Población Desplazada*, RUPD) and become eligible for State aid.

in their new urban settings, many people survive with the precarious handouts that they can secure. This became painfully evident to me when I conducted a survey that documented income levels and sources for 200 households with people that self-identified as *Afro* and as *desplazados*. When I and the other survey takers asked respondents what their sources of income were, they repeatedly mentioned *el rebusque*.¹¹⁰ In Colombia, the term *rebusque* refers to any resourceful means to generate income and includes most activities that would normally be included under the rubric of informal economy such as street sales and non-registered services. But when we asked them to be more specific in describing what these activities included, we noticed that they would routinely mention the search for *ayudas* (aid) alongside selling fruit and trash bags on the streets and braiding their neighbors' hair. I hope that it is clear that I am not suggesting that people eschew formal employment in order to live from the humanitarian aid for *desplazados*. Nothing could be farther from reality. Rather, I am suggesting that the time invested in accessing these humanitarian aid benefits can be considered on par with the time spent on informal economic activities. In other words, getting *ayudas* has become yet another strategy of *rebusque*.

But not everyone is equally willing or savvy enough to tap into these sources of income. On the one hand, the stigma that comes with being a *desplazado* is so strong that some people deliberately distance themselves from the label. No matter

¹¹⁰ For the small minority of people who had (temporary and inconsistent sources of) employment, the two most common occupations were in construction and domestic service. Although for the purpose at hand I am not stopping to analyze formal sources of employment for residents of Cazucá, I cannot overlook the fact that these are highly gendered and racialized occupations.

how poor, no matter how recently they arrived in Bogotá, no matter how lost they might feel, some people consider the category too degrading to take on. On the other hand, a few select people become so well versed in the workings of the complex web of organizations that provide aid and services for IDPs that they become *de facto* brokers between those seeking aid and those offering it. Overall, the process of stabilizing a given individual or population as IDPs constitutes a two-way street in which organizations interpellate *desplazados* and increasingly differentiate them into separate categories such as *Afros*, while individuals actively make themselves into *afro-desplazados* by highlighting both their vulnerability/victimization and their “*Afro-ness*” (usually expressed in cultural terms) simultaneously. In this process, cultural brokers are of essence.

Dora, Wilson’s sister, is without a doubt the clearest example of a case in which mastery of the institutional apparatus that makes IDPs turns individuals into brokers. Dora, who is now in her early forties, moved to Bogotá when she was seventeen to work as a live-in domestic worker for a well-known soccer commentator. Although this was in the 1980s, she testified and officially became an IDP in 2005. Of course, in the course of those twenty years many things happened. She lived in Chocó with her husband’s family and in her birth town in the southern Pacific and in both instances had to leave because of the surrounding violence in each of these areas.¹¹¹ Before moving to Cazucá in 1999 she had lived in several other

¹¹¹ Actually, several years after the recorded interview from which I reconstructed her life story, Dora told me in confidence that she had never been to Chocó, that she had never been displaced, and that she had told me that story because that was the story that her husband told when he testified to get IDP

substandard neighborhoods around the city as well as in wealthy areas as a live-in domestic worker. For all intents and purposes after more than twenty years in Bogotá, Dora is now a *Bogotana*.

Dora is a dynamic, sharp, and resourceful woman. When she first moved to Cazucá she signed her children up for World Vision's foreign "sponsorship." But Dora's motivations tend to exceed the limits of her own interests, and soon she became more than a beneficiary and started to recruit other children to be sponsored. She met Isaías there, who at the time was participating in World Vision's urban development efforts in the *barrio*, organizing local residents to provide the necessary labor to plot, clear, and sometimes pave the area's incipient streets. Isaías, like the rest of the residents, was providing his labor in exchange for food, and in the process turning the *invasión* (slum) into a *barrio*. One of the main differences between this *barrio* and the other ones where both Dora and Isaías had lived before was that in Cazucá there was a group of Chocoanos that was calling fellow Afro-Colombianos to attend meetings where they spoke about cultural identity and forced displacement. This group of Chocoanos included the extended families of the founders of AFRODES, all of which were living in Cazucá at the time, and although she herself is not Chocoana, over time Dora began to feel comfortable among them.

Today, both Isaías and Dora are active leaders in ABCUN, the local chapter of AFRODES, and as such they have become key brokers in the production of *Afro-desplazados*. They counsel others on how to obtain official IDP status and the State

status. At the time (in 2005), he was advised to say that he had been displaced from a town in Chocó (Regaderas) from which a large number of people were being forced to leave.

benefits that they are entitled to; they spread the news about every single meeting, workshop, and training that targets IDPs. Local organization representatives such as the priest at the Pastoral Social, the social worker at the Ombudsman's *Casa de los Derechos*, the UNHCR officer, and the *barrio* schoolteacher all know them by name. But Dora and Isaías are sought out not simply as IDP spokespeople; they are explicitly sought out as representatives of *Afro* IDPs. On any given day, Dora can get a call from the mayor's office in Soacha asking her to coordinate the upcoming events for the *Día de la Afrocolombianidad*, or from a music professor at the Universidad Javeriana who wants to schedule a public performance with her group of *Afro* women who sing *arrullos* and *alabaos*. In other words, they stand at a critical crossroads as representatives and members of a very specific population group that has recently come into the political limelight: *Afro-desplazados*. From their position as cultural brokers they not only secure resources for their own survival, but they also facilitate the back and forth traffic that effectively produces black IDPs as political subjects.

And although a large part of producing oneself as a black IDP involves learning how to effectively navigate the humanitarian aid landscape to one's own advantage, there is a great deal of compromise involved in the process. Because although organizations are eager to distribute aid, they too are motivated by particular interests and in actuality there is no such thing as a free lunch. State organizations, for example, are adamant about tying humanitarian aid to economic development and constantly resort to neo-liberal discourses of self-making to encourage IDPs to "succeed." Bogotá's city government, for example, has an institution dedicated to

promote income-generating alternatives for the city's most vulnerable population sectors, the Institute for Social Economy (IPES). Following the occupation of the *Parque Tercer Milenio*, which held IDPs and the government at a stalemate in 2010, the IPES convened a city-wide event in which they offered a wide range of entrepreneurial opportunities for *desplazados* to choose from. But this was not simply an act of generosity on the part of the city's government. IPES representatives urged, compelled, even demanded IDPs to be persistent, to be resourceful, to be optimistic, to work in teams, to take on the challenge to learn new skills, to innovate, to become autonomous. In other words, the opportunity to participate in these income-generating projects was extended in exchange for IDPs' promise of entrepreneurialism.

The same can be said of other kinds of organizations that have an interest in intervening on (behalf of) IDPs. Dora and Isaías, for example, were invited to become trained "multipliers" for one of the Catholic Church's *Pastoral Social's* projects, which was transparently called "Psycho-social intervention with victims of violence and forcefully displaced persons." They attended weekly retreats for several months and at the end of the training workshop they invited me to accompany them to the closing event, which was designed as a "cultural exchange" between the different "communities" that had participated in the project. The event was held at a sports club in downtown Soacha on a sunny day, so I was encouraged to bring my young daughter (who was two at the time) with me. When we arrived we were asked to sit in groups according to the "community" that we belonged to, and then one by one, a

representative from each community had to evaluate the project's accomplishments and make public their commitments for the future. Then, we were offered a snack while we watched each community perform on stage. All of the communities corresponded with particular parishes in Soacha and so were identified with specific *barrios*, except for ours, which was referred to as AFRODES. In fact, when I interviewed the event's organizer a few weeks later, she explained to me that AFRODES did not actually belong to one of their parishes but that the dioceses had specifically sought out people from AFRODES to join the project because they were interested in targeting vulnerable population groups and *Afro* IDPs were one such group that they had identified as in extra need of attention.

We watched four presentations before Dora, Florinda, and a couple of their friends had to go onstage. There was some poetry, some humor, and a *Carranguero* performance (which is a peasant music genre from the Eastern Highlands in Colombia). Then, the mc announced the upcoming performance by saying "the women of the AFRODES community will sing a song from their homeland" (*las mujeres de la comunidad de AFRODES van a cantar una canción de la tierra de ellas*). As soon as the four of them went on stage someone in the audience yelled "We want to see them dance!" (*¡Que bailen!*) Dora and her friends belong to a group of *cantaoras* who sing *arrullos* and *alabaos* and they had rehearsed a couple of songs from their repertoire for the occasion. It bears to mention that *arrullos* and *alabaos* can be loosely described as belonging to a genre of funerary music on the Pacific that not only is never danced but is also unaccompanied by music instruments. But rather

than explain this to their audience, when asked to dance, one of them excused the group by saying “we didn’t bring a CD.” To which another audience member replied, “You guys don’t need a CD” (*Ustedes no necesitan CD!*). Despite these moments of cultural miscommunication and implicit racialization, the mc declared the event a success and during her closing comment she expressed deep satisfaction with having “learned a lot from the culture of the Afros.” As a result of this cultural exchange, the mc assured us, we could walk away with the certainty of “having changed our way of seeing life.”

I recall this event in detail to show that the process of making oneself and others into *afro-desplazados* involves a give-and-take on many registers. At some moments, *afro-desplazados* like other IDPs are called upon to make themselves into suitable entrepreneurs, while at others they are called upon to perform acceptable forms of cultural difference. In some instances, their “*Afro-ness*” is highlighted as a cultural particularity that makes them eligible for special treatment, and oftentimes they become experts at making the best of these opportunities. But in all of these cases, there is a simultaneous process of victimization and ethno-racial otherization taking place. That is, in a single breath they are presenting themselves and/or being presented as black *and* as victims, and this confluence is what makes them visible, sometimes hyper-visible, as political subjects. Of course, these moments of simultaneous becoming do not exhaust all of the possible iterations of blackness in Colombia, but they have become so prevalent that they are having significant consequences for this political formation. Moreover, as I have shown in this section,

the great attention that the politics of victimization are currently receiving in Colombia have produced a magnification of the *afro-víctima* in the national imaginary, and this has been deepened by the work of Colombia's most well-known black organizations, who have increasingly shifted their attention to human rights (see Chapter 4). As with the other emergent formations of blackness that I have been tracing in this dissertation, the victimization of blackness is only one among several possible paths for its future articulations. But as such, it deserves careful analysis of its political possibilities and limitations.

Victimized citizenship for “Afros”

The most obvious consequence of the victimization of blackness is that it has provided some of the most disenfranchised members of Colombian society with an effective avenue from which to exercise citizenship. But this is a very particular kind of citizenship—victimised ethno-racial citizenship—in which, as anthropologist Pablo Jaramillo notes for the case of indigenous *wayuu* in Northwestern Colombia:

In order to outline a given indigenous population or person as a subject of rights, they must be conceived as a collection of vulnerabilities that makes them the object of the state's politics of care and development (*translation mine* 2011: 156).

According to Jaramillo, victimised citizenship has several consequences. First, because victims have to produce themselves as defenseless creatures in dire need of state intervention, that is, as *objects* of care, they exercise an ambiguous kind of agency that only partly constitutes them as subjects. In other words, they are subjects only inasmuch as they can constitute themselves as objects. Second, at those critical moments when victimised citizenship is exercised—for example when IDPs claim

State benefits—care and reparations tend to be conflated with full inclusion. And this conflation muddles the difference between being a victim and being a citizen more broadly.

Thirdly, Jaramillo rightly notes that the articulation of multiculturalism with victimized citizenship in Colombia has deepened the tendency for the State to monopolize the implementation of multicultural politics (see also Van Cott, 2000). This has meant that victims, particularly those that belong to the ethnic groups recognized by official multiculturalism, have been further folded into the State apparatus. In essence, Jaramillo finds that victimization has become the most common means whereby indigenous *wayuus* are included as citizens, and that this citizenship is always already ethnicized and racialized.

Overall, I am in agreement with Jaramillo's observations and find it rather telling that although his fieldwork took place in a very different context than mine, his findings reinforce my own. However, the differences between the indigenous and black cases are not negligible and merit discussion. Most importantly, the historical trajectories of the construction of indigenous and black people in Latin America as victims are profoundly different. Whereas indigenous peoples have been recognized as victims since colonial times (cf. de las Casas 1552), the descendants of slaves did not and have not yet received an analogous official recognition.¹¹² A brief reiteration

¹¹² This is not to say that slaves and their descendants in the Americas have never been recognized as victims. However, for historical reasons that are beyond the scope of this analysis, these recognitions have been marginal in comparison to those for indigenous people. Restrepo, for example, traces the arduous work of Padre Alonso de Sandoval to baptize African slaves in Cartagena in order to save their souls (Restrepo 2008). In many ways, Sandoval's work could be seen as parallel to that of De las Casas' with indigenous people in Mexico. However, Sandoval's work to draw attention to the colonial

of my usage of the term victimization is warranted here. Most concretely, victimization refers to acts of violence that produce death, destruction, and wounds, but it can also be used with a second meaning to refer to the process of attributing or appropriating the category of victim. Clearly, both indigenous and black people in Latin America have been victimized in the first sense of the word and I am not interested in comparing their wounds. Rather, my interest is in the comparative *recognition* of the two population groups as inherently victimized. That is, in the second meaning of the term. In this sense, I do not hesitate to state that blackness in Colombia has not (until now) been defined in victimized terms.¹¹³

In essence, I sustain that the concrete manifestation of victimized blackness that I have been tracing throughout this chapter—the production of the *afro-desplazado*—suffers from serious political shortcomings. Although it has presented some of the most disenfranchised and impoverished members of Colombian society with an opportunity to exercise victimized ethno-racial citizenship, it has stopped

victimization of African descendants has not remained vivid in Colombian history and has certainly not been incorporated into regnant views of blackness. His work and that of others like him constitute what Foucault would call a subjugated knowledge, which has not yet become dominant or even fully audible but whose roots have been effectively planted and which can emerge as a full-fledged discourse in the future (Foucault, 1980). The same can be said of Pedro Claver, the Jesuit priest who became known as the “slaves’ slave” for his work in Cartagena de Indias.

¹¹³ Several scholars of the African Diaspora have placed victimization at the center of their definitions of blackness. DuBois, Fanon, and Gilroy, just to name a few, have all theorized that black subjectivity is a direct result of the experience of slavery, dislocation, and ineffable violence. For each of them, this original victimization is at the heart of the black experience everywhere in the African Diaspora. However, as I have shown elsewhere (Cárdenas, 2010), the literature of the African Diaspora has rarely (if ever) contemplated Colombia as a part of this black community of belonging. In fact, the recognition of racial sameness across the African Diaspora has been historically asymmetrical; with black Colombians tending to be aware of black struggles elsewhere but not the reverse (Cárdenas, 2012a). These diasporic fractures in conjunction with the strong national formations of blackness in Colombia, (which have recently been obsessed with culturalism rather than racial difference), have effectively obstructed the full incorporation of the notion of historical victimization as an inherent part of blackness.

short of fulfilling its political potentials. The potential that I am referring to is the overt articulation of black people's victimization to the African Diasporic project of demanding States' reparations for slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. As it stands today, in Colombia the victimization of blackness has taken two primary forms, one that enables a good number of people to exercise an ethnically differentiated version of victimized citizenship, and one that attempts to take this *de facto* victimization of black people (in the first sense of the word) as the baseline for a much more ambitious project that explicitly links their current suffering to claims for historical reparations. Interestingly, the former has been whole-heartedly embraced by the State and humanitarian aid organizations, while the latter has been unable to gain sufficient traction to take off the ground. In the rest of this section I outline two examples, one within the state apparatus and one deliberately formulated outside of it, in which the failure of such attempts to instrumentalize victimized blackness is evident.

Afro-reparations

In 2005, the Uribe administration passed Law 975 known as the Peace and Justice Law. Although its primary objective was the demobilization of armed groups (mainly paramilitaries), the law also appointed a committee (the CNRR) that was charged with managing reparations for victims of the war. Soon after the CNRR was formed, an Afro-Colombian working group was established within it. Its purpose, as stated by one of its coordinators, was to draft a document with general guidelines on how to adequately repair ethnic groups, which under Colombia's multicultural

constitution are considered collective subjects of rights. The working group, organized by a young anthropologist, called well-known Afro-Colombian activists and academics as well as State officials to participate. They convened on several occasions and held a few workshops with civil society organizations, but within a matter of three months the working group had completely disbanded.

When I interviewed some of its members a few years later, they expressed disappointment at what they saw as a missed opportunity to engage in a discussion about historical reparations for Afrodescendants. The working group, situated at the intersection of victimization politics and multicultural rights, attempted to raise the issue of historical reparations for Afrodescendants by resorting to two arguments. The more radical members of the group argued that the transatlantic slave trade was a crime against humanity commensurate with those committed by contemporary armed groups. As such, its victims deserved reparations. Their suggestion that the notion of war crime should be expanded to include slavery, however, was easily overturned by referring strictly to the law, which circumscribed the CNRR's mission to victims of the armed conflict. In other words, the law only applies to victims of current crimes and descendants of slaves simply have no place in it.¹¹⁴ The second and more conservative approach was to make the continuities between present and past victimizations of Afrodescendants explicit. The working group's coordinator described this more indirect objective in the following way:

¹¹⁴ In fact the law is much narrower in its definition of current victims of war because in it there is an implicit assumption that Colombia is in a post-war setting. In addition, the procedures for victims to claim reparation are very restrictive in practice.

When one begins to discuss the issue and understands that the fact that black people on the Pacific have been disproportionately affected by the war is in part due to State negligence, to living in a marginalized region with very low socioeconomic indices... one can say that this is a result of history. It is because of the place that black people have occupied, and continue to occupy, in the formation of the nation, and that this is a result of their enslavement [...] Then we understand that the current victimization of Afro-Colombians derives from past victimizations and that the two cannot be separated.

Four years after the group's dissolution all that remains of their efforts is a file with meeting reports. Tellingly, when I spoke to one of the disgruntled academics who participated in it, she said that the CNRR's director had referred to their attempt to expand the notion of victim as a point of epistemic rupture, simply too radical to contemplate.

Although the CNRR was a potential site for the productive articulation of diasporic anti-racism and victimization politics, the attempt to expand the political scope within which the victimization of blackness could be mobilized utterly failed. The limits of the notion of victim established by the Peace and Justice Law simply did not allow for a racialized victim to fully crystallize. Although it was possible to contemplate victims who happened to be black (or indigenous), the idea that black Colombians were victims by virtue of being black was unthinkable. Clearly, the working group had hoped to make explicit the links between contemporary vulnerability and historical victimization in order to elicit conversations about historical reparations, but their efforts never got off the ground. In the end, the CNRR's attempt to differentially repair ethnic groups did in fact create a link between victimization and blackness, but the grid of intelligibility under which it operated

made it impossible to see this connection as anything more than an unfortunate calamity.

Diasporic suffering

Perhaps we should not be surprised by the Colombian State's unwillingness or inability to deepen the historical scope within which the intersection of victimization and blackness is conceived. This recognition would provide irrefutable grounds to demand historical reparations for slavery and thereby place a considerable moral and financial burden on a State that is undoubtedly eager to avoid such responsibilities. However, the State is not the only relevant interlocutor capable of producing, mobilizing, or silencing particular articulations of blackness. In fact, when it comes to recognizing the victimization of blackness as a point of departure for political action, the transnational realm of African Diasporic politics has proved to be a much more fruitful ground.

The most notable example of this kind of transnational political mobilization was the Durban Conference Against Racial Discrimination in 2001. Durban was a watershed moment in that it made black Colombians visible to others as African diasporic subjects, and in this sense it facilitated a process of *mutual* diasporic recognition—between black Colombians and Afrodescendants elsewhere—that had not taken place until then. By Durban, I am not only referring to the ten days during which representatives of UN member states and civil society organizations worldwide discussed the global manifestations of racism. I use “Durban” as shorthand to refer to the political effervescence that preceded it as organizations prepared for the

conference; to the conference itself and the unique encounters that took place there; and to the commitments and relationships—both formal and informal—that followed from it.

The aggregated consequences of this unique encounter, which Restrepo refers to as “The Durban Effect” (Restrepo, 2009), in conjunction with the intensification of the war, resulted in a significant re-drafting of the political strategies employed by Colombia’s most important black organizations. First, they substituted the language of ethnic rights with that of human rights. Second, they expanded their range of interlocutors to include international actors such as watchdog groups, human rights courts, and U.S. congress members. Third, rather than continue negotiating directly with the Colombian State, they re-routed their political actions through these newly established international networks. I can cite numerous examples of this significant shift in organized black politics in Colombia, which are all in one way or another attempts to instrumentalize the recognition of black people’s current victimization in order to project it into a historical recognition of victimization and consequently a rearticulation of blackness. In general, however, up until now these attempts, though audible and popular in select circles among black activists in the U.S., have not had a considerable impact in Colombia. My sense is that the conditions of possibility for such claims to gain sufficient traction do not yet exist.

In September 2010, I was asked to be a translator and intermediary for the PCN (The Process of Black Communities, one of Colombia’s most well-known black organizations) in their attempt to organize a political tour for Angela Davis in

Colombia. The idea of inviting such a prominent international representative of global blackness to Colombia had been something that Carlos Rosero,¹¹⁵ director of PCN, had contemplated as a concrete possibility ever since I mentioned that she was a faculty member at the university that I was currently attending. For Rosero, establishing a working relationship with Davis was a unique opportunity to draw international attention to the current victimization of black Colombians and therefore an expedient way to spur effective political intervention on their behalf. Davis was thought to be an ideal candidate for this work of African Diasporic solidarity because she was both well known in Colombia and, in his view, well-positioned to influence political decisions in the U.S. that would have direct bearing on black communities in Colombia.¹¹⁶

The news of Davis's presence in Colombia quickly spread and tensions between the PCN and other black organizations immediately surfaced regarding the purpose of her visit and the concrete events that she was invited to attend. In Cali, the local black student organization, CADUVE, at the local public university, UNIVALLE, welcomed her with the Black Panther salute and granted her the highest honors given to a visitor by handing her the keys to their institution. They also convened a lunch with the region's black majors, organized a press conference, and

¹¹⁵ Because he is a well-known public figure I use his real name.

¹¹⁶ These included two main foreign policy initiatives of the U.S. government, stalling the approval of the Free Trade Agreement and spending decisions for Plan Colombia monies. The first of these was thought to be important because if approved, PCN believed that the economic effects of the FTA would have particularly detrimental consequences for black communities' rural economies. The second foreign policy issue was important for two reasons that had direct bearing on black Colombians: 1. because military spending from Plan Colombia was disproportionately generating violence in the Pacific, and 2. because Plan Colombia money could be earmarked for development projects for Afro-Colombians and they wanted to actively participate in these spending decisions.

scheduled a public question and answer session that was attended by hundreds of people who showed up on campus early on a Sunday morning. But all of these events were secondary to PCN's main political objective (and in fact very contentious matters of negotiation between them and CADUVE).

For PCN, the main purpose of Davis's visit to Cali was to hold a closed-door witnessing session in which representatives from various regions in the Southern Pacific would describe the horrific victimizations that their people were currently undergoing.¹¹⁷ For this purpose, PCN summoned more than a dozen community representatives to give first-hand testimonies on the forced displacement, disproportional imprisonment, continued poverty, political persecution, and various forms of territorial encroachment suffered by black communities in Colombia. The session was closely moderated by a member of PCN who had coached each of the community representatives on how to effectively communicate the particular cases of racialized victimization that they wanted to evidence. In this way, they succeeded in giving Davis a broad sense of the systematic way in which black people's human rights were being violated in Colombia.

A particularly poignant intervention by a man who had recently been displaced from Lopez de Micay stood out among others. He introduced himself as a traditional medicine man and a local leader in his community. After describing the political persecution of which he was a target, his voice broke and he declared:

¹¹⁷ But also to visit La Toma, Cauca, an artisanal mining town in the interior Southwestern highlands that has become a flagship project of territorial protection for PCN.

We live the worst lives of all human beings on Earth. This government fumigated us, people not crops. We, the leaders of Lopez de Micay are not being persecuted by the *guerrilla*, but by the government. I have been displaced twice. If you could see where I'm sleeping now, you would surely weep. *Nobody cares for me, nobody protects me*, and I can't give public declarations.

Davis listened attentively and diligently took note of every single detail that each of the testifiers relayed. Then the meeting ended abruptly and she was escorted next door for the public question and answer session organized by CADUVE.

If ever I have witnessed a call to transnational racial solidarity based on the recognition of ongoing (and implicitly historical) victimization, this was one. Although there was no explicit mention of racial sameness between Davis and the testifiers, everything about the meeting suggested that this was implicitly understood by everyone. On the one hand, PCN handpicked each of the testifiers as representatives of black communities, and on the other, they had sought out Davis as a recognized black political figure in the hopes that she would intervene on their behalf.¹¹⁸ In addition, the tone of confidentiality under which the meeting was held in order to guarantee anonymity and enable open denunciations of the Colombian State made it clear that PCN's intent was to establish international solidarity networks that bypassed national governments—especially the Colombian government. The line of

¹¹⁸ In fact, during her entire visit in Colombia, Davis was recognized first and foremost as a black leader. This, in spite of the fact that she was initially invited to the inaugural event of the Universidad Nacional's Master's Program in Gender Studies. At every single event in which people flocked to hear her speak, it was clear that they were there to see a black celebrity. This was repeatedly made clear by the sale of afro wigs outside her keynote speech, the Black Panther salute that members of CADUVE rehearsed, the stickers with the outline of her figure with a prominent *afro* that were printed on occasion of her visit, and the giant mural of a black power fist that was painted outside the venue of her talk at UNAL to commemorate her visit.

sameness that PCN was tapping into and that they hoped Davis would in turn recognize was thus based on a victimized notion of blackness.

Nearly two years after her visit, not a single concrete political consequence of Davis' visit is still in sight. Although PCN attempted to follow-up on her visit and shortly after her departure they drafted a list of eight concrete "Solidarity actions to guarantee and uphold the rights of Afro-Colombian communities"¹¹⁹ the initiative soon dropped out of everyone's plate. I interpret the rapid disengagement of all parties involved following what was a moment of considerable political effervescence as proof of the fact that victimized blackness in this more expanded sense has simply not gathered currency in Colombia. Of course, this does not mean that the current articulation of multiculturalism and the politics of victimization cannot take this route in the future. However, at present, rather than being tantamount to the recognition of historical victimization, the exercise of victimized citizenship for Afrodescendants is simply a precarious means of being partially included as vulnerably citizens, as objects of special care and in this way accessing meager humanitarian aid packages. Perhaps most importantly, the simultaneous and repeated instantiation of *afro-victims* risks disseminating a narrow and preoccupying idea that black people are always "vulnerable."

Conclusions

¹¹⁹ I helped draft this document along with Tianna Paschel and Sandra Alvarez, both of who were also graduate students in the University of California system at the time. Then, after her departure, the three of us, in coordination with members of the PCN maintained communication with Davis in order to follow up the document with concrete interventions, but none materialized.

The intersection of the politics of victimization and ethno-territorial blackness has in some ways narrowed the terms of the multicultural conversation. Specifically, it has prioritized the claims of “victimized” or “at risk” Afro-Colombians to such an extreme that ethnic claims that do not clearly intersect with victimization politics have become nearly inaudible to the State. While this has favored a good number of people in truly dire conditions, the heightened preoccupation with “victimized” or “at risk” Afro-Colombians often comes at the expense of attending to other Afro-Colombians’ demands. The overall result has been that while the terms expand on one end they contract on another in a zero-sum game that pits Afro-Colombians against each other and/or compels them to do everything possible to construe themselves as “victimized” or “at risk.”

More concerning perhaps is the fact that the once-revolutionary demand for differentiated aid programs for “Afro-victims” can end up dovetailing with the government’s securitization initiatives. During President Uribe’s two terms his internal security policy, known as *Política de Seguridad Democrática*, increased militarization and intensified State repression of civilian opposition in an effort to eradicate all forms of insurgency. While it is still early to evaluate President Santos’ approach to national security, it is safe to say that Colombia continues to be a very dangerous place in which to mobilize oppositional politics of any sort. In other words, the effort to silence dissent and eliminate insurgency by any means necessary continues to undergird the current government’s logic to guarantee internal “security” and eventually attain “peace.” As I described above, the violent conjuncture of the

late 1990s displaced the discourse of ethnic rights from the center of the multicultural logic. In its place, the discourse of human rights gained force and facilitated the continuation of the struggle to protect black communities and their territories. Unfortunately, this strategic shift was also artfully seized by the Uribe administration in order to further its *Política de Seguridad Democrática*. As black activists' denounce the pervasive violations of human rights that were taking place in their communities, they inadvertently contribute to justify Uribe's governments' securitization project. In this way, a project that began as a set of policies to guarantee ethno-territorial rights has unwittingly become a useful instrument in the government's obsessive pursuit of "peace" at any cost.¹²⁰

Perhaps the greatest danger of any articulation is the possibility of its sedimentation into common sense. Sometimes, under certain circumstances, a particular articulation can gather force and become a unified social formation. Furthermore, if it acquires internal coherence and is in an advantageous position of power, it can become hegemonic. When this occurs, its values and ideas become naturalized. At the current juncture, it is impossible to determine whether this emergent articulation of black multiculturalism will ever become hegemonic, but I am nonetheless convinced that some of its elements have already done so. And although it is equally impossible to foresee what the concrete consequences of this would be

¹²⁰ It's important to clarify that I do not intend to suggest that the resolution of the armed conflict is not a worthy objective in and of itself, nor that the government deliberately created this humanitarian crisis as a political strategy. To the contrary, the humanitarian crisis is real and its resolution is urgent—but not at any cost.

for black Colombians, I do think that it is important to point out some of the imminent dangers of the possible naturalization of this articulation of blackness.

First, as the logics of ethnic blackness become conjoined to those of victimization politics, a new kind of Afro-Colombian subject—the *Afro-desplazado* or *Afro-víctima* more broadly—emerges. Specifically, the discourses and technologies employed in State programs for war victims (namely IDPs)—such as emergency aid, psychosocial therapy, and socioeconomic stabilization, to name a few—create a seemingly inherent link between blackness and vulnerability. If these programs are not designed and put in practice in such a way that makes their contextual character clear, stressing the contingency of Afro-Colombians' vulnerability, the link between blackness and vulnerability can become naturalized.

This could in turn shift the logic of multicultural recognition and rights in dangerous ways. Instead of recognizing Afro-Colombians' cultural difference as the foundation for their claim to special rights, Afro-Colombians would be deemed deserving beneficiaries of the State's largesse by virtue of their current misfortune. Furthermore, this shift has a worrying temporality effect. Unlike the claim to cultural difference, which has a self-reproducing logic, the denunciation of misfortune has a cross-sectional temporality. On the one hand, because it focuses on current victimization and the need to eradicate it, this new brand of multicultural recognition employs a self-annihilating logic that is similar to that of affirmative action. In other words it doesn't project into the future. But unlike affirmative action, it does not make explicit links between contemporary vulnerability and historical victimization;

therefore it doesn't project back to the past either. Although it creates a link between vulnerability and blackness, the relationship between the two is seen more as an unexplainable calamity than a historical continuity. As the case of the CNRR's Afro-Colombian working group suggests, this link has not yet succeeded in eliciting conversations about the past. If this limitation is not overcome, the result could be a multiculturalism that flattens out all categories of difference and equates the justification for Afro-Colombians' rights with that of all other "vulnerable population groups."

For black activists the dangers of victimized citizenship for Afro-Colombians are palpable. In many ways, they are keenly aware that the recourse to human rights discourse and the defense of life itself were born out of necessity, not political strategy. Victimized citizenship is therefore thought of as a temporary and partial *resolution* to black communities' most pressing problems. This was made crystal clear during a discussion that I held with Jesus, one of PCN's most active members, regarding the topic of victims' reparations and Afro-Colombians' rights. Jesús rhetorically asked, "does that mean that if you get a reparation for being a victim you stop being black?" And then as if responding to his own question he stated:

The relevant political subject is the black community, which transcends the current moment, the conjuncture. Should Afro-Colombians who are displaced claim rights as *desplazados* or as black communities? As members of black communities because displacement is a transitory matter that will cease. The government operates with a certain intentionality, which reveals that although they extend reparations for *desplazados* they must ignore everything else, all the historical legacy of black communities. And that's why we want to intervene. The relevant political subject is not the victim. If we allow it to

be, we know for certain that there will be no historical reparations. If we let them simply design public policies for victims' reparations that will be the limit of our rights; and our rights have to go way beyond that.

Although Esilda, Wilson, and Isaías may not have crafted such incisive political analyses of victimized blackness, their lives and aspirations reveal a similar perspective. Collecting humanitarian aid is not an end in itself, it is a makeshift and temporary expedient. As people in Cazucá have repeatedly reminded me, *desplazado* is not a noun, but an adjective. Consequently, nobody is a *desplazado*.

Chapter 6

Conclusions

*“Gracias al desplazamiento estoy hoy aquí compartiendo mi cultura con ustedes”
“I am here tonight sharing my culture with all of you, thanks to forced displacement.”*

Although I knew that Dora had been singing *alabaos* and *arrullos* with a small group of women from Cazucá for a few years, I was not prepared for the last performance that I saw her in. I had seen her perform at various venues and occasions that ranged from the launching of AFRODES’s latest human rights report to the Municipality of Soacha’s annual Afro-Colombian-ness celebrations. I was used to seeing her adopt the cultural markers that she knew would adequately represent her blackness and I had seen her over the years gradually produce herself as a *cantaora*. But that evening, as I entered the theater of one of Bogotá’s most prestigious private universities, I was overcome by her protagonism.

The tickets and the banner at the theater entrance were printed with a beautiful close-up picture of her smiling face, and as the evening went by it became clear that she was the star of the presentation. The theater, though modest in size, was packed with middle and upper class college-age men and women. I took a seat near the front and waited for the show to begin. Toño, who was the designated mc that night opened with a question for the audience, “What does it mean to be *afro*?” Several people volunteered responses that ranged from “having a sense of community” to “belonging to an ethnic group.” And Toño, a *mestizo* who publically claimed African

ancestry based on the African “Eve” evolutionary theory,¹²¹ added his expertise on the matter to each of the volunteered responses. The last contribution came from an audience member who was formally introduced and asked to stand up. The distinguished guest was Chinelo, a young Nigerian woman who was volunteering at several soup kitchens in Cazucá. She explained in a precarious Spanish that for her being *afro* amounted to deep cultural pride.

Next on the program were several short interviews with formal guests. Toño explained that in addition to being a musical performance the event had been designed as an open dialogue and proceeded to call the invited interviewees out. The first guest was Adriana, a current graduate student at the university who in addition to being a musician was writing a master’s thesis on the healing power of music. Specifically, she was researching the ways in which black women recapitulated painful memories of loss and sang their sorrows away. She was joined on stage by Dora and her sister Simona, who were dressed in color-coordinated outfits complete with jewelry and a head wrap. Unlike the dialogue with the first guest, Toño’s conversation with Dora and Simona centered not on analysis but on testimony. He began his set of questions in a low voice, as if conjuring an atmosphere of solemnity. “Can you tell us why you are here in Bogotá today?” he began. To which Dora responded, “I am here tonight sharing my culture with all of you, thanks to forced displacement.”

¹²¹ Toño was referring to the hypothesis that the most recent common matrilineal ancestor of homo sapiens sapiens lived in Eastern Africa. This hypothesis is based on mitochondrial DNA which carries the unbroken genetic material down the maternal line. Thus, people who are familiar with this theory often make reference to universal African descent.

What followed was a tentatively intimate set of questions that Toño and Adriana asked Dora and Simona. “What did you leave behind in your homeland (*en tu tierra*)?” Toño asked. Dora did not hesitate to respond, “I left my happiness, my freedom, and my family there.” Adriana spoke softly into the microphone to ask what marks the violence that she had lived through had left on her body and spirit. Dora paused for a second and responded, “I left my land, my ancestors, and my entire culture that I couldn’t bring with me. But inside my heart I brought a part of that culture, my *arrullos* and *alabaos*.” After a while the attention turned to Simona who was asked to explain the nature of those songs. “At what age are children allowed to participate in funerary rites and learn these songs?” Toño asked, to which Simona responded with a carefree air, “there’s no specific age, this is something that we carry in our blood, that we breathe in next to our elders.” And then she expanded on a cultural explanation of that music genre, explaining that although both of them were sung “for *our* dead,” *arrullos* were meant for children while *alabaos* were grown ups.

After that interview Diana came on stage. Diana, who is better known by her stage name María Mulata is a singer/songwriter in her mid to late twenties. She was born in San Gil, a town in the Colombia’s northern Andes, to a family of musicians. However, as she herself describes it on her website:¹²²

After a childhood dedicated to interpreting the music of her native mountains [...], her musical interests took a different turn: a voyage into the investigation of the contributions of the descendents of Africans to this coffee-growing country; traditions that had arrived to her region through the [Magdalena] river and which constituted one of her earliest influences. Thus, she decides [sic] to intern herself

¹²² www.mariamulata.org

in the very entrails of Colombia's black soul in order to learn firsthand from the great teachers of this tradition.

Although she attempted to minimize her protagonism, it soon became clear that Maria Mulata was an important figure that night. However, instead of occupying the stage as the renowned singer that she is, she explained the current project that she was undertaking, which was the origin of the evening's event: *Colcha de retazos* (or "Quilt").

She explained that in her professional travels she, a self-described "*blanca*" (white woman), had been fortunate enough to visit many regions of Colombia and had concluded that hers was a nation of cultural abundance. *Colcha de retazos* was therefore an attempt to "thread together the many different colors of a pluriethnic and multicultural nation through the integration and diffusion of the wealth and diversity of Colombian music."¹²³ In order to reciprocate the gifts that she had received from her wise teachers, the purpose of this project was to disseminate the cultural treasures that she had learned from these black elders to the young members of their communities. Thus, she had created a group in San Basilio de Palenque, Colombia's African community *par excellence*,¹²⁴ where local *palenquero* children learned and rescued the musical traditions of their elders.

The logic of black cultural rescue soon brought Maria Mulata to Cazucá.

"Who is in more danger of losing their cultural traditions than *desplazados* who have

¹²³ Ibid

¹²⁴ Palenque de San Basilio was founded by runaway and freed slaves from Cartagena in the Sixteenth Century and it is nationally and internationally recognized as the first free *pueblo* of the Americas. It is also one of very few places in South America that has a creole language that mixes Spanish and Bantu elements. For these reasons, it is routinely evoked as the heart of Colombia's African-ness.

been uprooted from their territories?” she asked rhetorically. Her interest in Colombia’s “black soul” combined with her preoccupation over cultural loss logically converged in a project aimed at *afro-desplazados*. And as most people who seek out this specific population group, she eventually contacted AFRODES and through them she found Dora. As a graduate of the prestigious university that hosted the event that night, Maria Mulata had no trouble securing university funding for her project. Like its *palenquero* counterpart, the Cazucá project—which was aptly baptized *Afroasis*¹²⁵—was also aimed at young children. The idea, Maria Mulata explained, was to teach them music and dance from their “homelands” in an effort to preserve these traditions and halt the rapid process of cultural loss spurred by displacement.

Initially, Maria Mulata contacted Dora to act as a coordinator. Being the cultural broker that she is, Dora was perfectly suited to announce and organize the weekly music lessons. Maria Mulata herself would teach the kids to sing and La Wey, a young *marimba* player from Guapi would teach percussion. The plan was to partner up with AFRODES’s local dance troupe, *Palma Negra*, and create a local children’s ensemble. But one day when she was becoming acquainted with Dora, Maria Mulata learned that Dora was a *cantaora* and asked her to sing some of the songs from her homeland (“*canciones de su tierra*”). Captivated by her singing, Maria Mulata invited Dora to participate as one of the project’s musicians, as a local bearer of her community’s cultural traditions. Although she continued to receive a

¹²⁵ El Oasis is the neighborhood in Cazucá where both *La 19*, the main drag that congregates black IDPs, and AFRODES’s cultural center are located. As I explain in Chapter 5, it is therefore a spatial referent for urban blackness in Bogotá.

salary as coordinator, she became the project's most visible protagonist, the very face on the cover of *Afroasis*.

That evening at the university theater, Dora's singing was the highlight. She sang the leading vocals to a number of *alabaos* and *arrullos*, each of which was preceded by a brief explanation intended to provide the uninitiated audience with the necessary context to appreciate them. She also sang a song that she couldn't quite place geographically, historically, or musically. It was a song that she remembered hearing when she was a little girl and that not even Maria Mulata, with her extensive knowledge of Colombia's black music, had heard. But the song had captured Maria Mulata's attention so much that she had encouraged Dora to perform it to an improvised *bunde*¹²⁶ accompaniment. Dora and Simona explained that *arrullos* and *alabaos* were sung during funerals. They related their early childhood experiences on the Patía River when they first learned these songs and shared with the audience the feelings that the songs stirred inside them. Despite the tone of despair inherent to this music genre, Dora's mood that night was not nostalgic. She was radiant. Although I had heard her sing those songs countless times, I had never seen her glow the way she glowed that night.

Finally, the closing act was designed to transform the presentation's overall tone from mourning to rejoicing. Toño intervened once more to guide the transition

¹²⁶ *Bunde* is a music genre that is generally identified as being native to the department of Chocó. In fact, it is thought to have been an indigenous rhythm (Embera) that was adopted and adapted by the black inhabitants of that region. In general, it can be characterized as a playful song that can be sung to entertain children while adults attend to funerary rites. Interestingly, given that Dora is a native of the department of Nariño, it is unlikely though not impossible, that the song that she sang was a *bunde*. In fact, the lyrics that she sang made a reference to Magüí (or Magüí Payán), which is a municipality of Nariño.

reminding everyone that *afro-ness* was fundamentally about joy and invited the children to come on stage. Thus, the evening's program concluded with several *currulaos*, the Southern Pacific's most well-known music genre with its characteristic melodic *marimba* that lends itself to dance. The boys played percussion instruments, the older girls sang chorus refrains, and the youngest ones put their reggaeton-inspired dance moves on display next to Dora and Simona, whose voices led the ensemble.

That night I left the theater with mixed emotions. On the one hand, there was my critical side, analyzing every single element of the performance, casting doubt on nearly everything I had seen and heard. I knew the intimate details of Dora's process of becoming a *desplazada*, and of adopting—even performing—*afro-ness*. Also, I was all-too-familiar with well-meaning projects like *Colcha de Retazos*, which tended to find and reproduce exactly what they searched for. And of course, always the deconstructivist, I was hyper-aware of the way in which the event cobbled together disparate but predictable elements to construct a cohesive image of an allegedly authentic “black culture.” I knew, for example, that Maria Mulata had taught the members of the ensemble a traditional Chocoano song that none of them had heard before. And there they were, children and adults alike, those born in Bogotá and those who had arrived there from every corner of the Pacific Region singing *Doña Elena* in unison as a representative song from their “homeland.”

On the other hand, I was deeply struck by Dora's demeanor. She was by no means a virtuous singer and yet she had adopted the bearing of a star effortlessly. Although Dora was neither shy nor cowardly, that night her composure was on a different scale. She was gleaming with pride. Perhaps counter-intuitively, her status as an *afro-desplazada* had led her to a place of profound satisfaction. Of course, this was an ephemeral moment and Dora's rise to such levels of protagonism is anything but the norm. Most people do not acquire the expertise that she has honed as a cultural broker of victimized blackness. Most people are not called upon as witnesses of violence and authentic cultural representatives. And still, I find this exceptional moment of hyper-visibility useful because it condenses many of my accumulated observations about Colombia's changing articulations of blackness. My purpose is therefore not to arrive at a final conclusion—whether pessimistic or triumphalist—regarding the possible opportunities of mobilizing any given articulation of blackness. My purpose is to use this moment as an exemplary case from which I can distill the major features of the trajectories that I have been tracing throughout.

First, official multiculturalism and its attendant ethnicization of blackness have left a deep and long-lasting imprint on circulating notions of blackness in Colombia. The language of culture continues to act as a central marker of difference and legitimator of special rights. Put simply, it is evident that blackness is still very much conceived primarily as a cultural form of alterity and “genuine” blackness is believed to necessarily display unique cultural traits. These cultural traits include many of the globally circulating stereotypes of blackness, such as joyfulness and

musicality, which Toño repeatedly extolled. But in Colombia, the emphasis on territory that accompanied the ethnicization of blackness since its inception has also entailed an attendant expectation for black communities to be “green.” This component of ethnic blackness has intensified over the last decade as the discourses and politics of environmentalism and green capitalism become globally dominant.

Second, at the current historical conjuncture the moments at which blackness is most visible and most effectively mobilized combine the ethnic articulation of black difference with an emphasis on victimization. If black communities or *afros* appear in the limelight today, they tend to do so first and foremost as ethnic victims. Or, as Dora herself eloquently put it, she has come temporarily under the spotlight thanks to her displacement. And the expectations that the audience had of her, which she willingly fulfilled, were to speak gloriously about her culture and to denounce the way the war has threatened it.

As I have been showing throughout and Dora’s performance confirms, the visibility conferred upon Afro-Colombians as victims has clear limits. As they stand today, the politics of victimization in Colombia only contemplate victims of the ongoing armed conflict. This means that the convergence of ethnic blackness and victimization has not (yet?) effectively folded in discussions of black people’s historical victimization. In other words, victimized blackness does not directly make reference to racial slavery or its sedimented racialized logics that continue to operate today. Because the ethnic component of blackness remains central, members of black communities are visible as ethnically differentiated victims only when their culture

and/or attendant territory is at risk. That night Dora was not asked to speak about her precarious living conditions or her job as a domestic worker. She was also not called forth as an expert on the history of slavery or to relay her quotidian experiences of racism. Class, gender, or race were not the primary axes through which her difference *and* her victimization were understood.

And still, we cannot simply shove these factors aside. It is important to remember that both ethnic and victimized blackness are marked by historical and ongoing processes of racialization. Despite the unusually strong emphasis on black cultural difference, in Colombia the (re)production of black alterity continues to rely (though not exclusively) on a racialized reading of black bodies. This is another way of saying that culture and race are often conflated or employed as euphemisms for one another. Without a doubt this persistent racialization is heir to the history of racial slavery in the Americas and therefore an element that Colombian articulations of blackness share with diasporic counterparts. But the relationship between national and diasporic articulations of blackness is shifting and this shift can be observed at least on two fronts.

On the one hand, over the last decade black Colombians have been gradually included as fellow Afrodescendants in the main circuits of African diasporic politics. This is a result of both the Durban Conference and the international attention that multicultural reforms for black communities in Colombia have received as an exemplary case of the successful mobilization of cultural politics. Otherwise, how do we explain the presence of a young African woman expressing her (implicitly racial)

solidarity with black Colombians? This kind of exchange would have simply been impossible twenty years ago. Today, despite the vast cultural, geopolitical, and class differences (to name a few) that separate Dora and Chinelo, nobody thinks it is unusual to put the two of them side by side as representatives of *afro-ness*.

On the other hand, as these new diasporic routes of exchange are carved out black activists have seized them to reactivate the defense of black ethnic territoriality, which had been threatened by the intensification of the war. This move has entailed a detour through the defense of human rights, and as a result, the ethnic claims that black activists had been making have been transformed. Namely, the existent claim to cultural difference and territoriality has been articulated to a demand for differential attention for Afro-Colombian victims. The overall result has been the consolidation of a political project of displaced blackness that is best represented by the work of AFRODES, who has become one of the most visible black organizations in Colombia today. And this move has (perhaps) unexpectedly reintroduced the issue of structural racism into the multicultural conversation by arguing that forced displacement cannot be solved without attending to structural racism. The intensification of the war was therefore a watershed moment, which compelled black activists to seek out the recently discovered and/or reactivated diasporic routes of exchange to save black communities' very existence, and in the process the regnant (multicultural) articulation of blackness has been reconfigured.

Dora stands at the juncture of these various processes: historical sediments, unexpected conjunctures, and makeshift strategies that together make up the

conditions of possibility for her visibility that night. And her visibility as an *afro-desplazada* is an expression of the current articulation of blackness in Colombia today, which is made up of three primary elements: ethno-territorial blackness, politics of victimization, and diasporic anti-racism. None of these elements are necessarily dominant, although they become more or less salient in different contexts. None of them are necessarily “progressive” or “regressive,” and in fact they can be put to use for all kinds of political projects. None of them *had to* meet, but the conjuncture has in fact favored their conjoining. But most importantly, this articulation has real consequences for real people.

For Dora the consequences have not been unambiguous. With the steady salary that she receives from the project she has been able to support her newborn granddaughter, but the added income is not sufficient to give up her job as a domestic worker. As a result of her newly gained visibility, she has established close relationships with all kinds of well-meaning people—mostly foreign NGO and international aid workers—that she has capitalized on both materially and symbolically. But at the end of the day when the spotlights go off, she rides the bus back to her home in Cazucá like any other *afro-desplazado* would.

And yet, the image of her smile that night is still vivid in my memory. As I sat in the dark theater listening to her sing, I tried to find a word to describe it. And then I heard her sing a familiar song that helped me find the word I was searching for. The song was *Ronca Canalete*, a coming-of-age song that is most popular in the Southern Pacific (Guapi, specifically). I had heard Dora complain that the other

women in the ensemble, who were mostly from Chocó rather than the Southern Pacific, did not know the songs that she sang. Or that sometimes they sang different tunes to the lyrics that she knew. But this was not the case with *Ronca Canalete*, which was a song that she usually led and the others had no problem following. That night as she sang it once more, with a more polished voice than I had ever heard, I thought again about the *canalete*.

In fact, the glow on her face that night reminded me of the collective atmosphere that was evoked on the afternoon that I gathered the founders of the *Bajo Mira*'s community council for a group interview. I thought back to their faces as they reminisced about the land titling process and spontaneously broke into song, recalling the lyrics of the anthem that they had composed together. Coincidentally, that afternoon they also spoke about the *canalete*, or wooden oar with which every single person on the Pacific learns to travel along their river. For the people of the *Bajo Mira*, the *canalete* was a symbol of the enthusiasm with which they worked for the recognition of their ethnic and territorial rights. It was a metonym for their commitment to their black community. But the *canalete* also stood for their pride. Some of this pride was associated with the tenacity with which they worked for their objective. But as a cultural symbol that had become intimately associated with blackness, it was also representative of their black pride.¹²⁷ They weren't just proud of their resolve, they were also proud of being black. For many people this was the

¹²⁷ I wish to thank Eduardo Restrepo for this insight.

first time that a direct association with blackness—which in this case was expressed as a rural and traditional culture—could be worn as a source of dignity.

That night, I believe that Dora was invaded by a similar pride. On the one hand, her pride was an expression of pure satisfaction; she was savoring the deep gratification she felt for having worked so hard to get there. But, like the members of the *Bajo Mira*, she was also proud of being black. This black pride was clearly connected to what was put on stage—and enthusiastically applauded—as “the culture of her homeland.” But in addition, she was grateful for what she had made of her displacement. The very wording of her opening phrase reveals that she felt fortunate; that she thought there was plenty to “thank” her displacement for. Even if only temporarily, her visibility as a black victim had provided her with a deep sense of self-worth. Even if fragmentarily, the dignity that came with being on stage that night overshadowed the many injuries suffered by both her displacement and her blackness.

In fact, although her pride was exalted that night, Dora had been cultivating it for some time. She had recently recorded a CD with her songs and performed a central character in a documentary film about *El Oasis*, the central neighborhood in Cazucá where *La Calle de los Negros* is located.¹²⁸ When people around her commented on how “famous” she had become she didn’t hide her pleasure or try to deny it. Nor was the experience exclusively hers. Others who participated in these projects were also positively impacted to one degree or another—whether materially or symbolically. Like the members of the *Bajo Mira*, they shared in on an incipient

¹²⁸ The film, which is aptly titled *El Oasis*, was directed by Antonio Girón Serrano.

collective black pride. Although their pride was associated to a different articulation of blackness—one that was victimized and differently racialized—its political possibilities cannot be overlooked.

Hall's theory of articulation stresses contingency and open-endedness. Theoretically speaking, these characteristics make it a beautiful and simple way to capture complex social phenomena. It is a way to understand that which is but didn't have to be. And it is also a way to imagine that which is possible but doesn't yet exist. Speaking from a pragmatic political perspective, however, these characteristics are both a curse and a blessing. On the one hand, open-endedness reminds us that articulations do not have a necessary political intent and can therefore be employed in numerous and sometimes undesirable ways. But on the other hand, by assuring us that no articulation lasts forever, contingency reminds us both of the fleeting nature of political successes and the promises of future rearticulations.

REFERENCES

- Acción Social. (2011). Agencia Presidencial para la Acción Social y la Cooperación Internacional - Estadísticas de la población desplazada. Retrieved August 1, 2011, from <http://www.accionsocial.gov.co/contenido/contenido.aspx?catID=621&conID=556>
- AFRODES, ORCONE, CNOA. (2008). Política pública con enfoque diferencial para población afrocolombiana en situaciones de desplazamiento forzado o confinamiento: propuestas para la construcción.
- Agudelo, C. (2005). *Retos del multiculturalismo en Colombia: política y poblaciones negras*. Medellín: La Carreta Editores, Institut de Recherche pour le Development, ICANH, IEPRI.
- Almario, Ó. (2002). Desesclavización y territorialización: el trayecto inicial de la diferenciación étnica en el Pacífico sur colombiano, 1749-1810. In C. Mosquera, M. Pardo, & O. Hoffman (Eds.), *Afrodescendientes en las Américas : trayectorias sociales e identitarias : 150 años de la abolición de la esclavitud en Colombia* (pp. 45–75). Bogotá: Unal, ICANH, IRD, ILSA.
- Almario, Ó., & Castillo, R. (1996). Territorio, poblamiento y sociedades negras en el Pacífico Sur colombiano. In Eduardo Restrepo & J. I. del Valle (Eds.), *Renacientes del guandal: «grupos negros» de los ríos Satinga y Sanquianga*. Bogotá: Biopacífico-UNAL.
- Aparicio, J. R. (2010). Gobernando a la Persona Internamente Desplazada: problemas y fricciones de un nuevo problema mundial. *Tabula Rasa*, (13), 13–44.
- Arboleda, S. (2002). Paisanajes, colonias y movilización social afrocolombiana en el suroccidente colombiano. In C. Mosquera, Pa, & O. Hoffman (Eds.), *Afrodescendientes en las Américas : trayectorias sociales e identitarias : 150 años de la abolición de la esclavitud en Colombia* (pp. 399–420). Bogotá: Unal, ICANH, IRD, ILSA.

- Armando, G. (2012). *Doblemente maldecidos. Representaciones sobre las poblaciones desplazadas en Caracoló-Robles (Bogotá-Soacha)*. Departamento de Estudios Culturales. Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá.
- Arocha, J. (1996). Afrogénesis, eurogénesis y convivencia interétnica en el Pacífico Colombiano. In Esco & A. Pedrosa (Eds.), *Pacífico: ¿desarrollo o diversidad? Estado, capital y movimientos sociales en el Pacífico colombiano*. pp. 316–328. Bogotá: Ecofondo, Cerec.
- Asher, K. (2009). *Black and Green: Afro-Colombians, Development, and Nature in the Pacific Lowlands* (1st ed.). Duke University Press Books.
- Bejarano Avila, J. A., & Diaz Uribe, A. (1985). *Historiografía de la violencia en Colombia*. Bogota: Cerec, Centro Gaitan.
- Bernstein, H. (2010). *Class Dynamics of Agrarian Change*. Kumarian Press.
- BID. (2011). *Diálogo regional de política. Red para la reducción de la pobreza y la protección social*.
- Bocarejo, D. (2008). *Reconfiguring the political landscape after the multicultural turn: law, politics, and the spatialization of difference in Colombia*. University of Chicago, Chicago.
- Bolivar Ramirez, I. J. (2003). *Violencia política y formación del Estado: ensayo historiográfico sobre la dinámica regional de la violencia de los cincuenta en Colombia*. Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales Centro de Investigacion y Educacion Popular.
- Brockington, D., & Duffy, R. (2010). Capitalism and Conservation: The Production and Reproduction of Biodiversity Conservation. *Antipode*, 42 (3), 469–484.
- Cárdenas, R. (2012). Multicultural politics for Afro-Colombians: an articulation «without guarantees». In J. Rahier (Ed.), *Black Social Movements in Latin America: From Mestizaje to Multiculturalism*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cárdenas, R. (2010). Trayectorias de negritud: Disputas sobre las definiciones contingentes de «lo negro» en América Latina. *Tabula Rasa*, 13, 147–189.

- Cárdenas, R., Mejía, J., & Romaña, G. (n. d.). Recorriendo los caminos en defensa del territorio: el desplazamiento forzado y las respuestas de las comunidades afrocolombianas. *Latin American Perspective*.
- Casid, J. H. (2004). *Sowing Empire: Landscape And Colonization* (1.^a ed.). University of Minnesota Press.
- Chu, J. Y. (2006). TO BE «Emplaced»: Fuzhounese migration and the politics of destination. *Identities*, 13, 395–425.
- Chu, J. Y. (2010). *Cosmologies of Credit: Transnational Mobility and the Politics of Destination in China*. Duke University Press Books.
- Clifford, J. (1994). Diasporas. *Cultural Anthropology*, 9(3), 302–338.
- Cohen, R. (2010). *Uprooted Ecologies: Rebuilding Relations between People, Plants and Land in Times of Ongoing Dispossession at the Urban Fringe of Cartagena, Colombia*. Doctoral Dissertation. University of California, Santa Cruz.
- Comaroff, J. L., & Comaroff, J. (2009). *Ethnicity, Inc.* University Of Chicago Press.
- Comité Municipal de Prevención y Atención Integral a la Población en Situación de Desplazamiento. (2010). *Plan Integral Único municipio de Tumaco*.
- Congreso de Colombia Ley 70 (1993).
- Congreso de Colombia Ley 725 de 2001 (2001).
- Cordeagropaz. (2008). «Cultura, territorio y economía». Cartilla No. 6.
- Cortés, H. (1999). Titulación colectiva en comunidades negras del Pacífico nariñense. In J Camacho and E Restrepo. *De montes, ríos y ciudades*. pp. 131–142. Bogota: Fundación Natura, Ecofondo, Instituto Colombiano de Antropología.

- Cresswell, T. (1999). Embodiment, Power and the Politics of Mobility: The Case of Female Tramps and Hobos. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series, 24(2), 175–192.
- Díaz, R. (2003). Matrices coloniales y diásporas africanas: Hacia una investigación de las culturas negra y mulata en la Nueva Granada. *Memoria y Sociedad*, 7(15), 219–228.
- Diósis de Tumaco. (2008). Sobre la grave situación de la población afronariñense del Gran Consejo Comunitario del Río Sanquianga del municipio de Olaya Herrera y Candelilla de la Mar, municipio de Tumaco. Tumaco.
- Edelman, M. (1992). *The Logic of the Latifundio: The Large Estates of Northwestern Costa Rica Since the Late Nineteenth Century*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.
- Escobar, A. (1994). *Encountering Development*. Princeton University Press.
- Escobar, A. (2008). *Territories of Difference: Place, Movements, Life, Redes*. Duke University Press Books.
- Fedepalma. (2006). La agroindustria de la palma de aceite en Colombia.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. (C. Gordon, Ed.) (First American Edition, Stained.). Vintage.
- Frazier, E. F. (1957). *Race and culture contacts in the modern world*. New York: Knopf.
- Frazier, E. F., & Glazer, N. (1966). *The Negro family in the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gilroy, P. (1993). *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (Reissue.). Harvard University Press.
- Gregory, S. (1999). *Black Corona*. Princeton University Press.

- Gross, C. (2000). *Políticas de la etnicidad : identidad, estado y modernidad* (1. ed.). Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia.
- Grueso, L., Rosero, C., & Escobar, A. (1998). The Process of Black Community Organizing in the Southern Pacific Coast Region of Colombia. En S. E. Alvarez, E. Dagnino, & A. Escobar (Eds.), *Cultures of politics politics of cultures : re-visioning Latin American social movements* (pp. 196–219). Boulder Colo.: Westview Press.
- Guzmán Campos, G. (1963). *La violencia en Colombia : estudio de un proceso social*. Bogotá: Ediciones Tercer Mundo.
- Hale, C. R. (2005). Neoliberal Multiculturalism. *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 28(1), 10–19.
- Hale, Charles R. (2006). *Mas Que Un Indio (More Than An Indian): Racial Ambivalence And The Paradox Of Neoliberal Multiculturalism in Guatemala* (illustrated edition.). School of American Research Press.
- Hall, S. (1996). On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall edited by Lawrence Grossbert. In D. Morley & K.-H. Chen (Eds.), *Stuart Hall: critical dialogues in cultural studies*. p. 506. London: Routledge.
- Hall, S. (1997). *Race, the floating signifier*. Goldsmiths College: mef Challenging Media.
- Herskovits, M. J. (1958). *The myth of the Negro past*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Hoffman, O. (2002). Conflictos territoriales y territorialidad negra: el caso de las comunidades afrocolombianas. In C. Mosquera Rosero-Labbé, M. Pardo, & O. Hoffman (Eds.), *Afrodescendientes en las Américas : trayectorias sociales e identitarias : 150 años de la abolición de la esclavitud en Colombia*. p. 351–368. Bogotá: Unal, ICANH, IRD, ILSA.

- Hoffmann, O. (2007). *Comunidades negras en el Pacífico Colombiano: Innovaciones y dinámicas étnicas*. Editorial Abya Yala.
- Hooker, J. (2005). Indigenous Inclusion/Black Exclusion: Race, Ethnicity and Multicultural Citizenship in Latin America. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 37(02), 285–310.
- Igoe. (2007). Neoliberal Conservation: A Brief Introduction. *Conservation and Society*, 5(4), 432.
- Jaramillo Buenaventura, E. (2009). Políticas espaciales y comunidades negras en el pacífico colombiano. *Poblaciones Y Territorios En Disputa* (Vol. v, pp. 45–81). Universidad ICESI.
- Katz, C. (1998). Whose Nature, Whose Culture?: Private productions of space and the «preservation» of nature. In B. Braun & N. Castree (Eds.), *Remaking reality: nature at the millenium* pp. 46–63. Psychology Press.
- Kay, C. (1997). *Latin America's Exclusionary Rural Development in a Neo-Liberal World*. Presentado en Annual Conference of the Latin American Studies Association, Guadalajara.
- Latour, B. (1993). *We Have Never Been Modern*. Harvard University Press.
- Leal, C. (2004). *Black Forest. The Pacific Lowlands of Colombia, 1850-1930*. Doctoral Dissertation. University of California, Berkeley.
- Malkki, L. (1995). Refugees and Exile: From «Refugee Studies» to the National Order of things. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24, 495–523.
- Malkki, L. H. (1995). *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (1.^a ed.). University Of Chicago Press.
- Martínez, M. E. P. (2004). *Territorio y desplazamiento: el caso de Altos de Cazucá, municipio de Soacha : un estudio exploratorio de los efectos sociales y ambientales del desplazamiento*. Pontificia Universidad Javeriana.

- Massey, D. B. (1994). *Space, place, and gender*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Mcdowell, L. (1999). *Gender, Identity, and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (1.^a ed.). Minnesota University Press.
- Mejía, J. (2012). *Battle for land*. [Movie]
- Merchant, C. (1989). *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England* (First Edition.). The University of North Carolina Press.
- Mosquera, C., & Barcelos, L. C. (2007). Afro-reparaciones: memorias de la esclavitud y justicia reparativa para negros, afrocolombianos y raizales. Retrieved August 6, 2012, from <http://www.bdigital.unal.edu.co/1237/>
- Mosquera Rosero-Labbé, C., Pardo, M., & Hoffman, O. (Eds.). (2002). *Afrodescendientes en las Américas : trayectorias sociales e identitarias: 150 años de la abolición de la esclavitud en Colombia* (1. ed.). Bogotá: Unal, ICANH, IRD, ILSA.
- Najcevska, M. (2010). *Chair WGPAD Statement* (Speech) (p. 2). Geneva: United Nations.
- Ng'weno, B. (2007). *Turf Wars: Territory and Citizenship in the Contemporary State*. Stanford University Press.
- Nina S. de Friedemann. (1984). Estudios de negros en la antropología colombiana. *Un siglo de investigación social. Antropología en Colombia*. (pp. 507–572). Bogotá: Etno.
- Oficina de las Naciones Unidas contra la droga y el delito. (2011). *Colombia: censo de cultivos de coca 2010*.
- Oslender, U. (2008). *Comunidades negras y espacio en el Pacífico colombiano: Hacia un giro geográfico en el estudio de los movimientos sociales*. Colección Antropología en la Modernidad. Bogotá: ICANH.

- Ospina, M., & Ochoa, D. (1998). *La palma africana en Colombia: apuntes y memorias*. Bogotá: Federación Nacional de Cultivadores de Palma de Aceite.
- Zuleta, M. (2005). Genealogía de la moral predominante en la literatura académica sobre la violencia política colombiana del siglo XX. *Nómadas*, (22), 282–286.
- Pardo, M. (2003). Iniciativa y Cooptación. Tensiones en el Movimiento Afrocolombiano. *150 Años de Abolición de la Esclavización en Colombia. Desde la marginalidad a la construcción de nación. VI Cátedra Anual de Historia «Ernesto Restrepo Tirado»*. pp. 652 – 684. Bogotá: Aguilar.
- PNUD. (2003). *Capítulo 5. «Las víctimas de una guerra injusta»*. *El Conflicto, callejón con salida*. pp. 116–137. PNUD.
- Pratt, M. L. (1992). *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1.^a ed.). Routledge.
- Presidencia de la República. (n. d.). SP NOTICIAS - Presidencia de la República de Colombia:: Retrieved November 25, 2011, from <http://web.presidencia.gov.co/sp/2008/enero/18/13182008.html>
- Restrepo, E. (2004). Un oceano verde para extraer aceite: Hacia una etnografía del cultivo de la palma africana en Tumaco. *Universitas Humanística*, XXXI(58), 73–87.
- Restrepo, Eduardo. (Forthcoming). *Etnización de la negridad. La invención de las «comunidades negras» como grupo étnico en Colombia*.
- Restrepo, Eduardo. (1996). Los tuqueros negros del Pacífico sur colombiano. En J. I. del Valle & E. Restrepo (Eds.), *Renacientes del guandal: «grupos negros» de los ríos Satinga y Sanquianga*. Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia.
- Restrepo, Eduardo. (2004). Ethnicization of blackness in Colombia. *Cultural Studies*, 18(5), 698–753.

- Restrepo, Eduardo. (2005). De «refugio de paz» a la pesadilla de la guerra: el conflicto armado y el proceso organizativo en el Pacífico nariñense. *Ciudad, género y conflicto desde la perspectiva de los estudios afrocolombianos*. XI Congreso de Antropología en Colombia, Santa Fe de Antioquia.
- Restrepo, Eduardo. (2009). Acción afirmativa y afrodescendientes en Colombia. Presentado en Seminario Internacional Afrodescendientes en América Latina y el Caribe: Racialización, patrimonialización y acción afirmativa, Cartagena, Colombia.
- Rojas, A. (2011). Gobernar(se) en nombre de los otros. Interculturalidad y educación para los grupos étnicos en Colombia. *Revista Colombiana de Antropología*, 47(2), 173–198.
- Rosero, C. (2002). Los afrodescendientes y el conflicto armado en Colombia: la insistencia en lo propio con alternativa. In C. Mosquera, M. Pardo, & O. Hoffman (Eds.), *Afrodescendientes en las Américas : trayectorias sociales e identitarias : 150 años de la abolición de la esclavitud en Colombia* (pp. 547–560). Bogotá: Unal, ICANH, IRD, ILSA.
- Sánchez G., G., & Aguilera Peña, M. (2001). *Memoria de un país en guerra : los mil días, 1899-1902*. Bogotá: Instituto de Estudios Políticos y Relaciones Internacionales : Unidad de Investigaciones Jurídicos-Sociales Gerardo Molina: Universidad Nacional de Colombia: Planeta.
- Sauer, J. D. (1993). *Historical Geography of Crop Plants: A Select Roster* (1.^a ed.). CRC-Press.
- Scott, P. J. C. (1999). *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale University Press.
- Serna, S. (2011). Vivir de los imaginarios del mar: restaurantes y estereotipos sobre el Pacífico en Bogotá. *Tabula Rasa*, (14), 265–294.
- Sharp, W. F. (1981). *Slavery on the Spanish Frontier: The Colombian Choco, 1680-1810*. University of Oklahoma Press.

- Silva Castañeda, L. (2011). Certification systems and land conflicts: the case of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil. International Conference on Land Grabbing, University of Sussex, UK.
- Sullivan, S. (2006). Elephant in the Room? Problematizing 'New' (Neoliberal) Biodiversity Conservation. *Forum for Development Studies* (Vol. 33, pp. 105–135).
- Trouillot, M.-R. (2002). The Otherwise Modern: Caribbean Lessons from the Savage Slot. En B. M. Knauft (Ed.), *Critically Modern: Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies*. Indiana University Press.
- Tsing, A. L. (2004). *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton University Press.
- Ulloa, A. (2001). El nativo ecológico: movimientos indígenas y medio ambiente en Colombia. *Movimientos sociales, Estado y democracia en Colombia*. Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Centro de estudios Sociales, ICANH, págs, 286–320.
- Van Cott, D. L. (2000). *The Friendly Liquidation of the Past: The Politics of Diversity in Latin America*. Pitt Latin American series. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Villa, W. (2001). El estado multicultural y el nuevo modelo de subordinación. *Seminario de evaluación: 10 años de la Constitución Colombiana*. pp. 89–101. Bogotá: Universidad Nacional. Facultad de Derecho, Ciencias Políticas y Sociales-ILSA.
- Wade, P. (1993). *Blackness and Race Mixture: The Dynamics of Racial Identity in Colombia*. The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Wade, P. (1996). Identidad y Etnicidad. En A. Escobar & A. Pedrosa (Eds.), *Pacífico, ¿desarrollo o diversidad?: Estado, capital y movimientos sociales en el Pacífico colombiano (Serie ecológica)*. ECOFONDO.

- West, P. (2006). *Conservation Is Our Government Now: The Politics of Ecology in Papua New Guinea*. Duke University Press Books.
- Whitten, N. E. (1974). *Black frontiersmen: a South American case*. Schenkman Pub. Co.
- Wolf, E. (1982). *Europe and the People Without History* (1.^a ed.). University of California Press.
- Wolford, W. (2010). *This Land Is Ours Now: Social Mobilization and the Meanings of Land in Brazil*. Duke University Press Books.
- Wouters, M. (2002). Comunidades negras, derechos étnicos y desplazamiento forzado en el Atrato medio: respuestas organizativas en medio de la guerra. In C. Mosquera Rosero-Labbé, M. Pardo, & O. Hoffman (Eds.), *Afrodescendientes en las Américas : trayectorias sociales e identitarias: 150 años de la abolición de la esclavitud en Colombia*. p. 351–368. Bogotá: Unal, ICANH, IRD, ILSA.